

**SELECT WORKS**

**REVIEWED**

**OF**

**EZEKIEL HOPKINS, D.D.**

**LORD BISHOP OF DERRY.**

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**VICAR OF GLASBURY, BRECON.**

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EZEKIEL HOPKINS, was born about the year 1633, at Sandford, Devon, of which place his father was the minister. The precise date of his birth has not been ascertained. In 1649, he was sent to Oxford, and became a Chorister in Magdalen College. Having taken his degree of B. A. in 1653, and that of M. A. in 1656, the College elected him their Chaplain. After performing the duties of that office in a pious and studious manner for four years, he went to London, where he soon became celebrated as an eloquent preacher—for some time he assisted Dr. William Spurstow, of St. John's, Hackney.

During his residence in the metropolis, Mr. Hopkins married a niece of Alderman Sir Robert Viner. She was a lady of singular piety, but was soon snatched from him by the hand of death. After a lapse of some years, he again entered the marriage state with Lady Araminta, daughter of the Earl of Radnor, Lord President of the Council.

About the year 1666, Mr. H. returned to his native county, and was chosen minister of St. Mary Arches in the city of Exeter. In 1669, Lord Radnor, being appointed Lieutenant of the kingdom of Ireland, took Mr. H. with him as Chaplain, and early in the next year, gave him the Deanery of Raphoe.

Lord Radnor was succeeded in the government of Ireland by Lord Berkeley, who, in 1671, conferred on Dr. H. the Bishopric of Raphoe. For ten years he filled that episcopal chair with honor, and was then translated to the see of Londonderry. In the pulpit of that Cathedral he was a constant preacher. By humble courage and prudent moderation he regained many dissenters to the communion of his church, convincing them that her doctrines were pure and apostolic. By strong reasoning and argu-

ment he won many to Christ. He preached powerfully not only in the pulpit, but also in his private practice. He was truly a burning and shining light, and his unblameable conversation was greatly influential on all who knew him. Here he laboured for about seven years, till the state of the kingdom obliged him to provide for his safety by escape.

He arrived in London 1688, and for a while indulged the hope that the disturbances would soon subside, but, finding that they were likely to continue, he resolved to seek some employment proper to his function. In September, 1689, he was elected minister of St. Mary, Aldermanbury. Here he appeared to be settled; but his mind had been so affected, and his body weakened, by the public disturbances and his private calamities, that after eight months, he was reluctantly obliged to resign this engagement.

He spent his last days in self-examination, repentance and prayer, and when death approached, he had such inward peace and anticipation of bliss, that a speedy departure was his earnest petition. His prayer was heard—God took him from the troubles of this life—summoned him to join the assembly of the blessed, and changed his earthly mitre for a crown of eternal glory.

Bishop Hopkins has fully developed his views of theology in the treatises entitled,—“The Doctrine of the Two Covenants,” and “The Almost Christian.” Some persons would stigmatize him as a legal writer.—But what is a legal writer? He who attributes to nature, the power of doing the will of God, and to man any proper merit before God. Bishop Hopkins was not of this class;—he adopted those views which most easily reconcile the declarations of scripture with its exhortations—he insisted on the obligation of man to do the will of God, and condemned him for his disinclination. He addressed man as a rational and responsible creature; and urged him to exert all his faculties to obey every impulse of the Divine Spirit:—but he ascribed all effectual and saving influence to that Spirit, and all merit and glory, to Jesus Christ.

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THE  
DOCTRINE OF THE TWO COVENANTS :  
WHEREIN THE  
*NATURE OF ORIGINAL SIN*  
IS AT LARGE EXPLAINED ;  
AND ST. PAUL AND ST. JAMES RECONCILED, IN THE  
GREAT ARTICLE OF JUSTIFICATION.

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*For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man, which doeth those things, shall live by them. But the righteousness, which is of faith, speaketh on this wise : say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven ? (that is, to bring Christ down from above :) or, who shall descend into the deep ? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it ? the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart : that is, the word of faith, which we preach : that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.—ROM. x. 5—9.*

THE  
DOCTRINE OF THE TWO COVENANTS.

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INTRODUCTION.

Of all the mysterious depths in Christian religion, there is none more necessary for our information nor more influential upon our practice, than a right apprehension and a distinct knowledge of the doctrine of the covenants. For if we be ignorant or mistaken in this, we must needs be liable to false or confused notions of the law and the gospel ; of our fall in Adam, and restoration by Christ ; of the true grounds of men's condemnation, and the means and terms of their justification ; of the justice of God in punishing sinners, and his glorious mercy in saving believers : and, consequently, neither can many perplexing doubts and questions be resolved, the necessity and yet different concurrence of faith and obedience unto salvation cleared, the utter insufficiency of our own righteousness to procure acceptance for us with God evinced, his justice vindicated, nor his grace glorified. For all these great and important truths will readily own themselves to be built upon the foundation of God's covenant and stipulation with man ; as I hope to make appear in our farther progress.

And yet, though this doctrine be thus generally service-

able both to knowledge and practice, how many are there, who call themselves Christians, that are grossly ignorant of these transactions between God and man ! that know not upon what terms they stand with the Almighty ; nor what they may expect, according to the tenor of their mutual compact and agreement !

This, therefore, I shall endeavour to treat of, as briefly and as clearly as the subject will permit, from the words which I have now read unto you ; which are the transcript and copy of those two great contracts made between heaven and earth, God and man : the one, from the beginning of his being, and that is the covenant of works ; the other, immediately upon his fall and ruin, and that is the covenant of grace : the one, called here the righteousness of the law ; and the other, the righteousness of faith.

But before I can particularly treat on this subject, I must first show you what a covenant is, in its general notion ; and whether there is or can be any such thing as a proper covenant, between God and man.

Our English word ‘ covenant ’ seems to be borrowed from the Latin ‘ convenire ’ or ‘ convēntus ; ’ which signifies a mutual agreement and accord, upon conditions propounded and accepted by the parties concerned. And it may be thus described,—a covenant is a mutual consent and agreement entered into between persons, whereby they stand bound each to other to perform the conditions contracted and indented for. And thus a covenant is the very same thing with a contract or bargain.

Now to a strict and proper covenant there are two things pre-supposed.

1. *That, in the persons contracting, there be a natural liberty and freedom the one from the other ;* that is, that the one be not bound to the other as to the things covenanted for, antecedently to that compact or agreement

made between them. For where an obligation to a duty is natural, there it cannot be strictly and properly federal, or arising from a covenant. If children should indent with their parents to yield them obedience upon condition that they on their part will afford them fit and convenient provision, this cannot, in strict sense, be called a covenant; because neither of the parties were free from the obligation of a natural law, which obliged them antecedently to this compact. In a proper covenant, the things promised by each party must be due, only upon consent and agreement: so that there must be an equality of the persons covenanting, if not in other respects, yet in respect of that for which they do covenant, that the right of both in what they mutually promise be equal. If one man covenant with another to serve him faithfully upon condition of such a reward and wages, though there may be much disparity upon other accounts between them, yet, as to the things covenanted for, there is none: the one having as much right to the wages, as the other to the service; and neither having right to either before the agreement.

2. In a proper covenant, *there must be mutual consent of the persons covenanting.*

And this is called a stipulation, whereby each party doth freely and voluntarily engage himself to the other for his own particular benefit and advantage. For where both are free and disengaged, it is generally the apprehension of some good that will accrue unto them, that brings them to enter into a federal engagement.

Now this being plainly the nature of a covenant, it clearly follows, that there neither is nor can be a strict and proper covenant between God and man. For, first, both parties covenanting are not naturally free the one from the other.

God is, indeed, naturally and originally free, and hath

no obligation to man antecedent to his own gracious will and promise. But man hath a double bond to duty: both his natural obligation, as he is a creature; and his federal, as he is a covenanter: and therefore he is bound to obedience, not only by his stipulation and engagement, but also upon that natural relation wherein he stands to God as his Creator, and which alone would have been a sufficient obligation upon him had he never entered into covenant.—And, secondly, the creature's consent and agreement is not necessary to the covenant which God makes with it. And that, because the terms of it being so infinitely to our advantage, as there can be no reason imagined why we should dissent; so neither is there any to expect an explicit consent for the ratification of it. Neither are we lords of ourselves; but he, that made us, may impose on us what laws he pleaseth: and, if he descend to encourage us by promises of reward, this voluntary obligation, which God is pleased to lay upon himself, lays a farther obligation upon us to do what he requires out of love and thankfulness, faith and hope, whereby we cheerfully expect and embrace what he hath promised: which, likewise, of itself, is so vastly transcendent and disproportionate to all our performances, that it cannot be our due, upon a strict and proper covenant (for, in every such bargain, the 'datum' and 'acceptum,' that which is promised by both parties, must be alike valuable, at least in the esteem of the covenanters;) but rather a free beneficence, upon an arbitrary promise.

So that, between man and man, a covenant is a mutual and an equal obligation: but, between God and man, it is only a mutual obligation; on God's part to a free performance of his promises, and on man's part to a cheerful performance of his duty: wherein, as there is no equality, either in right or value; so neither is there any

necessity, that man should give an explicit and formal consent thereto.

And, as God's transactions with us are not strictly and properly a covenant, so neither are they strictly and properly a law; although they are often called the law of works, and the law of faith. For God doth not deal with us merely out of absolute sovereignty, but he is graciously pleased to oblige himself to us by promise; which doth not belong to a sovereign acting as such, but carries some resemblance of a covenant. So that the agreement, which God hath made with man is not merely a covenant, nor merely a law; but mixed of both. If God had only said, "Do this," without adding "Thou shalt live;" this had not been a covenant, but a law; and, if he had only said "Thou shalt live, without commanding "Do this;" it had not been a covenant, but a promise. Remove the condition, and you make it a simple promise: remove the promise, and you make it an absolute law: but, both these being found in it, it is both a law and a covenant; though both, in a large acceptation.

And thus you see what a covenant is; and how the transactions between God and man may be said to be a covenant; and wherein they differ from the proper notion of one.

Yet the difference is not so great, but that the Scripture most frequently makes mention of covenants ratified between God and man, and chiefly insists upon the two principal ones, which indeed are the argument and substance of the whole Bible, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace; in which not only particular persons were engaged, but the whole race of mankind: the summary contents of which were, "Do this and live;" and "Believe, and live." The former is the tenor of the covenant of works; the latter, the tenor of the covenant of

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grace. And both these are expressed in my text: the covenant of works is called the righteousness of the law; that is, the rule of righteousness by the law, the sentence of which is, that "the man, which doeth those things, shall live by them :" the covenant of grace is called "the righteousness, which is of faith ;" that is, the rule of obtaining righteousness by faith, the purport of which is this, that "if thou shalt believe on the Lord Jesus, whom God hath raised from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

## C H A P. I.

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### PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON LAW AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Now, here, before I can treat of the substance of these two covenants, it will be requisite to explain to you, what is meant by the *law*, And what by *righteousness*.

I. To the first I answer, that the *law* is taken very variously in scripture; but, most commonly, by it is meant the whole sum of those commands, which Moses, from the mouth of God, delivered to the Israelites; containing that, which we commonly call the moral, judicial, and ceremonial law.

But, certainly, in this place, it cannot be taken in that latitude: for the judicial and ceremonial law were not branches of that covenant of works, which God entered into with Adam; nor are any guilty for not observing them, except the Jews to whom they were particularly delivered.

This law, therefore, which, according to the covenant of works, must be punctually fulfilled in order to our obtaining justification by it, is the moral law; the law and dictates of pure and uncorrupted nature. And this law of nature is no other but a bright and shining impression of divine light upon the soul: a kind of reflection of the immutable, unsearchable, and eternal law of God's holiness; a communication of divine attributes unto us; whereby, in our first moulding, we were stamped after the similitude of God, and are said to bear his image.

Of this moral law, God hath given the world two draughts; the one archetypal, being the fair strictures of his own likeness, in our first creation; the other ectypal, in the decalogue, wherein he hath in ten words limned out what man's nature was when it was perfect, and what it ought to be that it may be perfect. So that, for the matter and substance of them, there is no difference at all between the original law of man's first creation, the law of pure reason and uncorrupted nature, and the transcript thereof in the moral law delivered by Moses.

And, therefore, as the law of his creation was to Adam a covenant of works, so the moral law, being for the matter of it the very same, must also be acknowledged to be the matter and substance of the covenant of works. The same commands of both tables, which bind us to obedience, bound Adam himself, so far forth as his condition in Paradise was capable of an actual obligation by them: for parents, he had none, to honour; neighbours and servants, he had none, to receive the offices of justice and charity. But, had he continued in his first estate till these relations had sprung up about him, the same commands, from the innate principle of his reason, would have bound him to his respective duties towards them, as do now bind us.

And this may be farther discerned, even by those obscure prints of the law of nature which yet remain upon the hearts of heathens; who, though they "have not the law," yet, saith the apostle, they "do by nature the things contained in the law," that is, in the moral law: Rom. ii. 14. As, when Moses brake the two tables of stone, yet something of the commandments was still left engraven by the finger of God upon the shattered pieces of them; so, when man fell and brake that goodly frame of his nature, yet still some remains and parcels of the same law, written there likewise by the finger of God, may be observed still to continue upon it.

So, that, between the law of pure nature and the moral law, there is as much agreement as between an indenture and its counterpart. And, therefore, if the law of nature were to Adam a covenant of works, as doubtless it was, the moral law, being for the matter of

it the same, must likewise for the matter of it be the same covenant.

Now the moral law may be considered by us either as a covenant works, or as a rule of life. In the former respect, it is superseded to all believers by the mercy and grace of the gospel : in the latter, it is explained, corroborated, and protected by the gospel ; and though it be no longer the measure of God's proceedings towards us, yet still it is the measure of our duty towards him,

And, here, if a profitable digression may be allowed, give me leave to show you the agreement and difference that there is, between the law and the gospel. For, since they are vulgarly thought such opposite things, it will not, perhaps, be impertinent, to state and fix the limits, both of their opposition and concord.

When we speak of the law and the gospel, the words are very equivocal ; and may cause many mistakes and errors in ignorant and confused minds. For

i. By the *law*, three things may be understood.

1. The law, as a *covenant of works*. And, then, as hath been already noted, it must be taken for the sum and substance of the moral law, as originally imprinted in our natures.

2. By law, may be meant *the moral law, as it is the rule for our duty and obedience*. And so we understand it, when we commonly say, the law commands this or that to be done, or this and that to be avoided.

3. By the law, may be meant *legal administrations and ceremonies*, which under the pedagogy of Moses, were a great part of the Jewish worship. And thus we call their sacrifices, purifyings, ways of atonement, and other typical rites, legal observances.

ii. So, likewise, when we speak of the *gospel*, two things may be meant by it.

1. *Gospel grace, purchased for lost mankind by Jesus Christ* : both relative grace, for the change of our state, in pardon, justification, adoption, &c. and real grace, for the change of our natures, in sanctification and renovation. And thus we use to say, that the first gospel that ever was preached in the world, was to Adam, presently after his fall, by God himself: Gen. iii. 15. The

seed of the woman shall break the serpent's head : for this was the first discovery of grace and mercy, through Christ Jesus. Yea, and the promise made to Abraham many ages before the coming of Christ into the world, is by the apostle called the preaching of the gospel : Gal. iii. 8. God, saith the apostle, " preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed."

2. By gospel, is sometimes meant *the gospel administration of this grace*, dispensed to the world by Christ himself and his ministers, in a more free and open way, than the shadows under the law did exhibit it.

iii. Now, according to these various acceptations of law and gospel, we may observe a two-fold difference and a two-fold agreement between them.

1. Their *difference* is two-fold.

(1.) If we understand by the law a covenant of works, and by the gospel the grace and mercy of the gospel ; so, they are extremely opposite and contrary one to the other.

For, take gospel grace for relative grace, such as whereby we are pardoned, reconciled, justified, and adopted ; these could have no place at all under the covenant of works. Yea, if we take gospel grace for the real grace of sanctification and renovation, so as these terms do imply the making of an unclean thing holy, and an old thing new ; it had not, neither could have, place under the covenant of works : because there was no uncleanness supposed to be done away, nor any thing old that should be renewed. For this covenant makes no allowances for transgression, nor any admission of repentance. Yet, indeed, the habits of grace, which now sanctify us, were also in Adam, whilst under this covenant : yea, and Christ also was the author of them ; but with this difference, that to him Christ was the author of them merely as Creator, but to us as Redeemer, to him, only as God the second Person, but to us as God-man the Mediator.

(2.) If, by the law, we mean a legal administration under types and figures, such as were the sacrifices and ceremonies in use under the Jewish discipline ; and, by

the Gospel, that clear and unveiled way of dispensing the means of salvation since the coming of Christ into the world : so, again, they as much differ each from other, as shadows do from substance, or clouds from sunshine.

And thus may we understand that antithesis, John i. 17.

"The law was given by Moses ;" that is, the ceremonial, shady law : "but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ :" that is, a clearer and more full manifestation of grace, and the very substance and truth of those things which were before typified and adumbrated.

These are the two differences between the law and the gospel ; in both which, the gospel takes place upon the abrogation of the law : gospel grace hath abrogated the law as a covenant : and gospel dispensations have abrogated legal ceremonies.

2. Their *Agreement* is, likewise, two-fold.

(1.) If we take the moral law as it is the directive rule of our obedience, so there is a perfect harmony and accord between it and the gospel.

For the duties of the moral law are as strictly required from believers since Christ's coming, as they were before : yea, as strictly as ever they were from Adam in innocence : though not upon the same terms from us, as from him. The gospel is, in this respect, so far from weakening the law, that it doth rather much strengthen and confirm it. What saith our Saviour, Mat. v. 17 ? "I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it ;"—and the apostle, Rom. iii. 31 ? "Do we then make void the law through faith ? God forbid : yea, we establish the law." The gospel receives the law into its protection and patronage : so that, to the obliging power, which it had before from the authority of God the great sovereign of the world, enacting it, hereby is added the farther sanction of Christ the Mediator, ratifying and confirming it ; who likewise gives us of his Spirit, whereby we are enabled to act in conformity to the law, and to fulfil its commands. The law is, therefore, now taken within the pale of the gospel, and incorporated into it ; so that it is no longer law and gospel ; but, rather, an evangelical and gospel law.

(2.) If, by law, we mean the legal administrations of

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ceremonies and sacrifices, types and figures, used under the Mosaical discipline ; and if, by gospel, we mean the grace exhibited by it of pardon, justification, &c. so neither is there any opposition or repugnance between them, but a most perfect accord and agreement.

For, before Christ's coming into the world gospel grace was under a legal administration. When the sun is approaching us in the morning, though its body be under the horizon and in another hemisphere, yet then we see the dawning and glimmering of its light. So was it in the church ; though the Sun of righteousness was not risen upon them with his full brightness, yet they then saw and enjoyed the dawn of our perfect day ; and those Jews, who lived as it were in the other hemisphere of time before Christ's coming, were as much under grace as now we are, though not under such clear and glorious dispensations of it. We read, indeed, that the disciples were first called Christians some few years after our Saviour's death ; but yet those saints, who lived many ages before his birth, were as truly Christians as they, though not known nor distinguished by that name. Yea, and I remember I have somewhere met with a passage of St. Ambrose : ' *Prius cœpisse populum Christianum, quam populum Judæorum :*' ' There were Christian people in the world, before ever there was a Jewish nation.' They had then the same Christ to save them, the same promises to support them, the same faith to appropriate both unto them, as now we have. They were under as great an impossibility of obtaining life by the deeds of the law, as we are ; and we under as strict an injunction to fulfil the commands of the law, as was ever on them imposed. The only difference between them and us consists in this, that they saw the Sun of righteousness under a cloud ; we, openly ; they, by its reflection ; we directly.

And thus much for the opening of what is meant by the law, in this text ; which is the moral law, as a covenant of works.

II. The second preliminary was, to explain what was meant by *righteousness*. Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, &c..

And, indeed, unless we have a clear notion of this, we

can neither know for what ends the covenants were made, nor wherein the nature of justification doth consist ; for, because we fulfil the covenant made with us by God, therefore are we righteous ; and because we are righteous according to the terms of the covenant, therefore we are justified. So that a clear knowledge of this righteousness will be serviceable to the unfolding of both ; since it is the end of the covenant, and the matter of justification.

This, therefore, I shall attempt, by giving, first, several distinctions ; and, then, several theses or positions, concerning righteousness.

i. There is, therefore, *a two-fold righteousness.*

*Qualitative* : or that, which may be understood as a quality or habit in us.

*Relative or legal* ; or that, which stands in conformity to some law.

1. *A qualitative righteousness* is nothing else, but the divine qualities of grace and holiness inherent in the soul.

Holiness and righteousness, to be gracious and to be righteous, in this sense signify one and the same thing.

Nothing doth more frequently occur in scripture, than this use of the word. So Noah is called righteous : Gen. vii. 1. and Abraham pleads with God for the righteous in Sodom ; Gen. xviii. 23, 24. and Zacharias and Elizabeth have this testimony, that " they were both righteous," because they walked " in all the commandments of the Lord blameless :" Luke i. 6. The ways of holiness are called the ways of " righteousness :" Ps. xxiii. 3. and the works of holiness, works of " righteousness :" Ps. xv. 2. Isa. lxiv. 5. and 1 John iii. 7. " He that doeth righteousness, is righteous." Many other places there are, too numerous to be cited, wherein righteousness is taken both for the inherent principle of holiness, and for the gracious actions that proceed therefrom.

It is, indeed, improper to call our holiness, which is so imperfect and full of failings, by the name of righteousness. Nay, were it most perfect and consummate, yet it is not the same with righteousness strictly and properly taken : for righteousness, properly, is rather a denomination arising from the conformity of actions to their rule, than either the principle or substance of the actions them-

selves : for that is righteous, which is right ; and that is right, which is agreeable to the rule by which it is to be measured. Even in Adam, whose holiness was perfect, yet was there this difference between it and his righteousness, at least in our clear conceptions, that his grace, as it was conformable to its pattern, viz. the purity of God, so it was his holiness ; but as it stood in conformity to the law of God, so it was his righteousness. For, in strict propriety of speech, the rule of holiness is different from the rule of righteousness ; holiness is measured by similitude to God ; righteousness, by conformity to the law : holiness may admit of degrees, and be more or less perfect in several subjects in whom it is implanted ; but righteousness consists in an indivisible and unvariable point, for if it be less than a perfect conformity it is not righteousness, and more than perfect it cannot be.

Yet our defective and imperfect holiness may obtain the name of righteousness ; either because it flows from that principle, which, in its own nature, tends to a perfect conformity unto the law ; or else, because it is a necessary and inseparable concomitant of a true and proper righteousness, though not our own, yet imputed.

2. There is a *legal* or *relative righteousness* : and this a man is said to have, when the law, by which he is to be judged, hath nothing whereof to accuse him.

Unto this righteousness there are required, first, a law established for the regulating of our actions. For as, where there is no law, there can be no transgression ; so, neither can there be any proper positive righteousness. And secondly, there must be a perfect conformity unto this law.

The law is the straight rule, by which all our actions are to be measured : I mean the law of nature and right reason, enacted to all mankind ; and the superadded law of divine revelation, to those who enjoy it. Now, it is a contradiction to affirm that there can be a righteousness, where there is any obliquity in actions, compared to the rule and law, whereby they must be judged : for in case of such obliquity and crookedness, the law hath an advantage to lay in an accusation against the transgressor.

So, then, we may take a brief description of righteousness, properly so called, in these terms ;—righteousness is a denomination, first of actions, and consequently of persons, arising from their perfect conformity to the law whereby they must be judged. It must be first of actions, and then of the person ; because the righteousness of the person results from the conformity of his actions. Nor will it suffice that some of his actions be thus conformable to the law, but every action that falls under its cognizance must be conformed unto it, or else the person can by no means be accounted righteous.

This perfect conformity being thus absolutely necessary to constitute a person righteous, and yet as absolutely impossible to us in this our lapsed state, it might therefore seem to be alike impossible, that ever we should obtain a righteousness, that might avail to our justification.

ii. And, therefore, for the clearer apprehension of the nature of righteousness, and the manner how we are denominated righteous, which indeed is the very critical point in the doctrine of justification, these following *distinctions*, if duly pondered, will be very serviceable.

The law consists of two parts ; first, the precept, requiring obedience : “ Do this ; ”—secondly, the sanction of this precept, by rewards and punishments. “ The man, that doeth these things, shall live by them,” is the reward promised unto obedience ; and, “ The soul, that sinneth, it shall die,” is the punishment threatened against disobedience.

Now according to these two parts of the law, so there are two ways of becoming righteous by the law ; so that it shall have nothing to lay to our charge. The one is, by obedience to the precept : the other is, by submission to the penalty : not only he, who performs what the law commands, is thereby righteous ; but he also, who hath suffered what the law threatens.

From hence we may again distinguish righteousness, into a righteousness of obedience, and a righteousness of satisfaction : the former ariseth from performing the precept of the law ; the latter, from undergoing the penalty. Between these two righteousnesses this remarkable difference may be observed, that the promise of life being an-

nexed to the fulfilling of the precept, the righteousness of obedience gives a full right and title unto the life promised : but no such right results from the righteousness of satisfaction ; for it is not said in the law, “ Suffer this, and live,” since the suffering itself was death, but “ *Do this, and live.*” So that, by mere satisfaction, a man is not accounted the fulfiller of the law ; nor yet farther to he dealt withal, as a transgressor of it. Hence, then, the one may be called a positive righteousness, because it ariseth from actual and positive conformity of our obedience to the rules of the law : the other, only negative righteousness, because satisfaction is equivalent to innocence, and reduceth the person to a guiltless condition ; which I here call a negative righteousness.

Now each of these, both the righteousness of obedience and that of satisfaction, may again be two-fold ; either personal, or imputed. I call that personal righteousness, which a man in his own person works out, whether it be of obedience to the commands of the law, or of satisfaction to the penalty thereof. Imputed righteousness is a righteousness wrought out by another, yet graciously, by the lawgiver himself, made ours : and so accounted as effectual to all intents of the law, as if we had in our own persons performed it.

iii. These distinctions being thus premised, I shall now proceed to lay down some *positions*, which may farther clear up this subject to our apprehensions.

1. *If we could perfectly fulfil the preceptive part of the law, we should thereby obtain a perfect righteousness of obedience ; and might lay claim to eternal life, by virtue of the promise annexed to the covenant of works.*

This is most unquestionably true ; especially if we suppose this perfect obedience by our own natural strength, without the assistance of divine and supernatural grace. because such an ability would infer the primitive integrity of our nature, and exclude the guilt of original sin, which hath involved all in the curse and malediction of the law.

2. *If we could undergo the whole of that punishment which the law threatens for disobedience, then also should we be accounted personally righteous by a righteousness of satisfaction.*

If an offender against a human law suffers the penalty which the law requires to be inflicted on him, according to the nature of his offence, whether it be imprisonment, a pecuniary mulct, or the like, that man thereby becomes negatively righteous, because the law is satisfied, so that it hath nothing farther to charge against him for that particular fact. Thus stands the case in reference to the law of God. The transgressing of the command binds us over to suffer punishment; which suffering if we can accomplish, and come from under, we shall be as righteous in the sight of God, as if we had never transgressed.

*3. Because the punishment threatened by the law of works is such, as can never be eluctated, nor fully and completely borne by us; therefore, it is utterly impossible, that ever we should obtain a personal righteousness of satisfaction.* Indeed, could we suffer it and come from under it, we should then be as righteous and innocent, as if we had never transgressed. But this is utterly impossible. For,

(1.) Infinite justice cannot be satisfied under the rate of infinite punishment. In a full satisfaction, the punishment must answer the greatness of the offence. But every offence against God hath an infinite heinousness in it, and therefore the punishment for it must be infinite. Crimes are greatered, not only from the nature of the action as it is in itself flagitious; but also from the quality and dignity of the person, against whom they are committed. Reviling and injurious speeches against a man's equal are but actionable: but, against the king, they are treasonable. A less offence against an excellent person, is more heinous than a greater against a more ignoble person. And, consequently, God being of infinite majesty and perfection, every offence against him must needs be infinitely heinous; and therefore must be infinitely punished, before full satisfaction can be made for it.

(2.) There are but two ways how a punishment can be imagined to be infinite. The one is intensively, when it is infinite in degrees: the other is extensively, when it is infinite in duration and continuance, though but finite in degree. If the punishment be either of these ways infinite,

it is fully satisfactory and commensurate to the divine justice, which is infinite. But,

(3.) We cannot possibly suffer a punishment which is infinite in degrees, because we ourselves are but finite in our natures; and what is finite cannot contain what is infinite: yea, though God should stretch and widen our capacities to the utmost, yet we can never become vessels large enough to hold infinite wrath at once. Therefore,

(4.) The punishment of sinners, because it cannot be infinite in degrees, that it may be satisfactory must be infinite in duration and continuance; that so a finite, yet immortal creature, as the soul of man is, may undergo a penalty some way infinite as is the justice offended.

(5.) Because their punishment must be infinite in duration, therefore it is utterly impossible, that ever it should be completely borne and eluctated, since what is to last to all eternity can never be accomplished. And, therefore, it is impossible, that ever we should procure to ourselves a righteousness of satisfaction; as impossible as it is, to outlive eternity, or to find a period in what must continue for ever.

[1.] But it may be objected: 'Is not God's justice satisfied in the punishment of the damned? why else doth he inflict it? And, if justice be satisfied in their damnation, how then can satisfaction be a righteousness equivalent to innocence, since they shall never be discharged from their torments?'

To this I answer:

1st. That there shall never be any time, wherein the justice of God shall be so fully satisfied by the damned in hell, as to require no more sufferings from them: for they shall be making satisfaction to all eternity. The infinite justice of God is satisfied in this, that it shall be satisfying itself to all eternity: and yet, in all that eternity, there shall be no one moment, wherein the sinner shall be able to say it is finished, and justice is fully satisfied.

2dly. To this may be added, that the eternal succession of their torments is, in respect of God, a permanent instant, a fixed and abiding Now. So that the very infinity of their punishment in the everlasting continuance of it, is ac-

counted by God (to whom "a thousand years," yea thousands of millions of years, "are but as yesterday when it is passed") as now actually present and existing. For, in his essence, there is no variation; and, in his knowledge, objects have no succession, besides that of method and order.

[2.] 'But how then,' may some say, 'were the sufferings of Christ satisfactory, since they were not infinite nor eternal?'

I answer :

1st. That our Saviour Christ, being God as well as man, and so an infinite person, might well bear the load of infinite degrees of wrath at once laid upon him, and thereby complete his satisfaction. So that his sufferings might be intensively infinite, and yet not exceed the capacity of his nature.

Or, if any should scruple whether the punishment of Christ were infinite in degrees, yet,

2dly. We may affirm that the dignity of his person, being God as well as man, might compound for the measure of his sufferings, and shorten their duration. For it is infinite suffering for an infinite person to suffer, it being an infinite humiliation and abasement. However, that punishment, which is stretched out by the line of eternity when laid upon the damned, was all wound up together when inflicted on Christ. He, at one large draught, drank off the cup of that fury, which they everlastingly drain by little drops. And could they, as he did, bear and eluctate the whole punishment at once, they would thereby obtain a righteousness of satisfaction, and be proceeded with as innocent or negatively righteous.

That is the third position.

4. Another position shall be this;—*because we can neither fulfil the commands of the law, nor yet undergo and eluctate the utmost extremity of the punishment; therefore our righteousness cannot possibly be inherent or personal.*

We cannot be personally righteous by perfect obedience, because of the corruption of our natures: we cannot be personally righteous by full satisfaction, because of the condition of our natures. Our corrupt state makes our perfect obedience a thing impossible; and our limited finite

state makes our full satisfaction as impossible. As we are fallen sinners, so we lie under a sad necessity of transgressing the law: as we are vile creatures, so we lie under an utter incapacity of recompensing divine justice. Well therefore, might the apostle cry out, "There is none righteous; no, not one;" Rom. iii. 10. As for a personal righteousness of obedience, the prophet unfolds that goodly garment, Isa. lxiv. 6. "All our righteousnesses are" but "as filthy rags;" rags they are; and, therefore, cannot cover our nakedness: filthy rags they are; and, therefore, need a covering for themselves. To think to cover filth by filth, is nothing else, but to make both more odious in the sight of God.

Nor can we hope to appear before God upon a righteousness of satisfaction: for how should we satisfy his justice?

Is it by doing? Whatsoever we can do, is God's gift, our own duty had we never sinned, and can bear no proportion to the sin committed: for no duty is of infinite goodness; but every sin is of infinite heinousness, as hath been demonstrated; and therefore no duty can make satisfaction for it. Is it by suffering, that we hope we may satisfy God? Alas! this is nothing else, but to seek salvation by being damned: for that is the penal part of the law; and the only personal satisfaction, that the justice of God will exact of sinners.

Now, though it be thus in vain to seek for a righteousness of our own, either of the one kind or of the other; yet that corruption of our natures, which is the only cause why we have not a perfect personal righteousness of obedience, still prompts us insensibly to trust to it: and ready we are, upon all occasions, to be drawing up an inventory of our good works, as the merit of our justification; which, if they be really found, are but good evidences of it. For,

*5. The righteousness, which alone can justify us, must be a righteousness either of obedience or satisfaction; either doing what the law hath required, or suffering what it threatens: and, indeed, both are necessary to bring us to heaven and happiness, in a way of justification.*

Perhaps God might, by the absolute prerogative of his mercy, have pardoned and saved sinners, without requir-

ing any righteousness or satisfaction. But I say, that it is utterly impossible and contradictory, that he should justify any without a righteousness; for the very notion of justification doth essentially connote and infer a righteousness, since it is God's owning and dealing with men as righteous. For ought I know, God might, had he so pleased, have pardoned and saved us without any righteousness; but, certain I am, he could not justify us without it. Now that is no righteousness which doth not fully answer the law which is the rule of it: for the least defect destroys its nature, and turns it into unrighteousness.

If it be here objected, that the rule of our righteousness is not the law of works, but the law of faith: that the covenant of works is abolished, and that of grace succeeds in the place thereof, which requires faith, repentance, and sincere obedience as the conditions of our justification; and that these are now the righteousness by which we are justified: I answer, by laying down

6. A sixth position; that *the covenant of works is only so far forth repealed and abrogated, as it did require a personal righteousness to our justification; but it is not repealed, as it did require a perfect righteousness.*

God did never so far disannul the covenant of works, that, whether or no his law were obeyed or his justice satisfied, yet we should be accounted righteous: but, it is only thus far repealed by the covenant of grace, that, though we cannot perfectly obey nor fully satisfy in our own persons, yet we may be pardoned and accepted through the satisfaction and obedience of our Surety. So that, even now, under the covenant of grace, no righteousness can avail to our justification, but what, for the matter of it, is perfectly conformable to the law of works. And when we say that the covenant of works is abrogated, and that we are not to expect justification according to that covenant, the meaning is not, that the matter of that covenant is repealed, but only the personal obligation relaxed: for, still, it is the righteousness of the law which justifies us, though performed by another. And, therefore, in this sense, whosoever are justified, it is according to the covenant of works: that is, it is by that righteousness, which, for the substance and matter of it, this covenant did require.

For the proof of this, which is of very great moment for the clearing the doctrine of justification, consider,

(1.) That there can be no sufficient reason given why our Saviour should suffer the penalty, who never transgressed the precepts of the law, unless it be that his sufferings might be our satisfaction. Consequently, if Christ died for us, only to satisfy divine justice in our stead, and as our Surety, it must necessarily follow, that this his death is our righteousness of satisfaction according to the law and covenant of works.

(2.) That law, according to the letter of which the far greater part of the world shall be judged, cannot be an abrogated, a repealed law.

But, though true believers shall indeed be judged only according to the favourable construction of the law of works, which is the accepting the righteousness of their Surety for their own; yet all the rest of the world (and how vast a number is it!) shall be judged according to the strict letter of the covenant of works, and must either stand or fall according to the sentence of it: they must either produce a perfect sinless righteousness, wrought out personally by themselves; or else suffer the vengeance of eternal death. Indeed, all men, at the last day, shall be judged by the covenant of works: and, when they shall stand before the tribunal of God, this law will be then produced, and every man's title tried by it; and whoever cannot plead a righteousness conformable to the tenor and import of it, must expect nothing else but the execution of the punishment threatened. The righteousness of Christ will be the believer's plea; and accepted, because it fully answers the matter of the law. The rest of the world can produce no righteousness of their own, "for all have sinned;" nor can they plead this of Christ, because they have no faith, which alone can give this title and convey it to them: so that their case is desperate, their doom certain, and their punishment remediless and insupportable; and this, according to the tenor of the covenant of works, 'Do this' or 'Suffer this,' by which God will proceed in judging of the world.

Consider, again,

(3.) That the matter and substance of the covenant of

**w**orks is nothing else but the moral law (as I showed before) the law of holiness and obedience : the obligation of which continues still upon us ; and the least transgression of which is threatened with death and condemnation.

‘ What then, doth God speak contradictions ? and, in the law of works, tell us he will punish every transgressor ; and in the law of faith tell us he will not punish every transgressor ? ’ No, certainly : his truth and his justice are immutable ; and, what he hath once spoken with his mouth, he will fulfil with his hand. And his veracity is obliged to punish every offender ; for God can be no more false in his threatenings, than in his promises : and, therefore, he punisheth those whom he pardons, or else he could not pardon. He pardons their persons, according to his covenant of grace : he punisheth their surety, according to his covenant of works : which, in a forensic sense, being the punishing of them, they have in him made a satisfaction to the justice of God, and thereby have obtained a righteousness according to the terms of the covenant of works.

I have the longer insisted on this sixth position, because it is the very critical point of the doctrine of justification, and the very hinge upon which all the controversies concerning it do turn.

7. Another position shall be this ; that, *though we have no personal righteousness, yet our Saviour Christ hath a personal righteousness of both kinds, both of perfect obedience to the commands of the law, and of full satisfaction to the penalty threatened in it.*

(1.) Christ hath wrought out a righteousness of perfect obedience ; and that, by his absolute conformity to a two-fold law.

[1.] The law natural, under the obligation of which he lay as a man.

For both the first and second Adam were made under the same law of works : the first, under the mutability of his own will, which forfeited his happiness ; the second, under a necessity or infallibility of entire obedience, through the union of the divine nature with the human, whereby it became as impossible that Christ should fail in his obedience, as that the godhead should fail the human nature which it had assumed.

[2.] To the law national, under the obligation of which he was born, as being of the seed of Abraham, and of the tribe of Judah.

By this national law I mean both the judicial and ceremonial laws of the Jews, of whom Christ was, according to the flesh. For even the ceremonial law was, in a sense, national, and peculiar to the Jews : yea, and they themselves thought so, seeing they did not impose the observation of the Mosaical rites and observances upon proselyted heathens (those whom they called ‘Proselyti portæ’) but admitted them to the participation of the same common hope and salvation with themselves, upon the observation of the law of nature and the seven traditional commandments of Noah. Now Christ was made under both these laws ; the law of his nature, and the law of his nation : under the former, primarily and necessarily, as he was man ; and, therefore, he must obey the law of right reason : under the second, secondarily and by consequence ; because the law of nature and right reason dictates that God is to be obeyed in all his positive commands. Wherefore he himself tells us, Mat. iii. 15. that it became him “to fulfil all righteousness.”

Thus, then, his righteousness of obedience was both personal and perfect.

(2.) And so, likewise, his righteousness of satisfaction was personal and plenary.

As divine justice could exact no punishment from him, upon his own personal account ; he being holy, harmless, and undefiled : so did it receive full satisfaction from him, for the sins of others imputed to him. Neither came he from under the penalty, till he had discharged the very uttermost farthing that was due. And therefore his active and passive obedience, as they are commonly termed, were both perfect and complete. What the sufferings of Christ were ; how far he paid the ‘idem,’ and how far the ‘tantidem ;’ I shall not discuss. The Greek liturgy checks our too curious inquisitiveness in this search, by calling them *αγνωστα πάθη*, ‘unknown sufferings.’

Only it may be here queried, ‘Since that all righteousness is a conformity to some law, according to what law was Christ obliged to undergo the penalty for sin ? Could

the same law bind him to obedience and suffering too? Or is it consistent with the measures of justice, to inflict the penalty of the law on him, who had fully observed the commands of it?" To this I answer; that the same law cannot oblige both to obedience and to suffering: and, therefore, Christ Jesus was not bound over to undergo the penalty by that law, the precepts of which he had fulfilled. Had he been liable to suffer by the same law that we are, he would not have been a Mediator, but a malefactor.

Christ was, therefore, under a two-fold law, in conformity to which he obtained his two-fold righteousness.

[1.] The common and ordinary law of obedience, unto which he, as well as others, was subjected upon the account of his human nature.

[2.] The peculiar law of the Mediator.

By the law of the Mediator I mean, that compact and engagement, which Christ entered into with God the Father, to become our Surety, to pay our debts, and to bear the punishment due to our sins; which I shall hereafter more largely open to you, when I come to treat of the covenant of redemption.

Now when Christ had perfectly fulfilled the common and ordinary law, both of his nature as a man and of his nation as a Jew, it could in no wise be just, that he should also undergo the penalty by virtue of this law, which threatened it only against the transgressors. And, therefore, when the ordinary law acquitteth and dischargeth him as righteous, the law of the Mediator interposeth, seizeth on him, and bindeth him over unto punishment. And, if Christ had not borne this punishment, though still he would have been personally righteous as a man, yet he would not have been righteous as a Mediator, because not conformable to the law of the mediation or suretyship, to which he had voluntarily subjected himself, and which obliged him to suffer: John x. 18. Phil. ii. 8. but, the obligation of both laws being fully answered, he hath thereby obtained a righteousness according unto both; and, being both perfect in his obedience and perfected by his sufferings, he is become an almighty Saviour, "able to save unto the uttermost all those who come unto God by him."

That is the seventh position.

*8. Christ having such an abundant righteousness of his own, God, the Lawgiver, hath been graciously pleased to bestow that righteousness upon, and impute it unto us; to all intents and purposes, as if it had been our own personal righteousness.*

And in this particular lies the great mystery of our justification. And therefore, to explain it, I shall lay down these two things :

(1.) Imputed righteousness is not God's accounting us righteous when we are not so ? for that would be a false judgment, and utterly inconsistent with the truth, wisdom, and righteousness of the divine nature : but, first, the righteousness of Christ is become ours, by the conveyance which God hath appointed to make it over unto us ; and, then, it is imputed or reckoned for our justification.

For the imputation of Christ's righteousness is not ' res vaga,' that which may agree with any person in any state and condition ; as if there were no more required to justify the most profligate sinner, but only that God reckon him righteous : no ; but there must be something presupposed in us, either as a qualification, condition, or means, that must give us a title to the righteousness of Christ. And that is, as shall appear in the next position, the grace of faith : so that, Christ's righteousness being made ours by faith, God doth then actually impute it to our justification.

And, therefore, the righteousness of Jesus Christ is not by God only thought to be ours ; but it is ours really and truly, in a law sense. To affirm, that God imputes that to be ours which indeed is not, would be to make it only a putative righteousness, to invade the divine verity, and to lay the imputation of a false and partial judgment upon him. The righteousness of Christ is not ours, because God accounts it to be so ; but, on the contrary, therefore God accounts it ours, because it is so. It becomes not ours, by God's imputation ; for it must be ours, before any act of imputation can be true and just : but rather, it becomes ours, by divine designation or donation, whereby God hath made over the righteousness of his Son as a dowry and patrimony to faith. God doth not justify us,

that we may be righteous; but because we are already righteous: and that, not only imperfectly, by the inherent righteous qualities that are implanted in our regeneration; but most perfectly, by the righteousness of Christ consigned over unto us in our regeneration, by virtue of faith, which is a main part of it.

Certainly, that God, who hath told us, that "he, that justifieth the wicked, is an abomination unto him :" Prov. xvii. 15. will never himself make that the process of his justice. It is true, the apostle, Rom. iv. 5. saith, that God "justifieth the ungodly;" but this must be understood, either in a limited sense, for those who are in part so, being but in part sanctified: or, rather, it must be understood, not in a compounded sense, as if ungodliness and justification were states compatible to the same person; but in a divided sense, that is, that he justifies such who heretofore were ungodly; but their sanctification intervenes between their ungodliness and their justification. In which order the apostle recounts it, 1 Cor. vi. 11. "Such were some of you: but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified." So that, in order of nature, faith, which is a principal part of our sanctification, precedes our right to Christ's righteousness, because it conveys it; and our right to Christ's righteousness precedes God's actual imputation of it to our justification, because it must first be ours, before it can be with truth accounted so.

It is very wonderful, that the papists should so obstinately resolve not to understand this doctrine of imputed righteousness; but still cavil against it, as a contradiction. It being, say they, as utterly impossible to become righteous through the righteousness of another, as to become healthful through another's health, or wise by another's wisdom. And some, besides this slander of a contradiction, give us this scoff into the bargain: That the Protestants, in defending an imputative righteousness, show only an imputative modesty and imputative learning. But they might do well to consider that some denominations are physical; others only legal and juridical. Those, which are physical, do indeed necessarily require inexistent forms, from which the denominations should result: thus, to be healthful, and to be wise and learned, do require

inherent health, wisdom, and learning. But, to be righteous, may be taken either in a physical sense, and so it denotes an inherent righteousness, which in the best is imperfect; or else it may be taken in a forensic or juridical sense, and so the perfect righteousness of another, who is our Surety, may become ours, and be imputed to our justification. It is the righteousness of another, personally: it is our righteousness, juridically: because, by faith, we have a right and title to it; which right and title accrue unto us, by the promise and covenant of God, and our union to our Surety.

Indeed, some there are, who refer our justification wholly to the merits of Jesus Christ; but yet lay down a scheme and method of this doctrine, not altogether so honourable to our blessed Saviour as they ought. These affirm, that Christ by his righteousness, hath merited that God should account our faith to be itself our righteousness: that his is only the procatarctic or meritorious cause procuring this grand privilege to faith, that it should itself be our righteousness and the matter of our justification. Wherein they are so far injurious to the merits of our blessed Saviour, as to make them only the remote cause of our justification; and, consequently, necessary, rather that faith might have an object, than that we might have righteousness. But of this, perhaps, more hereafter.

However, this, which hath been spoken, may serve to give us a more clear and distinct notion of imputed righteousness; which is not ours, merely because God imputes it to us; but because he hath, by deed of gift in his promise, bestowed it upon us when we believe, and then imputes it to our justification.

(2.) That this righteousness of Christ, thus made ours, may serve to all ends and purposes for which we stand in need of a righteousness, it is necessary, that both his active righteousness, or his righteousness of obedience, and also his passive righteousness, the righteousness of his satisfaction in suffering for us, be made ours, and imputed to us for our justification.

Though this position be much controverted; yet possibly, the truth of it will appear from the grounds formerly laid, viz. that there are two ends, for which we stand in

need of a righteousness: the one, is a freeing of us from the penalty threatened: the other, is an entitling of us to the reward promised. Now had we no other but the righteousness of Christ's satisfaction made over unto us, this indeed would perfectly free us from our liableness to punishment; for if our surety hath undergone it for us, we ourselves are not liable: but, still, we should need a righteousness to entitle us to the reward; and that must necessarily be a righteousness of perfect obedience. For, as I noted before, it is not said, 'Suffer this,' and live: but 'Do this, and live:' and, consequently, it must be obedience and not suffering, the active and not the passive righteousness of Christ, that can give us a right unto eternal life. It is true, the satisfaction of Christ doth give a right unto eternal life concomitantly, but not formally; that is, wherever guilt is removed, there a title to heaven is procured: yet the formal reason of our title to heaven is different from the formal reason of the remission of our sins: this, results from the imputation of Christ's sufferings; that, of his obedience.

But, if any should in this particular dissent, as many very orthodox divines, Piscator and others, have done, upon the account of the impossibility of a neutral estate, that is, a condition neither of happiness nor misery, life nor death; I will not earnestly contend about it; so that this foundation stand firm and unshaken, that we are saved only by the righteousness of Christ made ours by God's donation, and imputed to our justification. Yet Rom. v. 18, 19, votes for it.

9. *This righteousness of Christ is conveyed and made over unto us by our faith.* That is the grace, which God hath purchased to honour with our justification.

I shall not long insist upon this, because I reserve the more full handling of it to another place. Only this is here to be observed, that faith gives us a title to the righteousness of Christ, and makes it ours, not only by the promise of God, but as it is the bond of union between Christ and the soul. By faith it is, that we are made mystically one with Christ; living members in his body; fruitful branches of that heavenly and spiritual vine. We have the communication of the same name: "So also is

Christ," saith the apostle, 1 Cor. xii. 12: speaking there of Christ mystical, both his Person and his church. We have the same relations : "I ascend unto my Father and to your Father;" John xx. 17. We are made partakers of the same Spirit : for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:" Rom. viii. 9. He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit: 1 Cor. vi. 17. And, finally, the very life, that we live, is said not to be ours, but "Christ liveth in" us, and that we "live by the faith of the Son of God;" Gal. ii. 20.

So that, being thus one with Christ, his righteousness becomes our righteousness, even as our sins became his: and God deals with Christ and believers, as if they were one person: the sins of believers are charged upon Christ, as though they were his; and the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to believers as theirs. Neither is God unjust, either in the one or the other imputation; because they are mystically one: and this mystical union is a sufficient ground for imputation.

Yet from this union flows the participation only of the benefits of his mediatorship: for we are not hereby transubstantiated or deified, as some of late years have blasphemously conceited. Neither the godhead of Christ, nor his essential righteousness as God, nor his divine and infinite properties, are made ours; but only the fruits and effects of his mediation: so that, hereupon, God graciously accounts of us as if we had done in our own persons, whatsoever Christ hath done for us; because, by faith, Christ and we are made one.

These are the positions, which I thought necessary, to instruct us in a true notion of righteousness, and the manner how we become righteous.

iv. I shall deduce from them a few *Corollaries*.

1. Hence we learn *the true difference that there is, between the covenant of grace and the covenant of works*.

Whatsoever vast disproportion some have imagined; yet, indeed, these are not distinct covenants, for the matter and substance of them, but only in the distinct method and manner of participating the same righteousness. They both require full satisfaction, to obtain remission of sin; and perfect obedience, to obtain eternal life. But, in this,

lies the only difference ; that the rigour and severity of the covenant of works requires that this righteousness be personal, and wrought out by ourselves ; which is relaxed to us by the covenant of grace, promising us remission and acceptance through the righteousness of our surety, conveyed to us by our faith.

2. Hence see *what influence faith hath into our justification.*

It is not itself our righteousness, or the matter of our justification ; but the instrument or means, call it which you please, of conveying over unto us the righteousness of Christ our Surety, which is perfectly conformable to the law of works, and the matter by which we are justified.

Some there are, who would have faith to justify us, as it is the fulfilling of the condition of the covenant of grace.

But, possibly, this difference might be soon compromised, if the tenor of both covenants be heedfully observed. The covenant of works promiseth life, if we obey in our own persons : but the covenant of grace relaxeth this ; and promiseth life, if we obey in our Surety. The condition of both is perfect obedience : in the one, personal ; in the other, imputed. And the way how we should obtain a title to this obedience of our Surety, is, by believing. So that, when the covenant of grace saith, " Believe and you shall be saved," it speaks compendiously ; and were it drawn out at length, it would run thus, " Procure the righteousness of Christ to be thine, and thou shalt be saved. Believe, and this righteousness, which will save thee, shall be thine."

Here, then, are two conditions ; the one, fundamental, primary, and immediate to our justification ; and that is, the righteousness of Christ : the other, remote and secondary ; and that is, our faith, which is the condition of the primary condition, and consequently of the covenant. This will appear more evident in this syllogism : If the righteousness of Christ be made thine, thou shalt be saved ; if thou believest, the righteousness of Christ shall be made thine : therefore, from the first to the last, if thou believest thou shalt be saved.

Now, though Christ's obedience be the principal, and our faith the secondary condition ; yet, usually, in pro-

pounding the covenant of grace, the former is silenced, and the latter only mentioned.

And this may be for two reasons:

(1.) Because, though Christ's righteousness be more immediate to our justification, yet faith is more immediate to our practice; and, therefore, it is of more concernment to know how justification might be obtained, than critically to know wherein it doth consist. And,

(2.) Because faith doth necessarily relate unto the righteousness of Jesus Christ. So that, to say, "Believe, and you shall be saved," doth virtually and implicitly tell us also, that our justification and salvation must be by the righteousness of another.

If, therefore, those, who affirm that faith justifies, as it is the performance of the condition of the covenant, intend it only in this remote and secondary sense, I see no cause of controversy or disagreement about it.

That is a secondary corollary.

3. Another inference may be this; *that we should never expect justification nor salvation, upon any other terms than a perfect righteousness, fully answering the tenor of the covenant of works.* Answering it, I say, as to the substance of what it requires, although the manner of obtaining that righteousness be not conformable thereunto, but unto the law of grace. If we cannot produce a righteousness every way perfect, and tender it to God as ours, we cannot with reason expect but that God should seek for satisfaction to his justice upon us in our everlasting destruction. Ours it must be, through our union to Jesus Christ by the bond of faith; which is a sufficient foundation for a real communication of all benefits and interests.

4. Hence we may learn, that *the two righteousnesses of which the text speaks, the righteousness which is of works, and the righteousness which is of faith, do not differ, as to the nature of the things themselves, but only as to the manner of their being made ours.*

The righteousness, which is of the law, must be of perfect obedience or of full satisfaction; the righteousness, which is of faith, is both of obedience and of satisfaction: so that, for the matter, there is no difference between them; for the righteousness of faith is no other than what

the law of works required. But, herein, lies the only difference, that the one must be personal, the other imputed. The law requires obedience or satisfaction to be wrought out in our own persons : grace mitigates this strictness ; and is contented with the obedience and satisfaction of another, apprehended and applied to us by our believing.

And thus you see, at large, the nature of righteousness, both legal and evangelical ; wherein they do consist ; and what is the true difference between them. The knowledge of these things is of absolute necessity to a clear perception of the doctrine of the covenants and of justification. Some, perhaps, because these truths are abstruse and knotty, may think that I am teaching you, as Gideon is said to have taught the men of Succoth, Judges viii. 7. with the thorns and briers of the wilderness. Yet I doubt not but by a diligent recollection of what hath been delivered, you may, even of these thorns, gather figs. Sure I am, that God, who once spake to Moses out of a bush, can speak to you out of these thickets. And, though they do not so immediately tend to the exciting of affections, yet those affections may be well suspected to be irregular, and experience shew's they are seldom durable, that are not built upon a right information of the judgment.

These things being thus discussed and stated, let us now proceed to a more distinct and particular consideration of the covenants ; which I have told you were principally two : the one, made with mankind in Adam, at his first creation ; the other, made with mankind, upon his restoration. The tenor of the former is, " Do this and live :" the tenor of the latter, " He, that believeth on Christ Jesus, shall be saved."

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## CHAP. II.

### THE COVENANT OF WORKS.

I SHALL first treat concerning the former, the covenant of works : the sum of which is, " do this, and live ; ' or, in

the words of my text, "The man, which doeth these things, shall live by them."

And, herein, two things are chiefly to be observed: the promise, which is life; and the condition, which is, "Do this," or perfect obedience.

I. I shall begin with the former, *the promise made unto Adam, and all mankind in him*: "The man, which doeth those things, shall live;" which, by the rule of contraries, implies the threatening and curse against all transgressors. If he shall live, who fulfilleth the law; then, by the contrary proportion, he shall die, who transgresseth it. And this threatening we find expressly annexed to one particular command of the covenant of works; Gen. ii. 17. "In the day that thou eatest thereof," that is, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; "thou shalt surely die:" and to the general tenor of the whole; Gal. iii. 10. "Cursed is every one, that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law to do them."

Concerning this life and death, much difficulty there is to state wherein they did consist: and, truly, the Holy Ghost having spoken so sparingly of it, it would be presumption, and an affectation of being wise above what is written, to determine any thing positively and magisterially herein; God taking more care to inform us how we might recover our lost and forfeited bliss, than wherein it consisted. Yet, possibly, something may, with modesty and probability, be spoken of it; that may give us some satisfaction in the clearing up, if not of all, yet of some truths that are pertinent to this subject, and worthy our knowledge and acceptance.

1. As for the *life* here promised,

(1.) There are two opinions, that carry a fair probability.

[1.] That, by life here is meant the perpetuity and continuance of that estate wherein Adam was created; being a state of perfect happiness and blessedness, free from sin, and therefore free from misery: he, the friend of God and lord of the visible creation; all things being subject unto him, and himself subject only to his Maker: there being a perfect agreement between his God and him, and between him and himself; no tormenting conscience, no

gnawing guilt, no pale fears, no pains, no sickness, no death. He might converse with God, boldly and sweetly : and God would have conversed with him, familiarly and endearingly. Then there would have been no desertion, on God's part ; because no apostasy, on his : no clouds in his mind, no tempest in his breast, no tears, nor cause for any ; but a continual calm and serenity of soul, enjoying all the innocent delights that God and nature could afford, and all this for ever. The whole world had been but a higher heaven and a lower. Earth had been but heaven a little allayed ; and Adam had been as an angel incarnate, and God all in all : and all this to be enjoyed eternally, without diminution, without period. O how great a happiness may we conceive the state of upright man to be ! which nothing can resemble, nothing exceed ; unless it be the happiness and bliss to which fallen man shall be restored. Had not sin soiled and drossed the world, it should never have felt the purgation of the last fire : the elements should never have been dissolved, the heavens folded up, nor the host of them disbanded ; but man had been the everlasting inhabitant of an everlasting world.

This is the first opinion concerning the life promised in the covenant of works.

[2.] Others again, to avoid some inconveniences which might follow upon the former opinion, whereof the greatest seems to be a populousness beyond what the world could contain, think it more probable to affirm, that when the multitude of mankind (which certainly had been far greater than all the generations since the beginning of it amount unto, since sin and the curse have hindered the fecundity of the first blessing) had so far increased as to straiten the bounds of their abode, God would have translated them to heaven, without their seeing or tasting of death. As, when a land is surcharged with inhabitants, the state transplants whole colonies of them, to disburden itself : so, when this earth should have been crowded with an overplus of mankind, God would have transplanted whole colonies of them ; and would have removed them from a terrestial to a celestial paradise. God doth now, indeed, remove believers to that state of happiness ; but

yet they first descend into the dust : death is their passage into life, and the grave their entrance into glory : we read but of two men only, who leaped that ditch ; and they were Enoch and Elijah : of the one, it is said that God took him ; and of the other, that God fetched him in a fiery chariot. But, had not sin come into the world, this might have been the common and ordinary passage out of it : Eve had never been terrified by the king of terrors, nor struggled at his approach, nor feared nor detested the separation of those dear companions, the soul and body : for there had been no such thing as death ; but both soul and body, jointly and at once, should have been rapt up to the enjoyment of the same God and the same happiness, which our faith now embraces, and our hope expects.

Which of these two is the very truth I cannot determine ; though the grand inconvenience, consequent upon the former, may incline a considering mind to adhere rather to the latter.

(2.) Now here fall in two questions to be resolved :—whether Adam, in innocence, may be said to be immortal ; —what is meant by the tree of life, spoken of in the history of Adam, and said to be planted in the midst of paradise.

[1.] To the first I answer, that Adam, in his state of innocence, was immortal. For sin is not only the sting, but the cause and parent of death ; and gives it not only its terrors, but its being. What saith the apostle, Rom. v. 12 ? “ By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin : ” so that, had there been no sin, there had been no death. But yet, even then, Adam had in him the contemplation of contrary qualities ; and, therefore, the principles of death and corruption. And, therefore, his immortality was not such, as the angels enjoy in heaven ; for they are not composed of jarring and quarrelling elements, being pure spiritual substances : nor was it such, as the bodies of glorified saints shall hereafter possess ; for they shall be made wholly impassible, and set free from the reach of outward impressions, and the discords of elemental mutinies, that might impair their vigour or endanger their dissolution. But it was an immortality, by donation ; and by the privilege of an especial Providence, which engaged itself to sway and overrule that

tendency which was in his body to corruption, and, notwithstanding the contrarieties and dissensions of a terrestrial constitution, to continue him in life, so long as he should continue himself in his obedience.

[2.] And, as a means and sacrament of this, God appointed the fruit of the tree of life, that the eating thereof might perpetuate his duration. Which tree of life, what it was, and why so called, was the second query.

Some suppose it was so named, because the fruit of it had a natural virtue to preserve and prolong life; and that Adam, using it as his ordinary food, should, by the medicinal force of it, have kept off or repaired all incident decays. But this, I think, sounds somewhat of the rabbi: for the guard, which God set upon this tree, lest fallen Adam should once taste it and live for ever, sufficiently overthrows this conceit; and evinces that immortality could not be the natural effect and production of it.

But the best and most received opinion is, that it was therefore called the tree of life, because it was a sacrament added for the confirmation of the promise of life. That, as now, under the covenant of grace, God hath instituted baptism and the Lord's supper, that, by being washed with the water of the one, and eating and drinking the bread and wine of the other, he might seal to us the stability of that covenant, wherein he hath promised eternal life to those who believe: so God gave Adam this tree of life, that, by his eating thereof, he might seal to him the faithfulness of the covenant of works, wherein he had promised life to him if he would obey; that, as sure as he tasted of the fruit of that tree, so sure he should live, if he would perform the commands of God. For every covenant hath its sacraments or seals, annexed to it. The old covenant of grace was sealed by circumcision, called therefore "a seal of the righteousness of faith;" Rom. iv. 11. and likewise the passover was another sacrament of that covenant: the new covenant of grace is sealed by baptism and the Lord's supper. And, in like manner, the covenant of works was sealed by the fruit of this tree of life: which was so called, not from any inherent quality of its own, but only sacramentally, because it did confirm the promise of life; that, as surely as Adam

did eat thereof, so surely he should live if he would obey.

(3.) By these obscure and uncertain things which cannot be recommended unto you as undoubted verities, but only as probable conjectures, you may perceive how much we are in the dark, and how subject to error, when we pretend to define and positively determine what the Holy Ghost hath thought fit to conceal.

Yet two things I account most certain; and, with which, it will be good to put a stop to our inquisitiveness; —that this life, promised in the covenant of works, was a state, made happy and blessed, by the confluence of all good things, outward and inward, temporal and spiritual; whatsoever man's condition could need, or his will desire. So long as there were no defects of righteousness and holiness in his nature, there would have been none of happiness suitable to his capacities; nor should he have any complaints to make, nor cause for them.—That this life, whether eternal on earth or in heaven, though so perfectly happy in its kind; yet was far short of that glory and happiness, which is now promised to believers under the covenant of grace.

Christ not only died to redeem a forfeiture, but his obedience merited the purchase of a richer inheritance, and he will instate his in the possession of far more transcendent glory. Adam was never so happy in his innocence, as he is now, since his fall, by his faith and repentance. He is now exalted far higher than at first he stood. And, therefore, St. Gregory the great, considering the advantage which we have gained by our restoration through Christ, could not forbear exclaiming, ‘*O felix culpa, quæ talem meruit habere Redemptorem!*’ ‘Happy sin, that obtained such a Redeemer!’ And Clemens Alexandrinus hath a like passage: ὁ εκ παραδεισεώς πεσων μειζον ὑπακοης αθλον εργας απολαμβανει. ‘His disobedience cast Adam out of paradise: his obedience instates him in a far higher and greater reward, even heaven.’ So that, as Christ saith concerning John the baptist, “Among all that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than he; yet he, that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater;” the same may I say

concerning Adam in innocence. Among all the visible creation, there was none greater nor more happy than he; yet the least believer, who is now in the kingdom of heaven, is far greater than he, when he was lord of paradise.

Yea, should we suppose, that Adam, after he had long continued in his innocence and obedience, should have been assumed into heaven; yet a believer's glory there, purchased by the merits of his Saviour, shall far outshine whatsoever glory Adam could have acquired by his own obedience. For, so much approximation and union as there is of the creature unto God, the fountain of all glory; so much participation is there of glory from God, by the creature. Now Adam's union unto God was only moral; such an union as love and friendship doth beget: but a believer's union unto God is nearer, and mystical, and ineffable; and, therefore, from this nearer union will flow a greater glory. God hath wedded our nature to himself, in the hypostatical union; and he hath wedded our persons to himself, in a mystical union: neither of which could have had place under the covenant of works; and, therefore, the union not being so great and close, the glory promised therein would not have been so glorious, nor the life and immortality so blessed, as that which is now brought to light by the gospel.

This you may take, in answer to the first question, what the life is, that is promised in the covenant of works: "The man, which doeth those things, shall live by them."

2. Our next inquiry is, what *death* it is, that this covenant threatens: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt die" the death. And herein, truly, we are almost as far to seek, as in the former.

Yet thus much is certain,—that by death, is meant the separation of the soul and body, which is a temporal death: together with all its forerunners and concomitants; pain, grief, weakness, sickness, and whatsoever, doth either cause it or attend it.—It is also certain, that here is meant spiritual death; the loss of the image and favour of God; a despoiling the soul of the ornaments of knowledge, grace, and righteousness, with which in its first creation it was beautified. For, as the separation of the soul from the body, is the temporal death of the man; so

the separation of the soul from the love and grace of God, is the spiritual death of the soul—And as certain it may be, that hereby is meant likewise an eternal death, to endure for ever, because to be inflicted by an infinite justice.

But the main difficulty is, whether this eternal death should have consisted in the utter annihilation of the soul, after its separation from the body by a temporal death; or whether both soul and body should have been again united, to suffer eternally some torments proportionable to those, which the damned now suffer in hell.

To this I shall give you what I judge most probable. And that is,—that the death threatened in the covenant of works would not have been the utter annihilation of the guilty soul, after its separation from the body. Because annihilation is not a punishment suited to the eternally glorifying of God's justice and power; since it would be in one moment transacted, and put the soul out of the reach and from under the dominion of omnipotency itself: for, although “*non esse*” be “*maximum malum metaphysicum*;” yet, certainly, God will not glorify himself by metaphysical notions, but by physical and sensible punishments.—Whatsoever punishment had been eternally inflicted, either upon the separate soul alone, as some hold, or upon the whole man both soul and body, as others affirm, had been more mild and mitigated under the covenant of works, than now the torments of the damned will be, who have despised the covenant of grace. For, as the life promised then was inferior to the life promised now; so the death threatened then was not so rigorous, so tormenting, as the death threatened now. Certainly, the tenders, that are made to men, of Christ, and salvation by him, are not mere indifferent things; that, though they slight and reject them, yet they shall be in no worse condition than when they were born: but a despised Saviour, an abused grace, a neglected salvation, are such things as will add rage to the unquenchable fire; and make it eat deeper into the soul, than if there had been no Saviour provided, no grace offered, no salvation purchased; but they had been all left in their first fallen estate, without hope, without means, without possibility of recovery. And thus much concerning the life

promised and the death threatened, in the covenant of works.

Only, it may be queried, how God verified this threatening upon Adam. The threatening runs thus : " In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die :" and yet we read that Adam lived nine hundred years, and more, after this peremptory sentence. How is this consistent with God's justice and veracity, who not only did not inflict death on him, on the day of his transgression, but reprieved him for many hundred years after ? To this I answer, briefly ; that, when it is said, " In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die," by this is not meant, that he should presently upon his sinning undergo actual death ; nor only that death should be then due unto him, as some would have it, for so it might, and yet never have been inflicted : but the meaning is, that he should be liable and obnoxious, yea and ordained, to death : death should certainly be inflicted on him, in the time that God had appointed, and which he foresaw would make most for the glory of his holiness and justice. " In that day thou shalt die," is no more, than " In that day thou shalt be a mortal creature : thy life shall be forfeited to justice, to be cut off whosoever the righteous and holy God shall please."

II. Let us, in the next place, proceed to consider the condition of the covenant of works ; and that the apostle tells us is, " Do this ; " " The man, which doeth those things, shall live by them." By doing these things is meant obedience, both in its perfection and perseverance : for perfect obedience could not justify, unless it were persevering obedience ; for we find that Adam himself was not justified by his perfect conformity to the law for a time, because he did not continue in it.

Concerning this obedience, which was required in the covenant of works, we may observe,

1. That the rule of Adam's obedience in his state of innocence was principally the dictates and promptings of his own nature, and secondarily any positive law that should be given him by God.

So that, when God bids him do this and live, he doth but point him inwards to see what was written upon his

own heart, and to act suitably thereunto. God gave him one command, which was not written there ; and that was, not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And some suppose also the command of sanctifying the sabbath-day to have been a positive law given to Adam : Gen. ii. 3. where it is said “ God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it : ” others suppose those words to be brought in only by way of prolepsis or anticipation. However that be, yet certain it is, that God laid very few injunctions upon upright man, besides what the dictates of his very nature and reason did prompt him to : but, if many more had been then imposed on him, they would all have been ultimately resolved into that grand law of nature, That whatsoever God commands we ought to obey. And, therefore, though the not eating the fruit of such a tree were not a law of nature, yet this was, that he ought not to have done what God forbade him. So that, “ Do this,” was to Adam no more than “ Act only according to the rules of nature and right reason, and thou shalt live.”

*2. The covenant of works required of Adam all those things, which are now required of us under the covenant of grace ; except it be those, which suppose a sinful and a fallen state.*

Some duties there are, which are in themselves absolute and perfect, and do not presuppose any sin or corruption in our nature : and such are, to love God ; to reverence and worship him ; to depend upon him, and believe in him ; and to commit all our affairs and the conduct of our whole lives, to his guidance and government. Other duties there are, which do necessarily connote and presuppose imperfection and sin : as patience and submission under afflictions ; confessing of guilt ; acts of repentance, and of faith in the merits of Jesus Christ ; relieving the necessities of the poor ; forgiving wrongs and injuries ; and many other such like. Now the duties of the former sort, which are required of us, were likewise required of Adam ; and his continuance in them would have been his justification : but not the duties of the latter sort ; for a state of innocence and perfection excludes all such duties, because it excludes all that imperfection and guilt, upon the

account of which alone such duties are become necessary. Adam had the innate radical power to do them; but no occasion to exercise it.

3. *Adam, in innocency, had a power to do whatsoever the law or the God of nature did require; and, by this his perfect obedience, to have preserved the righteousness of his first estate, and his undoubted right unto that life that was promised.*

God is so just and merciful, that he lays no commands upon his creatures to any thing that is impossible, unless it be so made by an impotency wilfully contracted. God may, indeed, justly require that from us, which is now beyond our power to perform; as the perfect fulfilling of his law: and that, because it was once possible for us in our representative. And if we have lost our power of obeying, that does not prejudice God's right of commanding; no more than the inability of a voluntary bankrupt dischargeth his obligation to his creditors. In the state of innocence, God suited the power of his creature to the law which he intended to give him; and made his obligation to duty commensurate with his ability to perform it.

4. *That obedience, which was the condition of the covenant of works, was to be performed by Adam in his own person, and not by a surety or undertaker: and, therefore, the covenant of works hath no mediator.*

And this is the great, yea, for ought I can see, the only real difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. They both require the same obedience and righteousness to justify men: only, the covenant of grace allows it to be the righteousness of another; but the covenant of works requires that it be wrought out by the man himself. It is true, we live by doing this, as well as Adam; but we do it by our Surety, not in our own persons. And hence we may learn what covenant it was, that Christ, the second Adam, was made under. It was strictly the covenant of works, of personal righteousness; the same, that God entered into with Adam: and, therefore, he is called by the apostle the second Adam: because, the first Adam failing in his undertaking, he rose up in his stead to be our federal head and representative; and, seeing the first did not rightly manage the trust de-

posited, Christ took the whole affair out of his hands, and hath perfectly, fully, and faithfully transacted it.

We have thus seen, both the promise and the condition of the covenant.

III. Our next inquiry should be concerning *the persons, with whom it was first made, and by whom it was first broken.*

1. But before I come to that, it may not be impertinent to resolve a query, that may arise upon what hath been already said. And that is,—whether the afflictions and temporal evils, that believers suffer in this life, be not inflicted on them by virtue of the curse and threatening of the covenant of works: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt die,” and “The soul, that sinneth, it shall die.” For the curse of dying comprehends in it, not only temporal death itself; but all other miseries and troubles, that we undergo in this present life. And, indeed, it is worth the inquiry, whether the afflictions and sufferings of true believers, be properly punishments, or not.

To resolve this, we must know, that God hath two ends respecting himself, for which he brings any evil upon men. The one, is the manifestation of his holiness: the other, is the satisfaction of his justice. And, accordingly as any affliction tends to these, so it is either properly a punishment, or barely a chastisement and correction. If God intend by the affliction to satisfy his justice, then it is properly a punishment; and flows from the curse and threatening of the covenant: but, if God intend thereby only to glorify and manifest his holiness, then it is not a proper punishment, neither hath it any thing of the rancour and venom of the curse in it; but it is only a fatherly correction, proceeding from love and mercy.

(I.) But the afflictions and outward evils, that true Christians suffer, are inflicted by God upon them, to the end that he might manifest his purity and holiness.

Indeed, there are many gracious ends, respecting believers themselves, wherefore God doth afflict them: as, to exercise their graces, to keep them humble and dependent, to starve up their lusts, to wean them from the world, and to fit them for a better. But the great end, respecting God himself, is, that, by these afflictions, they

might know and see how holy a God they have to deal with ; who doth so perfectly hate sin, that he will follow it with chastisements wheresoever it be found. Though the sin be pardoned, though the sinner be beloved ; yet God will afflict him : not, indeed, to satisfy his justice, for that is done for him by Jesus Christ ; but to satisfy his holiness, and vindicate the honour of his purity in the world, and himself too from contempt, when those, who will presume to offend, shall certainly smart for it : 2 Sam. xii. 13, 14.

(2.) The afflictions and evils, that believers suffer, are not inflicted by God, that thereby he might satisfy his justice upon them ; and, therefore, they are not from the curse of the law, nor properly punishments for their sins.

Punishment always connotes satisfaction for transgressing the law. But this satisfaction to divine justice is not to be wrought out by believers themselves ; and, therefore, whatsoever they suffer is not strictly punishment. Christ hath fully satisfied all the demands of justice ; and, therefore, no farther satisfaction is expected from them, since that could not be consistent with the rules and measures of justice to punish both the surety and principal too. The curse of the law poured all its poison into Christ ; and there is not one drop of it that falls besides upon believers : Gal. iii. 13. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." For that death, and all those evils threatened in the covenant of works, are curses : not merely because they are grievous and afflicting ; but because inflicted on transgressors in order to the satisfaction of divine justice upon them. And therefore Christ is said to be accursed, and his death to have been an accursed death, ("Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree") not because he died, nor because he died a most bitter, painful, and shameful death : but because he was ordained to undergo this death, as a satisfaction to the justice of God for the sins of men. And, truly, should God inflict those very evils which he now doth upon believers, to the end that he might thereby raise some satisfaction to his justice, though the evils themselves would not be greater, nor more sharp and painful, yet they would all be curses, and make them too

accursed creatures : for the true notion of a curse and of a punishment, consists not in the quality or the measure of the evil suffered ; but in the inflicting of it as penal, and in order to the satisfaction of justice.

Hence, therefore, with what calmness and sweet peace may a true Christian look upon all his afflictions ! Though they be sore and heavy, and seem to carry much wrath in them, yet they have nothing of the curse. The sting was received, all of it, into the body of Christ : so that now the covenant of works is disarmed to him ; and he need not fear the dreadful thunder of its threatenings, for the bolt is already discharged upon another. Indeed, were it God's intent to satisfy his justice by the evils which he brings upon me, I might then tremble with horror and astonishment ; and account every the slightest suffering a presage and pledge of far greater and eternal to come : but if I have an interest in the righteousness of Christ, justice is already satisfied, and the curse removed ; and all the sorrows and afflictions which I suffer, are but the corrections of a gracious Father, not the revenge of an angry God. Am I pinched by poverty ? that is no curse : God doth not seek revenge upon me ; but only keeps me from the allurements to sin and vanity. Am I afflicted with losses in my relations or estate ? that is no curse : God doth not thereby seek satisfaction to his justice ; but only takes these from me, that he might be all in all. Am I tormented with pain, and weakened with diseases ; and will these bring death upon me ? yet diseases and death itself are no curses ; but only a necessary passage from life to life, a bad step to Canaan, a short night between one day and another. Revenging justice is satisfied : and, therefore, come what afflictions it shall please God to try me with, they are all weak and weaponless ; without sting, without curse in them.

But, most sad and miserable is the condition of wicked men, whose infidelity excludes them from having a right in the sufferings of Christ. For there is not the least affliction that besets them, the least gripe of any pain, the least loss in their estates, the most slight and inconsiderable cross that is, but it comes upon them through the curse of the law. God is, by these, beginning to satisfy

his justice upon them ; and sends these to arrest and seize them. He is beginning to take them by the throat, and to call upon them to pay him what they owe. Every affliction is to them but part of payment of that vast and endless sum of plagues, which God will, most severely and to the very utmost farthing, exact of them in hell.

And so much in answer to that query.

2. Let us now proceed to inquire *who are the persons, with whom this covenant of works was at first made, and then by whom it was broken.*

(1.) But, in order to a clear and distinct resolution to this, I must first premise one or two things most necessary to be known ; and which I shall lay as the basis and foundation of my ensuing discourse.

[1.] The first is this : that Adam may be considered under a two-fold capacity ; as a natural root—as a federal head.

In the former respect we were in him as in our original : in the latter, as in our representative.

There is no difficulty at all in conceiving of Adam as our *natural root* ; for that is only in regard of the traduction of the same nature to all his posterity. As all parents are the natural root of their posterity, so Adam was of all mankind, delivering his nature to his children, which hath since been handed down along from one generation to another, even unto us.

But all the difficulty lies in opening how Adam was our *federal head*, and what it signifies to be so. A federal head is a common representative or public person ; a person, as it were dilated into many ; or many persons contracted into one, appointed to stand in the stead of others ; so that what he doth, as acting in that public capacity, is as valid in law to all intents and purposes, as if those, whom he represents, had in their own persons done it. This is a federal head, surety, or representative.

Now such a representative is supposed to have a power to oblige those, for whom he appears, to any agreement or compact whatsoever, as though they themselves had personally entered into it.

And this power, that one man hath to oblige and bind another, may arise two ways,—from a voluntary delega-

tion ;—from a natural, or at least a legal or acquired right, that the one hath over the other.

A representative *by delegation* is one, to whom those, whom he represents, have, by a free and joint consent, given up their own power, and invested him in it. As, to use a known instance in the choice of a parliament, the people give away their power to those few select men whom they send : each shire to its knight, and each corporation to its burgess : so that whatsoever those few do, is, in law, not only the act of those men, but of all the people in the nation : what laws or taxes soever they impose on those whom they represent, are not only from them, but, in a law sense, the people lay them upon themselves. But Adam was not thus the federal head or representative of mankind ; because, having not as then received our being, we could not by a free consent choose him to transact with God for us.

Therefore, there is in some a power to oblige others, arising merely from *the right* that the one hath over the other.

And this right is two-fold ; either natural, upon the account of natural production ; or else legal and acquired, upon the account of purchase and redemption. For both he that begets, and he that purchases and redeems another, hath a right over him ; and, by that, may become his federal head, and bind him to all just conditions ; disposing of his person and concerns, as he thinks fit and expedient. Accordingly, the whole race of mankind never had but two federal heads or general representatives ; and they were the first and the second Adam. The power, that Christ, the second Adam, had to represent those, for whom he undertook, was founded upon a legal and acquired right over them ; as being their Redeemer, who had bought them to himself out of the hands of justice, and therefore might dispose of them as he pleased. But the power, that the first Adam had to be our representative, arose from a natural right ; as being the common parent of all mankind, in whose loins we all lay, and from whom we derived our being ; and, upon that account, he might justly oblige us who owe ourselves to him, as well as himself, to what terms soever God should pro-

pound, and he accept. And the reason why we say, that Adam only was our representative or federal head, and not our other intermediate parents from whom we spring as well as from him, is not, because other parents have not the same power to covenant for and oblige their children as he had ; for still they have as much natural right over those that descend from them : but, because they are not so appointed and constituted by God. Should God make a distinct and different covenant with them, they would have as much power to bind their posterity to the terms of it, as Adam had to bind all mankind to the covenant of works.

That is the first thing premised.

[2.] Because Adam was thus our federal head, we are not to be considered as distinct from him : but, as one and the same person with him, entering into covenant with God.

As the parliament is to be considered as the same with the whole body of the people, in all things wherein they do represent them ; so Adam and all mankind are to be considered as one and the same person, in all things wherein he represents us. Now our being thus one with Adam doth not denote any real physical unity or oneness : but it must be understood in ‘ sensu forensi,’ in a judicial law sense. And this oneness with him in a law sense (which is a term frequently used, and therefore it might help us to have it expounded) signifies nothing else but that there is a real foundation laid for the law justly to reward or punish us, upon Adam’s obedience or disobedience, as if we were one and the same person with him ; which foundation is the right he hath over us, to oblige us to covenant-conditions.

(2.) These things thus premised, which are of great moment in the doctrine of the covenants,

[1.] Take these two particulars :

1st. That the covenant of works was not made with Adam, considered in his private and personal capacity ; but as a public person and a federal head ; and, therefore, it was made with us as well as with him ; yea, with us in him.

He was not a single person, but a whole world wrapt

and folded up together in one: so that all, who have since sprung from him; are, in respect of the covenant, but one. Adam unravelled: and drawn out at length. What the apostle saith of Levi, Heb. vii. 9, 10. "Levi payed tithes in Abraham; for he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him." I may say in this case; we all entered into covenant at the very beginning of the world; for we were then in the loins of our father Adam, when that covenant was made. So that, when we consider either Adam or ourselves with relation to this covenant, we must so mould our apprehensions, as if all we were Adam, and Adam all of us: for, though we then lay so deep hid in our causes and the small principles of our beings, yet the covenant took hold of us; and bound us, either to the obedience which Adam promised both for himself and us, or to the penalty which he exposed both himself and us unto. Yet, still, our covenanting in Adam must be understood in a law sense: for it is utterly impossible, that we should personally and actually enter into covenant before we were: but the meaning is only this, that the covenant, which God made with Adam, doth as lawfully and strongly bind us to obedience, and in case of failure to punishment, as it did him; because God made this covenant with him, considered not personally but representatively, he having a power to indent for his posterity, from the natural right he had over them as their common parent. And yet, possibly, it may be long enough disputed, without hopes of a certain resolution, whether, when God made this covenant with Adam, he then knew himself to be a public person, and to stand as the representative of all mankind. Probable it is, that this affair being of so vast and general concernment, some such apprehensions might be impressed upon him by God, either through natural instinct or divine revelation: and, if so, the more inexcusable was his fault, that, knowing himself intrusted with no less a stock than the happiness of all his race, he should so wilfully break, and thereby ruin both himself and them.

2dly. In like manner, Adam brake this covenant, not only as considered personally, but as he was a common representative and a public person; and, therefore, not

only he, but we, by eating of the forbidden fruit, sinned and fell.

We are not to look upon Adam as alone in the transgression; but we ourselves were as deep in it as he: he, indeed, by personal consent to the temptation, without which neither he nor we had sinned; but we, by a covenant or federal obligation in him, our surety and representative. Every one will readily confess, that he hath been and still is a transgressor of the covenant of works; that his obedience falls infinitely short of the holiness and perfection of the law: but, that he should transgress this covenant so many thousand years before he was born, even in the infancy of the world, that his hand should be lifted up against God in that primitive rebellion; this some deny, few understand, and fewer lament. Yet what saith the apostle, Rom. v. ver. 12, 18, 19? In the 12th verse, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men," "for that all have sinned," saith our translation; "*in whom all have sinned*," saith the margin: both are right; for indeed both carry but the same sense. So v. 18. "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation:" and, v. 19. "By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners." But how could many be made sinners by the sin of one? It is not by imitation only, as the Pelagians held, maintaining that Adam's sin had no more influence upon us, than the power that a bad example hath to sway that will to evil that is not necessarily confirmed in good: but this cannot be, because death is here said to reign over those, who never "sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," ver. 14, that is, over infants, for they also die in whom the example of Adam could never work any propensity to disobedience; and, certainly, were there nothing else in Adam's sin to make men sinners, but only the setting of an ill example before them, I can see no reason why the example of his penitence and after-obedience should not as effectually excite us to virtue, as that of his disobedience to sin: especially, methinks, the examples of the miseries and wretchedness, that sin hath brought both upon Adam and upon his posterity, might much more deter them, than the examples of vice, if there

were no corruption in their nature, allure them. It is not therefore by example only, that mankind are made sinners through the disobedience of one; but we became sinners by his disobedience, because in him we ourselves sinned and disobeyed: not, indeed, actually, for so we were not in him; but forensically and in a law sense, he being our representative and federal head, and God looking upon what he did as equivalent to the personal deed of all mankind; which imputation was built upon most just and righteous grounds, because Adam, being our first parent, had a natural right over us, and might bind all his posterity to the terms of any covenant, that God should be pleased to make with him, and which might have been so much to their advantage.

And thus I hope these two things are sufficiently cleared, which are of great use and necessity to our right understanding the doctrine of the covenants; with whom the covenant of works was made, and by whom it was broken.

That many of these things are abstruse and difficult, I cannot deny; but, that any of them are vain and frivolous, I do. It is a most ignorant and weak excuse of many, who perhaps may be well-meaning people, that these things are two high speculations for them to search into; that their eternal salvation may be secured well enough, though they know not such obscure points as these are, so long as they conscientiously practise those obvious truths and express duties which they know. I will not, I dare not deny, but men may be safe in not knowing what they cannot attain. But, if they pretend this for a shelter of slothful and affected ignorance, let them consider, that many of the great and precious truths of the gospel are delivered obscurely; not to excuse us from, but on purpose to engage us to a diligent search and study of them. If these things were not expedient to be known, why should the holy scriptures so abound with them? The epistles of St. Paul are full of these profound mysteries, which he wrote to the churches in common, and every member of them: these were read in public assemblies; and it concerned all the people to hearken to them, and consider of them: and, if the pressing only of practical duties of Christianity had been sufficient, most part of the apostle's

writings had been needless and superfluous. It is true, we cannot determine what is the ‘minimum quod sic,’ that is consistent with salvation; what is ‘the least degree,’ either of grace or knowledge, that may just serve to bring a man to heaven: but this we may say, that it is a very ill sign, to drive the bargain so hard with God: to desire to be saved, at the least charges and expenses possible. This I will boldly say, that he who despiseth a more high and elevated knowledge of the mysteries of Christianity, where the means to attain it are afforded, though others who are destitute of those means may arrive at heaven and happiness, yet I must needs doubt whether ever he shall. To despise evangelical truths, which do not so immediately tend to practice, is no other than to impute trivialness to the infinite wisdom of God, who hath revealed them, and so often and largely insisted on them; and to withdraw the chiefest part of ourselves, whereby we most of all show ourselves to be men, from his obedience, even our understandings. Certainly, we serve God as well by endeavouring to know his truth, as by endeavouring to obey his commands; and he, who resolves to obey God bidding do this, but not when he bids him understand this, serves him more like an engine, than like a man.

[2.] From this, that hath been spoken, we may borrow some light to discover to us the manner how we are all become partakers of original sin, through the violation of this first covenant of works.

Many are the disputes and great the difficulties about this matter. Very much is said and written upon this subject, to very little purpose; unless it be to show us, how miserable the blindness and ignorance of human nature is, which this sin hath brought upon us. It would be a labour, as fruitless as endless, to reckon up to you the great variety of opinions herein. No one point of divinity hath been more discussed and controverted than this; and yet, if I may be allowed so to judge, all that ever I have yet seen, hath either been false in the hypothesis, or failed in the accommodation. Some deny the imputation of guilt, and some the corruption of nature; and, because they cannot comprehend the way and man-

ner of its conveyance, destroy original sin itself. Others, that grant both, yet puzzle themselves and their readers with strange assertions : some holding that the soul is propagated from the parents even as the body is, and therefore no wonder that a defiled soul should beget another such : others, who hold the souls of men to be immediately created by God, affirm that it contracts pollution by being infused into a polluted body. But, yet, the absurdities, that will follow upon all these ways are so many, so very gross and palpable, that such hypotheses, instead of satisfying, must needs only disquiet and torment an inquisitive mind. And yet, if, after all these differences and disputes, the certainty of the truth in this matter could be evidenced, it would more than recompence the pains of all, and the errors of many who have attempted it: for, though it be certain that niceties in religion are not necessities; yet, if ever difficulty and usefulness were conjoined together in any one point, it is in this of original sin. I intend not to handle the question at large; but only briefly speak to it, as a deduction and corollary from this doctrine of the covenants.

To enter into it, I must first premise a distinction or two concerning original sin: and then lay down some positions, from which it may be cleared to you, that the true ground of our partaking of it is only the covenant of works.

1st. Original sin therefore is two-fold ;—the imputation of guilt ;—the inhesion of corruption.

(1st.) There is an imputation of guilt. To impute guilt, is, to reckon a person a transgressor of the law; and therefore liable to the punishment threatened, whether he hath in his own person transgressed the law or not. And here lies a great part of the difficulty, how we can become guilty of another man's transgression, which we never acted in nor consented unto, and which was committed some thousands of years before we were born: and yet we shall be punished for it; and that, as justly, as if we had in our own persons committed it.

(2dly.) Besides this imputation of guilt, there is in original sin an inherent corruption of nature.

The former is by the schools called ' peccatum originans; '

and this ‘ peccatum originatum :’ barbarously indeed, but yet significantly.

Inherent corruption of nature is commonly made to consist of two parts.—The loss and privation of the image of God : the clarity of our understandings, the obedience of our wills, the order of our affections, the perfect harmony of the whole man in the subjection of his inferior faculties to his superior and all unto God, being utterly lost and renounced; so that now we are become both unable and averse to every thing that is good.—Besides this, it is commonly affirmed, that there is some positive malignant quality in original sin, viz. a violent propension and strong bent of the whole man unto what is evil and sinful. The former is called the privative, this latter the positive part of original sin.

Yet I think, if it be well weighed, as there may be insuperable difficulties in admitting such a positive corruption in our frame and composition, so there is not any necessity to grant it. We need not, I say, superadd any positive corruption in original sin, to the privation of original righteousness: for a mere privation of rectitude in an active subject, will sufficiently solve all those phenomena for which a positive corruption is pleaded. We shall find man’s nature wicked enough by his fall, though there were no evil principles infused into him, (for from whence should they come ?) but only holiness and righteousness taken from him: for the soul being a busy creature, act it must and will: without grace and the image of God adorning and assisting it, it cannot act regularly, nor holily: its nature makes it active; the loss of God’s image, which alone can raise the soul to act spiritually, makes all its actions defective: and this alone is sufficient to make all its actions corrupt and sinful, without admitting any positive corruption. There needs no more to make a man halt, that must walk, but to lame him: and, certainly, he that doth lame him, doth it, not by infusing into him any habit or principle of lameness, but only by destroying that strength and power which before he had. So stands the case here! we are all lamed by the fall we took in Adam: our natures are despoiled of their primitive integrity and perfection, so that there needs not any positive vicious

habit implanted in our original, to make our actions vicious and irregular; but, it is sufficient, that we have lost those holy habits and principles of righteousness and knowledge, which we were at first endowed with, and which alone could direct every action ‘in ordine ad Deum,’ as the schools speak, ‘with a reference to God,’ and his honour and glory.

Thus then you see, original sin may be either the guilt of the first transgression imputed to us, or the corruption of nature inherent in us: to which corruption nothing more is required, than the loss of God’s image in an active subject.

2dly. It remains now to open, how this imputation lies upon us, and this corruption cleaves unto us, merely upon the account of the covenant of works; whereby we may clearly understand how it is, that we become partakers of original sin.

This I shall endeavour to do as to both branches.

(1st.) As to the imputation of Adam’s sin to us, take these two particulars; which will explain how original sin, as to the guilt of it, lies upon us.

[1st.] If Adam had not been our federal head, if the covenant had not been made with us in him but had respected him alone; yet his sin might have been justly so far imputed to us, as to subject us to temporal evils and punishments; because of that relation which we bear unto him as our natural head, and the common root from whence we all sprang.

And the reason of this is, because God might justly have punished the transgression of Adam, in all his concerns, and in whatsoever was dear unto him; as his posterity would have been. So that, to us, these evils would have been only a ‘simplex cruciatus,’ ‘only painful,’ because inflicted without any respect to our own sin; but, to Adam, they had been penal, and properly punishments. This I think may be made good by many places of scripture, where God is set forth as punishing some for the sins of others, who were not their federal heads: Exod. xx. 5. “Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children,” Isa. xiv. 20, 21. “The seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned. Prepare slaughter for his children, for the

iniquity of their fathers : " and so, for the sin of David seventy thousand of his subjects are slain : and yet those fathers were not the representatives of their children, neither was David of his subjects. But God might justly thus punish them in their relations : for a father is punished, in the evils that befall his children ; and a king, in those that befall his subjects : and, though it be true that they have evil enough of their own, to deserve these, yea and greater plagues ; yet, if they should be supposed to be innocent and without sin, God might justly thus afflict them, not indeed as punishing them, but those that sinned ; they being made only the passive conveyers of those punishments to them. I remember Plutarch gives this reason, in his treatise ' Of those who are late punished,' why it may be just to revenge the fathers' offences upon the children : ' It is nothing strange nor absurd, that, since they belong to them, they should suffer what belongs to them.' So, then, though we had never sinned in Adam, nor the covenant made with him had ever reached us ; yet God might justly have brought temporal evils upon us, because of the relation we bear unto him, as our natural head, and as we are parts of him.

[2dly.] That Adam's sin is imputed unto us, so far as thereby to make us liable to eternal death and damnation, results not from his being our natural, but our federal head.

Adam's sin is imputed to our condemnation, only because we covenanted in him, and not merely because we descended from him. It is an everlasting truth, Ezek. xviii. 20. " The soul that sinneth, it shall die :" and, " The son shall not bear the iniquity of his father," that is, the punishment of his father's iniquity. So, Gal. vi. 5. " Every man shall bear his own burden." These expressions cannot be meant of temporal sufferings ; for I have already showed, that God may and doth inflict them upon children, for the parents' sins : but they are meant of future punishments and eternal death ; that none shall eternally perish for his father's crimes, but only for his own. ' But,' you will say, ' how then comes it to pass, that we are liable to eternal death through the sin of another, if so be the son shall not bear the iniquity of his father, and only the

soul, that sinneth, shall die ?' I answer, this is still true, because we are the souls that sinned ; we, in Adam, who then rose up our representative, in whom we covenanted with God, and in whom we brake that covenant : and therefore God inflicts death eternal upon his posterity, not as a punishment for his sin, but for their own ; for his sin was theirs, though not committed personally by them, yet legally and judicially charged upon them. The grounds of this I have before mentioned, and therefore shall spare to enlarge upon it here : only take the sum and abstract of it, in brief, thus : God was, at first, willing of free grace to enter into covenant with Adam ; that, if he would obey, he should live ; if he would disobey, he should die the death : but, lest this grace should be too narrow and stinted, if it had been limited to Adam's own person only, therefore God extends it to all mankind, and bids Adam stand forth as the representative and surety of all his posterity, and indent for them as well as for himself ; which he might justly do, being the common parent of mankind, and therefore having a natural right to dispose of them, especially when in all appearance and probability it would have proved so incomparably to their advantage : he therefore disobeying, the death threatened is as much due to us, as to him ; it being, in law, not only his act, but ours. And this is plainly the manner how we, who live so many thousand years after, are made liable to death by the first transgression. And, therefore, Alvarez de Auxil. d. 44. n. 5. saith well, '*Propriè loquendo omnes filii Adæ peccaverunt originaliter in eo instanti, in quo Adam peccavit actualiter :*' that is, all the children of Adam are not only then guilty of original sin, when they are first conceived or born, but 'properly they sinned originally in the same instant, in which Adam sinned actually' by eating the forbidden fruit ; because they were then in Adam as in their representative, and upon that account his transgression was legally theirs.

And thus, I hope, I have made it clear, that, as for that part of original sin which consists in the imputation of the guilt of the first transgression, it lies upon us merely from the covenant of works, into which we entered with God in Adam.

(2dly.) There is another branch of original sin, which consists in the corruption of our natures, through the loss of the image of God. This also had never seized on us, but by the covenant of works.

Many perplexed disputes there are, how we became so totally depraved, and whence we derived that corruption. I shall, as clearly as I can, lay open to you the true and genuine grounds of it: which, in general, I affirm to be the violation of the covenant of works.

To make this evident, consider these three particulars.

[1st.] It must again be remembered, that the loss of God's image, that is, of all that grace and holiness where-with our natures were primitively endowed, is the true and only ground of all original corruption and depravation.

Men's natures are not now become sinful, by putting any thing into them to defile them; but by taking something from them, which should have preserved them holy. We have nothing more in us by nature, than Adam had in innocence: and, if it be said we have corruption in us by nature, which he had not, that is not to have more, but less. He had the free power of obedience: he had the perfect image of his Maker, in all the divine qualities of knowledge and holiness, which we have not, and are therefore said to be corrupt; not as though there were in our original any real positive qualities which were not in Adam, but because he had those holy qualities which are not in us. And, therefore, when we say that Adam communicated to his posterity a corrupted nature, it must not be understood as if that nature which we receive were infected with any vicious inclinations or habits, which should sway and determine our wills unto evil; but the meaning is, that Adam communicated to us a nature, which hath a power to incline and act variously: but, withal, he did not communicate to us the image of God, nor the power of obedience, which should make all its inclinations and actions holy and regular; and, therefore, he communicated a nature corrupted, because it was deprived of that grace which should have kept it from sin.

That is the first particular.

[2dly:] The loss of this image of God was part of that death threatened in the covenant of works. "In

the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die ; " that is, thou shalt die a spiritual death, as well as a temporal and eternal death.

And this spiritual death was the very despoiling him of the image of God, and the habits and principles of holiness : so that corruption of nature seized upon Adam through the curse of the covenant ; God taking from him his image, and thereby executing upon him this spiritual death literally, even in the very day wherein he transgressed.

[3dly.] Adam being our federal head, and we disobeying in him, God doth justly deprive us of this image ; that thereby also he might execute upon us the spiritual death threatened in the covenant of works, which covenant we brake in our representative.

And this I take to be the true account of the corruption of our nature. It is a curse threatened in the covenant, to those that shall disobey ; and inflicted upon us, because we were those that did disobey in Adam our federal head. We have our beings delivered down to us : but that grace, which should have enabled us to act without sin, is lost, because the covenant of works threatened it should be lost upon the first transgression. And, indeed, this loss of God's image was the only death, that was immediately upon the fall inflicted : God did not presently bring either temporal or eternal death upon sinful Adam ; but he instantly brought spiritual death upon him, as judging him, who had a will to disobey, unworthy any longer to enjoy a power to obey, nor would he have his image profaned by being worn by a rebel and a malefactor.

And thus I have stated and answered that great and much controverted question ; and think it to be the clear, yea indeed the only satisfactory way to resolve how we are become originally sinners, both by the imputation of guilt, and corruption of nature.

[3.] And, yet, to add some more light and confirmation to this, two particulars more are considerable.

1st. Most probable it is, that, though Adam had sinned, yet by that one act of disobedience he would not utterly have lost the image of God, had it not been taken

away from him according to the terms of the covenant of works. It was rather forfeited by law, than destroyed by the contrariety of sin.

So that, it is only upon the account of the covenant, that both his nature and the nature of his posterity were corrupted by that first transgression. For it is very hard to conceive how Adam's sin, which was but one transient act, should formally eat out and destroy the innate habit of grace in him; and therefore it did it, meritoriously and federally. All grace depends necessarily upon the influence of the Spirit of God, both to preserve and to actuate it; and sin provoked God to withdraw that influence, according as he had threatened to do: and, hence it came to pass, that Adam's grace decayed and perished, at once; and left him nothing but mere nature, despoiled of those divine habits and principles, with which it was before endowed.

2dly. Though Adam had lost God's image himself, yet, if he had not been our federal head and representative, I can see no reason but that we should have been created with the perfection of that image upon us, notwithstanding his sin and transgression.

And, therefore, it is not merely our being born of sinful Adam nor of sinful parents, that must be assigned as the true and principal cause why our natures are corrupted; but because we are born of that sinful Adam, who was our federal head, in whom we covenanted, and in whom we ourselves sinned and transgressed. Not our birth from him, but our sinning in him, derives corruption upon us. Though he had corrupted himself, yet, if he had not been a public person, his corruption had not infected our nature, any more than the sins of intermediate parents do the natures of those who descend from them. Nor doth Job contradict this, when he asks, chap. xiv. 4. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" for there he shows the impossibility of it, as the case now stands; not, how it might and would have been, if the whole mass had not been federally corrupted in Adam. And he, who seriously considers the most pure and immaculate conception of our blessed Saviour, will be convinced of the truth of this: for, though he de-

scended from Adam as a natural root, yet he descended not from him as a federal head; the covenant of works reaching only unto those, who were to be his ordinary and common offspring: and, therefore, though he partook of his nature; yet he did not partake of his guilt and corruption.

And thus I have, as I could, stated this much disputed and very difficult point of our partaking of original sin, both as to the imputation of the guilt of it, and the corruption of our nature by it; and have resolved all into the covenant of works, into which we entered with God, in our first father and common representative. The guilt of the primitive transgression lies upon us, because we both covenanted, and brake that covenant in him; so that his sin is legally become ours: the corruption of nature, through the loss of God's image, cleaveth unto us, because this was part of the punishment contained in the death threatened against those, that should violate and break that covenant.

3. *Here then let us, with a silent awe upon our souls, tremble at the hidden depths of God's justice.*

It is the hardest task in the world, to bring carnal reason to submit to and approve of the equitableness of God's proceedings against us for the sin of Adam.

' Is there any shadow of reason, that I should be condemned for the sin of another, which I never abetted, never consented to, never knew of? a sin, which was committed so many hundreds of ages before I was born? If God be resolved I shall perish, why doth he thus seem to circumvent me? why doth he use such ambages and captious circumstances of indicting me for Adam's sin, which I never entered into? Were it not far more plain dealing, more direct proceeding, to cast me into hell, and to justify it by the mere arbitrariness of his will, and the irresistibleness of his power? Who can oppose the one, or prevail against the other? But to implead me before justice, and to urge equity in condemning me by a law made on purpose to ensnare me, seems only the contrivance of an almighty cruelty; which yet might be safe enough in its own force, without any such pretexts and artifices.'

Let every such blasphemous mouth be stopped, and all flesh become guilty before the Lord. Tell me, thou, who thus disputest against God's equity, and complainest of his severity in this particular, tell me, wouldest thou have been content, or thought thyself well dealt with, to have been left out of the covenant of works, and by name excepted, if Adam had continued in his integrity? and, when all others of mankind for whom he engaged had been crowned with life and happiness, that thou alone shouldst have no share in their blessedness, no title to it, no plea for it, it being due only upon a covenant-stipulation? Wouldest not thou have thought that God had dealt very hardly with thee, to omit, to except thee only, for want of thy express consent? so that, though thou hadst obeyed, yet life should not have been due to thee, nor couldst thou have had any plea for it. For I have heretofore showed you, that, if God had not entered into this covenant with Adam, though he had observed all that God commanded him, yet he could not challenge life and happiness as a debt due to his obedience. And, indeed, was God severe in threatening death to the transgressors of his law, when yet he promised life to those who observed it, which life he was not bound to bestow; and deposited this in the hands of one, who might as easily have kept as lost it, and whose interest did infinitely oblige him to a punctual observance? What more equitable, what more reasonable terms could be offered than these, or more favourable to all mankind? Was this severity? Was this a design to entrap or ensnare us? Wouldest not thou thyself, hadst thou then lived, have consented to this transaction; and have infinitely blessed God, for the mercy of the condescension in making such a covenant, whereby, if man should prove any other than a vast gainer by it, it must be through the mere fault of his own will?

Again; to vindicate the righteousness of God in involving us in the guilt of the first Adam, consider, do you not think it is just with God, to save your souls from everlasting condemnation, through the merits of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, imputed unto you? And shall it not then be as just with God, to account you

liable and obnoxious to it, through the sin of the first Adam, imputed to you? If the one be just because of the covenant made between God the Father and our blessed Saviour, this likewise is just because of the covenant made between Adam and God. You gave no more consent to that, than to this; and Adam had as much power to appear and undertake for you upon the account of production, as Christ had upon the account of redemption: only, such is the partiality of our self-love, that we are ready to think that God is only then just, when he is merciful; and we reckon his dealings with us equal, not by the strict measures of justice, but by our own successes, interests, and advantages.

Let this, therefore, be an apology for God to vindicate his proceedings with us upon the account of Adam's transgression. I had not so largely insisted on it, but that there are secret heart-risings in the very best, against the righteousness of God, in this particular. Flesh and blood can hardly brook it; and, when it hath nothing left to reply, yet still it will be murmuring and rebelling against this truth. When the mouth of carnal reason is stopped, yet then it will vent itself in carnal repinings. But it becomes us to lay our hand upon this mouth also, and to give God the glory of his justice; acknowledging it is most righteous, that we should be actually and personally wretched, who were federally disobedient and rebellious.

*4. Many nice questions might be here propounded; but because they are so, I shall only propound them.*

As:—if Adam had continued in innocence for some certain time, whether God would have so confirmed him in grace as he hath done the holy angels, that he should infallibly have persevered in his original state. Whether, though Adam had stood, his posterity might have sinned and fallen. Whether, upon their fall, their posterity had been guilty of original sin. Whether, if Adam had stood some years in innocence, and afterwards had sinned, his children born before his fall had been involved in it. Whether, if Eve only had transgressed, and not Adam by her persuasion, mankind had thereby been originally sinful. But these things, being rather curious than necessary speculations, which are not revealed to us in the scrip-

tures, I look upon it as an unprofitable, so a bold and rash undertaking, positively to determine what might have been in such cases ; and think it safest and most satisfactory, to acquiesce in sober and modest inquiries.

5. I shall, therefore, add no more for the doctrinal part of this covenant of works, but shall close it up with some *practical application*.

(1.) Is it the tenor of the covenant of works, that the man, which doth those things that the law requires, he only shall live by them ? This then may be for *conviction to all the world*.

It is a doctrine, that will strike through all self-justiciaries, that trust to their own works and righteousness to save them. Let the scripture tell them never so often, that there is none righteous, no not one ; that all have sinned and are fallen short of the glory of God : let God offer Christ unto them ; Christ offer himself, his righteousness, his sufferings, his obedience, and a life ready purchased to their hands : yet still they retreat ; and appeal from him, to the works and righteousness of the law for justification.

Well, then, to the law they shall go. And by three demonstrations, I shall convince men, that it is utterly impossible for them to be justified by the law, or according to the terms of a covenant of works.

[1.] It is utterly impossible for them to act answerably to the exact strictness and holiness of the law ; and, if they fail in the least jot, read but that terrible sentence pronounced against them, Gal. iii. 10. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." This is the tenor of the law.

And dare you now maintain your plea, and bring it to an issue with God ? What can you produce, that may justify you according to this sentence ? Perhaps, among many thousand works of darkness and of the devil, may stand up a few shattered prayers, a few faint wishes, a few pious resolutions ; but the prayers heartless, the wishes ineffectual, and the resolutions abortive. Is this the righteousness of the law, which Moses describes ? Is heaven grown so cheap, as to be set to sale for this ? If

you depend upon your works for life, bring forth an angelical perfection. Can you tell God, that you never had a thought in you, that stepped awry? not an imagination, tainted with any the least vanity, impertinency, frivolousness, not to say uncleanness, malice, blasphemy, and atheism? Can you say, that you never uttered a word that so much as lisped contrary to the law? that you never did an action, which innocence itself might not own? If not, as certainly there is no man that liveth and sinneth not, you can expect nothing but condemnation according to the sentence of the law, and the tenor of the covenant of works, which thunders forth the curse against every transgressor.

[2.] It is alike utterly impossible for you to make any satisfaction to justice for the violation of the law.

Thy own conscience, that tells thee thou hast sinned, summons thee before the great and righteous Judge, who demands full satisfaction for the violation of his laws, and thy offences committed against him. Suffering cannot satisfy, unless it be in thy eternal damnation; and all, that thou canst do, will not satisfy; for all, that thou canst do, is but thy duty however. And yet, without a full personal satisfaction, thou canst expect no salvation, according to the covenant of works. Yet, farther,

[3.] Could you perfectly obey, and in your own persons meritoriously suffer, yet still there would be a flaw in your title; for still there would be original sin, which would keep you from obtaining a legal righteousness.

It is true, the law saith, "Do this, and live;" but to whom doth it speak? Not to fallen, but to innocent, upright man. It is not only a "Do this" can save you; but the law requires a "Be this," too. Now can you pluck down the old building, and cast out all the ruins and rubbish? Can you, in the very casting and moulding of your beings, instamp upon them the image of God's purity and holiness? If these impossibilities may be achieved, then justification by a covenant of works were not a thing altogether desperate. But, whilst we have original corruption, which will cause defects in our obedience; whilst we have defects in our obedience, which will expose us to divine justice; whilst we are utterly unable to satisfy that

justice; so long we may conclude it altogether impossible to be justified by a covenant of works. Instead of finding life by it, we shall meet with nothing but death and the curse.

(2.) *This, therefore, might endear to us the unspeakable love of God, in the inestimable gift of his Son Jesus Christ; by whom both this covenant is fulfilled, and a better ratified for us.* Either obligation of the law was too much for us: we could neither obey, nor suffer: but he hath performed both; fulfilling the precept, and conquering the penalty; and both, by a free and gracious imputation, are reckoned to our justification, and the obtaining of eternal life.

(3.) *This declares the desperate and remediless estate of those, who, by unbelief, refuse Jesus Christ, and the redemption he hath purchased:* for they are still under the covenant of works; and shall have sentence pass upon them, according to the tenor of that covenant.

There are but two covenants between God and man. The one saith, "Do this, and live:" the other saith, "Believe, and live." Men are left to their own choice, to which they will apply. If they refuse the conditions of the latter, they must perform the conditions of the former, or else perish eternally. Now every unbeliever doth actually thrust Christ from him; and reject that great salvation which he hath purchased: they will not have him to be their Lord and Saviour: and therefore God will certainly judge every such wretch, according to the strictest terms of the covenant of works; and then woe, everlasting woe unto him. For every the least transgression of the least tittle of the law will certainly, as God's threatenings are true, be punished with eternal death. And how many deaths and hells then must be put together, and crowded into one, to make up a just and fearful reward for him, who, scorning the way of salvation by believing, shall put himself upon his trial by the covenant of works! Whither will such an one fly? What will be his refuge? Plead his innocence, he cannot: conscience will take him by the throat, and tell him loudly he lies. Plead the righteousness and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, he cannot: he scorned it, he rejected it; and, therefore, cannot ex-

pect it should ever appear for him, or avail him. There is no hope, no remedy for such a wretch ; but, being thus cast and condemned by law, he must for ever lie under the revenges of that wrath, which it is impossible for him either to bear or to evade.

And, thus much, concerning the covenant of works.

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### CHAP. III.

#### THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

LET us now proceed to consider and treat of the *covenant of grace*: the sum and tenor of which is delivered to us from the sixth to the seventh verse.

This covenant of grace is propounded to us, upon a supposed impossibility of obtaining righteousness and justification according to the terms of the covenant of works.

And, lest it might seem as impossible to be justified by this covenant, the apostle removes the two great objections, that lie in the way.

For, it may be argued, that the abode and residence of Christ, the Son of God, who is to work out this righteousness for us, is in the highest heavens ; and how then shall he be brought down to earth, to fulfil the law in our stead ?

To this the apostle answers : “ Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven ? that is, to bring Christ down from above.” That care is already taken ; and God, the eternal Son, hath left those glorious mansions, to shroud and eclipse himself in our vile flesh. He was born of a woman, and made subject to the law, and hath wrought out all righteousness for us ; that, through his obedience, sinners might be pardoned and justified.

But then, again, it might be objected, that whosoever will appear to be our surety, must not only yield perfect obedience to the law of God, but pay down his life to the justice of God for our offences : and, if Christ thus die for

us, how can he then appear before God in our behalf, to plead our cause, to justify and acquit us? We cannot be justified unless Christ die; neither can we be justified by a dead Christ: and who is there, than can raise this crucified and murdered Saviour to life again, that we might obtain righteousness by him?

To this also the apostle answers: "Say not in thine heart. Who shall descend into the deep?" that is, into the grave, where his body lay entombed; or into hades, the place and receptacle of separate souls: or, if you will, into both these depths;—into hades, to bring back the soul of Christ to his body; and into the grave, to raise his body with his soul, and to rescue him from the power of death and corruption. That work is already done. He hath, by his almighty Spirit and Godhead, broken asunder the bands of death, and the bars of the grave: it being impossible that he should be holden of it; and that, having discharged the debt, he should any longer lie under arrest and confinement.

And thus the apostle, as I conceive, answers these two objections against the possibility of our being justified by Christ, according to the terms of the covenant of grace, taken from the grand improbability both of his incarnation and resurrection: how, being God, he should descend from heaven, and become man; and how, being man, he should ascend out of the grave, and become a fit Mediator between God and men. And, therefore, both these being done, though the righteousness of the law be impossible, yet you need not despair of a righteousness: the matter of your justification is already wrought out: Christ, by his incarnation, hath subjected himself to all obedience both of the precept and penalty of the covenant of works; and, by his resurrection and intercession, will take care to secure the application of his merits and righteousness unto you.

These two objections being thus removed, the apostle proceeds on, in the eighth and ninth verses, to give us the sum and tenor of the covenant of grace.

"What saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart:" (expressions borrowed from Moses concerning the delivery of his law: Deut. xxx.

12, 14. which the apostle applies here to the gospel of Christ) and tells us, that "the word of faith, which we preach, is, that, if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe with thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." As if the apostle should have said: 'God requires no impossible thing for thy salvation. He doth not bid thee pluck Christ from heaven, and thrust him into a body. He doth not bid thee descend into the bowels of the earth, and there rescue Christ from the power of the grave. These are not within the compass of thy ability; nor doth God require for thy justification and salvation any thing, that is impossible to be done. No: but "the word of righteousness which we preach," that is, the manner of obtaining righteousness which we exhibit in the gospel, is no other than what lieth in the heart and in the mouth. Thou needest not go up to heaven, to bring Christ down from thence; nor down to the grave, to raise him from the dead: these things are already done; and thou needest go no farther than thy heart and thy mouth for salvation. God hath placed the conditions of it in them: that, if thou believest on Christ in thy heart, and if thou confessest him with thy mouth, thou shalt be saved.'

This I suppose is the clear scope and intent of the apostle in these verses.

Yet here we must take notice, first, that, though the apostle seems here to make the believing that Christ is raised from the dead to be a true, saving and justifying faith; yet it must not be so understood, as if only a dogmatical belief of this proposition, that Christ is risen from the dead, were faith sufficient to justify us: but as it is common in Holy Scripture, by mentioning one principal object of faith to mean the whole extent of it; so, here, though only the resurrection of Christ be mentioned, yet all his merits and righteousness are intended, which, by virtue of his being raised from the dead, may by faith be effectually applied unto the soul. So that, "If thou believest that Christ is raised from the dead," is no other, than "If thou believest on Christ, who is raised from the dead." And so the apostle himself ex-

pounds it, v. 11. " Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." For saving faith is not only a mere assent to any proposition concerning Christ, whether it be his deity, his incarnation, his death, his resurrection, or the like ; for, so, " the devils believe and tremble," and many thousand wicked Christians do believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and all the other articles of their creed ; but yet, this speculative faith, being overborne by their impious and unholy practices, will not at all avail to their justification : but if thou so believest that Christ is risen from the dead, that this thy faith hath an effectual influence to raise thee from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, thou shalt be saved.—Secondly. What the apostle speaks here, of confessing Christ with our mouths, must not be restrained only to a verbal confession of him ; but it comprehends, likewise, our glorifying him by the whole course of our professed obedience and subjection to him.

So that, in these two, is comprehended the whole sum of Christian religion; faith, and obedience; the inward affections of the heart, and the outward actions of the life.

In brief, all, that here the apostle speaks, falls into this, " If thou wilt believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and if thou wilt sincerely obey him, thou shalt be saved :" and this he gives as the sum and tenor of the righteousness of faith, and the covenant of grace.

I. That we may aright conceive of the covenant of grace from the very first ground and foundation of it, I shall *lead you through these following positions.*

1. God having, in his eternal decree of permitting it, foreseen the fall of man, and thereby the breach and violation of the covenant of works, graciously resolved not to proceed against all mankind according to the demerits of their transgression, in the execution of that death upon them which the covenant threatened ; but to *propound another covenant unto them upon better terms;* which whosoever would perform, should obtain life thereby. Purposing, likewise, by his grace and Spirit so effectually to work upon the hearts of some, that they

should certainly perform the conditions of this second covenant, and thereby obtain everlasting life.

God would have some of all those creatures, whom he made capable of enjoying him, to be brought to that most blessed and happy fruition. The angels did not all fall, but multitudes of them kept their first estate and glory: and, therefore, as some think, God never found out a means to reconcile those that fell. But all mankind at once sinned, and fell short of the glory of God: and, therefore, lest they should all perish, and a whole species of rational creatures, who were made fit to behold and enjoy him in glory, should for ever be cut off from his presence and the beatific vision; he resolves, that, as the fall of all was by the terms of one covenant, so the restoration of some should be by and according to the terms of another. And thus, in reference to this eternal purpose, the apostle calls it "eternal life, which was promised before the world began :" Tit. i. 2. And also, 2 Tim. i. 9. he speaks of the "purpose and grace of God, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began."

Now in this design of entering into another covenant, besides the restoring of fallen man, God the Father intended the glorifying of himself and his Son Jesus Christ.

(1.) He intended to glorify himself: his manifold wisdom and unsearchable counsel; in finding out a means, to reconcile justice and mercy, to punish the sin and yet to pardon the sinner: his righteousness; in the remission of sins through the propitiation of Christ, Rom. iii. 25. "God hath set him forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood; to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins :" and, likewise, his rich and abundant grace; in giving his Son to die for rebels; to make him a curse, that we might receive the blessing; and to make him sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God through him.

(2.) By the covenant of grace the glory of Christ Jesus was also designed: God appointing him to be the Mediator of this new covenant; and thereby giving a glorious

occasion to demonstrate the riches of his free love, in subjecting his life to such a death, and his glory to such a shame; and all to purchase such vile and worthless creatures as we are, and to redeem us from eternal woe and misery: to exalt likewise the glory of his almighty power; in supporting the human nature under the vast load of the wrath of God and the curse of the law: the glory of his uncontrollable sovereignty, in voluntarily laying down his life and taking it up again; of his complete and all-sufficient sacrifice, in fully perfecting all those who are sanctified; of his effectual intercession, in the gifts and graces of his holy Spirit impetrated thereby.

These may be some of the reasons, why, after the foresight of the breach of the covenant of works, God purposed from all eternity to establish another and a better covenant with mankind.

2. Upon this purpose of God to abrogate the covenant of works, that it should no longer be the standing rule according to which he would proceed with all mankind, *there came in the room and stead thereof a two-fold covenant;—a covenant of redemption;—a covenant of reconciliation.*

The covenant of redemption was everlasting, from before all time; made only between God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The covenant of reconciliation was temporal; made between God and men through Christ, and took place immediately after the fall: of which the first exhibition was that promise, that the seed of the woman should break the serpent's head.

The covenant of redemption, or of the Mediatorship, was made only between the Father and the Son, before the foundations of the world were laid. And, though it was entirely for man's infinite benefit and advantage, yet he was taken into it as a party. The form of this eternal covenant we have at large expressed, Isa. liii. from the tenth verse to the end: "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death. By his

knowledge," that is, by the knowledge and faith of him, " he shall justify many." All which is spoken of the reward, which God would give unto Christ, for his great and arduous undertaking of the redemption of fallen mankind.

(1.) From this covenant of redemption do flow many of those relations, wherein God the Father and the Son do stand mutually engaged each to other, which are founded upon Christ's undertaking our redemption.

As, from this eternal covenant it is, that Christ Jesus is related unto God, as a surety to a creditor: and, therefore, Heb. vii. 22. he is called " the Surety of a better testament." Hence, likewise, he bears the relation of an advocate to a judge; 1 John ii. 1. " We have an advocate with the Father." Hence, also, ariseth the relation of a servant to his lord and master: Isa. xlvi. 1. " Behold my Servant, whom I uphold :" and, again, " It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my Servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob only. I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth ." Isa. xlix. 6 ; and so, again, Christ is called God's servant, " the Branch :" Zech. iii. 8. Hence, likewise, it is, that, although Christ, considered essentially as God, be equal in glory and dignity, yea the same with the Father, John x. 30. " I and my Father are one ; " yet, because he entered into this covenant of redemption, engaging himself to be a mediator and his Father's servant, in accomplishing the salvation of his elect, therefore he may be said to be inferior to the Father. In which sense, he himself tells us, John xiv. 28. " My Father is greater than I." It is no contradiction, for Christ to be equal with God, and yet inferior to the Father. Consider him personally, as the eternal Son of God, and the second hypostasis in the ever-blessed Trinity; so, he " thought it no robbery to be equal with God :" Phil. ii. 6. Consider him federally, as bound by this covenant of redemption to serve God, by " bringing many sons unto glory ; " so, he thought it no debasement to be inferior unto God. And, therefore, whatsoever you meet with in Scripture, implying any inequality and disproportion between God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, must still be understood

with reference to this covenant of redemption. For, essentially, they are one and the same God : personally, they differ in order and original : but, immediately, they differ in authority and subjection, and all the economy of man's salvation, designed by the one and accomplished by the other.

(2.) From this covenant of redemption flows the mutual stipulation or agreement between the Father and the Son, upon terms and conditions concerning man's salvation ; or rather, indeed, it formally consists in it.

Christ was originally free ; and no way obliged to undertake this great and hard service, of reconciling God and man together. He well knew what it would cost him to perform it ; all the contempt and reproach, the agonies and conflict, the bitter pains and cruel torments, which he must suffer to accomplish it. And, though the deity was secure in its own impassibility ; yet he knew that the strict union between his human nature and divine would, by a communication of properties, make it the humiliation and abasement of God, the sufferings and the blood of God. And, therefore, God the Father makes Christ many promises, that, if he would undertake this work, he should " see his seed, prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand :" as in the forecited Isa. liii : yea, that all principality and dominion, both in heaven and earth, should be consigned over unto him ; and that he should be the Head, King, and Governor, both of his church and of the whole world. And, therefore, when he had fulfilled and accomplished this great work, he tells his disciples, Matt. xxviii. 18. " All power is given unto me, both in heaven and in earth ; " and, Eph. i. 20, 21, 22. the Father set Christ " at his own right hand, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in the world that is to come ; and hath put all things under his feet, and hath given him to be head over all things to the Church." Upon these articles and conditions, Christ accepts the work ; and resolves to take upon him the form of a servant, to be made under the authority of the law, and to bear the curse of it, and the whole load of his Father's wrath due unto sin

and sinners. " He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong : because he hath poured out his soul unto death :" Isa. liii. 11, 12. And thus the covenant of redemption is, from all eternity, agreed and perfected between the Father and Jesus Christ.

*3. This undertaking and agreement of Christ in eternity was as valid and effectual for procuring all the good things of the covenant of grace, and the making of them over unto believers, as his actual performing of the terms afterwards in the fulness of time.*

Upon this lies the stress of our affirming the covenant of grace to be exhibited before Christ's coming into the world. For, had not Christ's undertaking been as effectual as his actual fulfilling, this covenant of grace could have been of no force, till his coming in the flesh, and his dying upon the cross. And therefore he was the Mediator of the new covenant, to the Jewish believers, under the administration of the law ; to the patriarchs, before the promulgation of the law ; yea, to Adam himself, instantly upon his fall : because the covenant of redemption, that he had entered into with his Father, gave him present right and title to enter upon his office, and to act as Mediator upon the account of his future sufferings. As a man, that purchaseth an inheritance, may presently enter upon the possession, though the day for the payment of the price be not yet come ; so Christ, upon the contract and bargain made with the Father, of purchasing the whole world to himself at the price of his death and blood, entered presently upon his purchase, though the day set for the payment of the price was some thousand years after. And thus Christ is called " a Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world :" Rev. xiii. 8. though some, indeed, would refer these words, " from the foundation of the world," to the writing of the names, and not to the slaying of the Lamb ; making the sense thus, ' Whose names were not written from the foundation of the world, in the book of life of the Lamb slain : ' and for this interpretation they allege, Rev. xvii. 8. yet, certainly, this slaying of the Lamb from the foundation of the world, may well be understood concerning the death

of Christ, either typically represented in those sacrifices of lambs which Abel offered in the beginning of the world, or else decreed in God's purpose from all eternity, and thereupon valid to procure redemption for believers in all ages, even before his actual suffering of it.

These things I premise, that, in them, you might see upon what bottom stands the whole transaction between God and man, in entering into a covenant of grace. That man is at all restored, can be founded upon nothing but God's absolute purpose of having "mercy on whom he will have mercy." That this restoring him to grace and favour, and consequently to eternal life, should be by a covenant of grace sealed and confirmed in the blood of Christ, is founded only on the eternal covenant of redemption made between the Father and the Son. The covenant of reconciliation is built upon the covenant of redemption; the covenant between God and Man, on the covenant between God and Christ.

(1.) Here, possibly, some, instead of glorifying the infinite wisdom of God in thus laying the model and platform of our salvation, may be apt to cavil against the tediousness of the proceeding. 'For, might not God, by one act of sovereign mercy, have pardoned our sins and remitted the punishment, though Christ had never died to satisfy justice? Might he not have accepted the sinner to favour and salvation, though Christ had never been sent to work out a perfect righteousness for him? What needed then this long and troublesome method, of designing him from eternity to be a Mediator, of appointing his own Son to so base a humiliation and so cursed a death; since all, that is now purchased for us at so mighty a rate, might have been conferred upon us by a free and absolute act of mercy?' Thus, possibly, the thoughts of men may work.

But to this I answer,—It is saucy and unwarrantable presumption, for us to dispute whether God could have saved us otherwise; since it is infinite love and mercy, that he will vouchsafe to save us any way. And, if so be it were not simply necessary that Christ should die to bring us to glory, this should the rather engage us to admire and adore the supererogation of the divine love;

which designed him primarily a gift to men, as well as a sacrifice to God ; and sent him into the world, not so much upon the necessity of satisfying justice, as of demonstrating infinite love and mercy : John iii. 16.—Whether God might, according to his absolute pleasure, have saved us, without the satisfaction of Christ, is not necessary for us to know : since it is clearly revealed in scripture, that this is the way, that God designed from all eternity ; and, by which, in the fulness of time, he accomplished our salvation. Who can peremptorily determine, what God might or might not do, in this particular ? Can we set limits to his power, or bound his prerogative ? It should satisfy our inquiries, that this way of salvation is attainable ; and that God is resolved to save us no other way than this. “ There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved : ” Acts iv. 12.—Yet, if any be farther inquisitive, only out of an awful reverence to search out the wonderful mystery of his redemption, I assert that it is most probable that God might, according to his absolute power and good pleasure have saved fallen mankind, though Christ had never been appointed to the work of redemption, nor any covenant of grace been made with us in him. Nor doth this position hold any correspondence with Socinianism ; since we absolutely maintain, that it is God’s revealed will and purpose to save none, but through the satisfaction of Christ.

(2.) If it be said, that ‘ no other way could be consistent with God’s justice ; and that therefore the apostle tells us, Rom. iii. 26, that Christ was set forth as a propitiation to declare the righteousness of God, that he might be just, and the justifier of those that believe : and how could God be just, if he should pardon sin without a satisfaction ; and by whom should this satisfaction be made, but by Christ the Mediator ? ’

To this I answer, that the justice of God may be considered, in its absolute nature, as an infinite attribute and perfection of the divine essence ;—as to the external expressions of it in punitive acts, taking vengeance on offenders.

If we take the justice of God in the former respect, so it

is essential to him, yea the same with him : and it is as blasphemous a contradiction, to say that God can be, and yet not be just ; as to say, that he may be, and yet not be holy, wise, almighty, &c.

But, if we take the justice of God for the external expressions of it in a vindictive way upon offenders, I can see no contradiction nor absurdity, in affirming that God might, if he had so pleased, have pardoned sinners without any satisfaction. If he punish without pardoning, he is just ; and, if he should have pardoned without punishing, still he had been just. God created this world, to declare his power, wisdom, and goodness ; yet still he had been essentially almighty, wise, and good, if he had never expressed these attributes in any effects of them. So God punisheth sin, to declare and glorify his justice ; yet he would have been as essentially just, had he remitted it without exacting any punishment. And why should it be unjust with God, to acquit a guilty person without punishment ; seeing it is not unjust with him, to assign an innocent person, his own Son, to bear the punishment of the guilty ? Certainly, there was no more natural necessity, antecedent to the free determination of his own will, to punish another, that he might show mercy unto us ; than there was, to show mercy to another, only with a design to punish us : and, therefore, there was no more need that God should punish Christ, that he might pardon us ; than there was, that he should pardon Christ all the sins imputed to him, that he might justly punish us. For, if punitive justice be natural to God, so also is pardoning mercy. Yet I suppose none will deny, that God might, without wrong to his nature, have damned all men for sin, without affording pardon to any of them : and there can be no reason imagined, why it should be more natural to God to punish, than to pardon ; unless we would make him, as the Marcionites and Manichees of old did, a “ *sævus et immitis Deus.* ” Sin doth, indeed, naturally and necessarily deserve punishment ; but it doth not therefore follow, that God must, by the necessity of his nature, punish it : for then it would be as necessary for him to pardon, because the sinner deserves it not ; because a sinner, deserving punishment, is as much the object of mercy, as

of justice; both being equally essential attributes of the divine nature.

The truth is, that though all the divine perfections be natural and necessary to God, yet his will governs the external expressions of them: omnipotency, wisdom, justice, and mercy, are in God naturally, and not subject to the determination of his will: so that it is not from his will that he is almighty, nor all-wise, nor holy and righteous; but from his nature. But the outward expressions of these are arbitrary, and subject to his will: omnipotence is natural and essential unto God; yet it is his will that applies his power to such and such effects: so, likewise, though it be natural and necessary that God be just; yet the particular expression and manifestation of his justice, in a vindicative manner, is not necessary, but subject to the free determination of his will. As God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens: so, he will have vengeance on whom he will have vengeance, and whom he will he might have pardoned, and that merely by the prerogative of his will.

(3.) And if it be said, that 'God, being a holy God, must necessarily hate sin, and therefore punish it:' I answer, that, though God's holiness doth necessarily infer his utmost hatred of sin, yet that hatred of sin doth not necessarily infer his punishing of sinners. For it must be acknowledged, that God may hate sin, 'odio simplici, et non redundantia in personam:' 'with a simple abhorrency and detestation of it, yet not with any ireful effects flowing from it upon the sinner.' It is, indeed, absolutely necessary, that sinners should deserve punishment: this flows not from the will and constitution of God, but from the nature of the thing itself. But, that they be actually punished according to their deserts, depends wholly upon the determination of the divine will.

That is the third position.

4. *Whether this way of salvation by Christ were simply and absolutely necessary, or no: yet, certain it is, that no other way could be so suited to the advancement of God's glory as this; and, therefore, it was most congruous, and morally necessary, that our salvation should be wrought out by his sufferings and satisfaction.* For,

(1.) This is the most decent and becoming way, that God could take to reconcile sinners unto himself. So the apostle says expressly, Heb. ii. 10. " For it became him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." It would not become the great Majesty of heaven and earth, whose sovereign authority was so heinously violated by such a vile and base creature as man is, to receive him into his love and favour without some repair made unto his honour, And, if there must intervene a satisfaction, there is none who could make it but only Jesus Christ.

(2.) No other way could so jointly glorify both the mercy and the justice of God, as this of bringing men to salvation by Christ.

If God had absolutely remitted punishment, and accepted the sinner to life by his mere good pleasure, this indeed had been a glorious declaration of his mercy, but justice had lain obscured. If God had made a temporary punishment serve for an expiation of sin, here indeed both justice and mercy had been glorified; justice in punishing, mercy in relaxing the eternity of the punishment: but neither the one nor the other had been glorified to the utmost extent of them. But, in this redemption by Christ, justice hath its full glory; in that God takes vengeance on the sin to the very uttermost: and yet mercy is likewise glorified to the full; for the sinner is, without his own sufferings, pardoned, accepted, and saved. That none but Christ could do this is evident, because no mere creature could bear an infinite punishment so as to eluctate and finish it, and no finite punishment could satisfy an infinite justice: he must be a man, that satisfies; else, satisfaction would not be made in the same nature that sinned: he must be God, likewise; else, human nature could not be supported from sinking under the infinite load of divine wrath: and, unless we would have either the Father or the Holy Ghost to become incarnate, this work of man's redemption must rest on Christ. And, indeed, who so fit to become a Mediator between God and man, as the middle Person in the Godhead? Thus then we see how expedient and fit it is, that our redemption should be accomplished by Christ

Jesus: and, therefore, because the divine wisdom takes that way which is most expedient, it is, in a moral sense, necessary that it should be by him brought to pass; though, simply and absolutely, God might have laid another design for our salvation. ‘*Potuit aliter fieri de potentia medici, sed non potuit commodiū aut doctiū preparari ut esset medicina ægroti.*’ August. Serm. iii. de Aununt. Dom.

And this, certainly, may commend the infinite love of God unto us; since he would not go the thriftiest way, in accomplishing our salvation. Although it were not simply necessary, yet, if it be more conducible to make the mercy of our redemption glorious, the Son of God must become the Son of man, and the Son of man “a man of sorrows.” He gives his natural Son, to gain adopted ones. He punisheth a righteous person, that he might pardon the guilty. God spares nothing, he saves nothing; that he might spare and save fallen man, in a way most adapted to glorify, both the severity of his justice, and the riches of his grace and mercy.

I shall not any longer detain you with preliminary truths. You see upon what the covenant of grace is grounded, viz. the covenant of redemption; and how far forth it was necessary, that Jesus Christ should be our Redeemer, and the Mediator of this covenant of reconciliation.

II. To come now more immediately to the subject intended, we must know, that the covenant of grace made by God with man, is twofold. There is the absolute covenant of grace, and the conditional.

Indeed, if we lay stress upon the words, as some do, there can be no such thing as an absolute covenant; because every covenant supposeth conditions and a mutual stipulation; but, yet, we may be well contented with the impropriety of the word, so long as we use scripture language.

1. Frequent mention is made of this *absolute covenant*: as Jer. xxxii. 38—41. Ezek. xi. 17—20: but, most fully and clearly, Jer. xxxi. 33, 34. “This shall be the covenant, that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they

shall be my people : " which the apostle quotes and transcribes, Heb. viii. 10.

It is not this absolute covenant, or promise, call it which you will, that I intend to insist on ; and, therefore, I shall only give you some brief remarks concerning it, and so proceed to treat of the conditional covenant.

(1.) That this absolute covenant is made only to those, whom God foreknew according to his eternal purpose : but the conditional covenant is made with all the world.

God hath promised a new heart, only to some : but he promiseth life and salvation to all the world, if they convert and believe. And hence it follows, that the absolute covenant is fulfilled to all, with whom it is made : but the most part of mankind fall short of obtaining the benefits of the conditional covenant, because they wilfully fall short of performing the conditions.

(2.) The absolute covenant of grace is so called, because the mercies promised in it are not limited nor astricited to conditions.

For though, in the ordinary method of God's sanctifying grace, a sedulous and conscientious use of the means is necessary to our conversion, and the making of a new heart and spirit in us ; yet these means are not conditions, because God hath not limited himself thereto. It is certain and infallible, that no man shall ever attain salvation without faith, repentance, and obedience : but no man can say it is impossible, that any should attain a new heart, faith, and conversion without preparations and previous dispositions.

(3.) Faith is the very mercy itself promised in the absolute covenant : but it is only a condition for obtaining the mercy promised in the conditional covenant.

In this, God promiseth salvation to all men, if they will believe : in the other, he promiseth grace to his elect, to enable them to believe. All the benefits of the conditional covenant we receive by our faith ; but our faith itself we receive by virtue of the absolute covenant ; and therefore it follows, by necessary consequence, that though no man can plead the promise of the absolute covenant for obtaining the gift of the first grace, yet likewise no man can receive comfort by the conditional covenant, till he be

assured that the promise of the absolute be performed to him.

(4.) In brief, the absolute covenant promiseth the first grace of conversion to God : the conditional promiseth life, if we be converted. The conditional promiseth life, if we believe : the absolute promiseth faith, whereby we may believe to the saving of our souls.

And therefore it is called an absolute covenant, because the first grace of conversion unto God cannot be given upon conditions. It is indeed commonly wrought in men by the right use of means ; as hearing the word, meditation, prayer, &c. but these means are not conditions of grace, because we have found, that, in some instances, God hath not limited himself to them. And, indeed, what is there, that can in reason be supposed as a condition of God's bestowing the gift of the first grace upon us ? Either it must be some act of grace, or of mere nature : not of grace ; for then the first grace would be already given : nor of nature ; for then grace would be given according to works, which is the sum and upshot of Pelagianism. Whence it follows, that the absolute covenant, of giving grace and a new heart, is made only to those, who shall be saved ; but the conditional covenant, of giving salvation upon faith and obedience, is made with all the world, and we may and ought to propound it to every creature, "If thou wilt believe, thou shalt be saved."

2. It is not the absolute, but *the conditional covenant* that the apostle speaks of in the text.

For life and salvation are here promised upon the terms and conditions, of believing on Christ with the heart, and confessing him with the mouth ; that is, of faith and obedience, as hath before been explained : and, therefore it is called the conditional covenant, because these conditions must be first fulfilled on our part, before any engagement can lie upon God to give us the salvation promised.

Here observe,

(1.) That the salvation, which the text mentions, when it saith, "If thou believest in thy heart, and confessest with thy mouth, thou shalt be saved," comprehends in it all the benefits of the covenant of grace.

Not only glorification, which it doth most signally de-

note; but also pardon, justification, reconciliation, and adoption: all which are called salvation, because they all tend thereunto, and terminate in it.

(2.) Though conditions are required on our part, yet the mercies of the covenant are promised to us out of mere free grace. For, therefore, saith the apostle, are justification and salvation "of faith, that they might be of grace :" Rom. iv. 16. For God's grace and free mercy, in enabling us to believe and obey, and thereupon saving us, is altogether as glorious, as if he should save us without requiring faith and obedience from us at all.

(3.) Though faith and obedience are the conditions, which God requires for the obtaining of salvation, yet these conditions are themselves as much the free gift of God, as the salvation promised upon them. By whom they are required, by the same God they are effectually wrought in the hearts of all those who shall be saved. And, therefore, as there is no absolute covenant, properly so called; so neither in strictness of speech, is there any conditional covenant between God and man: because a condition, to which a promise is annexed, must, in propriety, be somewhat of our own, and within our own power; otherwise, the promise is but equivalent to an absolute denial. But, the conditions of the covenant of grace are not simply in our power to work them in ourselves; but to those, who shall be heirs of salvation, they are made possible by grace: to the rest, they were once possible; which power they have lost, nor is God bound to repair it.

If it be said, 'True: it is impossible for us to believe, unless God enable us; yet this doth not prove that it is not in our own power to believe: for without the assistance of God, and his influence, we cannot think, nor speak, nor move: "In him," saith the apostle, "we live, and move, and have our being :" yet who is so unreasonable as to say, that, because these are God's gifts, therefore we do not perform them by our own power? So, likewise, though faith be the gift of God, yet it may also be in the power of nature.'

This is the refuge of some, to which they retire, when they are forced by scripture evidence to acknowledge that faith is the gift of God: as if a common providential in-

fluence were alike sufficient, to enable men to believe, and to perform any ordinary and natural action.

To this, therefore, I answer: that some actions depend only upon the concurrence of common providence: others, upon the influence of special grace. And this I apprehend to be the true difference between these two: that the former are wrought in us by God, without the reluctance and opposition of our natural faculties; but the latter, against the bent and bias of our natures, which are now corrupted by the fall. And, therefore, we may affirm, that the obedience, which Adam performed during his continuance in the state of innocence, was but a common work wrought in him by God's common influence; but our faith, and the same obedience in us, though it be far more imperfect, is from special grace; because, in him, it was wrought suitably to the tendency of his nature; but, in us, contrary to all its appetites and inclinations, which in this lapsed state of mankind are wholly evil and corrupt. And, thus much, the apostle intimates unto us concerning faith: Eph. i. 18, 19, 20. "That ye might know what is the exceeding greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead: therefore was the power, which God declared in raising Christ from the dead, an extraordinary and special power, because it was contrary to the course of nature, and far above the ability of any created agent to effect; and such, saith he, is the power that worketh faith in us. And so again, Col. ii. 12. "Ye are risen with Christ, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead:" by the faith of the operation of God, we may rather understand the faith of God's operation, that is, which he worketh and implanteth in us, than our faith in God's operation of raising Christ from the dead: so that the scope of the place is plainly this; as Christ is raised, so are we raised with him by faith; which faith is wrought in us by the same almighty operation, that raised him from the grave, and therefore wrought in us by the supernatural efficacy of divine grace. Hence all those places which mention faith to be the gift of God, must be understood not as of a gift of course, and of common influence; but of extra-

ordinary power and special influence. So Phil. i. 29. "Unto you it is given, not only to believe, but also to suffer :" where, though it may seem that to suffer for the name of Christ denotes not any special work of God ; yet, to suffer from a right principle and to a right end, to suffer with a calm submission and a conquering patience, is not less a gift and a special privilege bestowed upon us by the special and supernatural grace of God, than we assert faith itself to be. So, 2 Pet. i. 1, 3. "To them, who have obtained like precious faith with us, through the righteousness of God, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." I omit Eph. ii. 8. "Ye are saved by faith ; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God ;" because, though this place be commonly produced to prove that faith is God's gift, yet I suppose that the word "gift" refers rather to salvation, than to faith : for so it must needs be, according to grammatical construction : Εστε σεσωμένοι διὰ τῆς πίστεως, καὶ τῷ Θεῷ θάρποι ; else it would not be τῷ Θεῷ, but διὰ τὴν πίστην : so that the words do of necessity carry it, that this expression, "not of yourselves, it is the gift of God," must be understood, that the salvation, which we obtain by faith, is not of ourselves, but God's free gift.

And thus you see that it is very well consistent, for faith and obedience to be conditions on our part, and gifts on God's.

III. These things being premised, that which I shall now pursue is, to open to you, *what concurrence faith and obedience have into our justification and salvation.* Which certainly is as difficult a point to be explained, as it is necessary to be understood.

And, in order to this, I shall inquire into the nature of justification itself ; what it is, and signifies ;—of justifying and saving faith ;—of that obedience, which the covenant of grace requires from believers, as necessary to salvation :—and lay down some positions in answer to the question. And this I shall do with all the brevity and perspicuity, that the subject will permit.

1. *Justification*, therefore, in the most general and comprehensive notion of it, signifies the making of a man just and righteous.

(1.) And this may be done two ways.—By making a real change in a man's nature, through the infusion of the inherent qualities of holiness and righteousness.—By making a relative change in his state, in respect of the sentence of the law: that is, when the law acquits and absolves a man from punishment, whether he hath committed the fact or not.

The former may be termed a physical justification; the latter, a legal. The former justification is opposed to unholiness; the latter, to condemnation: the one properly removes the filth; the other, the guilt of sin.

Now when we speak of the justification of a sinner before God, it must still be understood of justification in this latter sense, viz. as it signifies a judicial absolution of a sinner from guilt and punishment, according to a legal process, either at the bar of God or of conscience.

And herein lies the great error of the papists in the doctrine of justification, that they will not understand it as a law phrase, and a relative transaction in the discharge of a sinner; but still take it for a real change of a man's nature, by implanting in him inherent principles of holiness. We grant, indeed, that, in order of nature, sanctification is before justification; for we are justified by faith, which faith is one great part of our sanctification; but, in respect of time, sanctification and justification are together; for, in the very same instant that we believe, we are justified. Yet justification is not the making of a man's person inherently just or holy: if it were, certainly the wise man would not have said, Prov. xvii. 15. “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord:” that man certainly would not be an abomination to the Lord, who should be serviceable to the implanting habitual holiness in another; since Daniel tells us, chap. xii. 3. “They, that turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.”

Many differences might be assigned between these two justifications; but the chief are these: that man is the subject of the one, because holiness is wrought in him; but he is the object of the other, for the judicial sentence of absolution is an act in God terminated upon the crea-

ture :—the one, is by inherent grace; the other, by imputed righteousness :—the one, is gradual, the other complete at once :—in brief, they differ as much as sanctifying our nature differs from acquitting and absolving our persons.

(2.) This justification doth always presuppose a righteousness in the person justified : for God doth not make a man inwardly righteous, because he justifies him ; but therefore he justifies him, because he is righteous.

The righteousness therefore, that a man must have before he can be justified, is either, a righteousness of innocence, whereby he may plead the non-transgression of the law, and that it was never violated by him :—Or a righteousness of satisfaction ; whereby he may plead, that, though the command were transgressed, yet the penalty is borne and the law answered. These two respect the avoiding of the punishment threatened.—Or a righteousness of obedience, which he may plead for the obtaining of the good things promised ; and this respects the reward propounded.

Now accordingly as any man can produce any of these righteousnesses, so shall he be justified. Innocency cannot be pleaded ; for “ all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God :” neither can we produce a personal satisfaction, nor a personal obedience wrought out by ourselves : and, therefore, our justification is either utterly impossible for want of a righteousness, or else we must be justified by the righteousness of another imputed unto us.

(3.) Christ, therefore, as our surety, hath wrought out for us,—a righteousness of satisfaction, which, in the eye and account of the law, is equivalent to innocence ; and, by this, we are freed from the penalty threatened against our disobedience :—a righteousness of obedience, whereby we may lay claim to the reward of eternal life.

I am now the briefer in these things, because I have before opened them at large.

(4.) We, therefore, having this two-fold righteousness given to justify us, our justification must accordingly consist of two parts ;—the pardon and remission of our sins ;—Our acceptance unto eternal life.

[1.] Our justification consists in the pardon of sin.

And this flows from the righteousness of Christ's satisfaction imputed to us. For guilt is nothing else but our obligation to punishment; and therefore pardon, being the removal of guilt, must needs remove our obligation to punishment. But no man can be justly obliged to that punishment, which he hath already satisfactorily undergone. And, therefore, Christ having satisfactorily undergone the whole punishment that was due to us, and God graciously accounting his satisfaction as ours, it follows, that we lie under no obligation to punishment; and are therefore, by the righteousness of Christ's satisfaction, pardoned and justified, ransomed and delivered from bearing the penalty of the law. It is true, a pardon and full satisfaction are, in themselves, *αρνητατα* and inconsistent. If a man receive satisfaction for an injury done unto him, he cannot be said to pardon and remit it: how then can God be said to pardon sin, since his justice is fully satisfied by Christ? I answer: those very sins, which God doth pardon to the justified, he did not pardon to Christ, when they were made his by imputation: for his justice seized on him, and demanded and received the utmost farthing of all the debts he was surety for. And, therefore, pardon of sin is indeed inconsistent with personal satisfaction; but not with the satisfaction of another imputed to us: if God had satisfied his justice on us for our sins, then he could not have pardoned them: but to satisfy his justice on another for our sins, was at once to take punishment, and vouchsafe pardon; to punish our Surety, and to pardon us. That is, therefore, the first part of our justification, viz. pardon of sin.

[2.] In justification, there is the imputation of the active righteousness and obedience of Christ, whereby we obtain a right and title and are accepted unto eternal life.

He hath fulfilled all righteousness for us, and we are "accepted in the beloved." The law saith, "Do this, and live;" and God accounts Christ's doing it as ours. And, therefore, believers have as just a claim to life, as Adam could have had, had he never transgressed. I shall not again discuss, whether the right, which justification gives us to eternal life, flow from Christ's right-

eousness of obedience or of satisfaction: to me, it seems to be from his obedience, and not so directly from his sufferings: for, though his sufferings be ours, yet the law saith not, "Suffer this, and live," but "Do this, and live;" as I observed before.

And if it be objected, that, by a man's not being accounted a sinner, he must needs be accounted righteous; by his not being liable to damnation, he must needs have a right to salvation; and, therefore, that there is no more required unto justification, than the imputation of Christ's satisfaction, which carries with it both pardon and acceptance to eternal life;

To this I answer, that pardon of sins, through the satisfaction of Christ, doth give a man a negative righteousness; that is, he is no longer accounted unrighteous, and therefore not liable to punishment: but this gives him no positive righteousness, which consists in a conformity to the precepts of the law, by that active obedience, which should entitle him to the promised reward.—Though damnation and salvation be contrary states, so that he, who is not liable to the one, hath right to the other; yet they are not immediate contraries in their own nature, but only by divine appointment and institution. And, therefore, though a man should not be liable to damnation, yet his right to salvation doth not naturally result from this, but from God's appointment. It is true, if it be not night, it must be day: if the line be not crooked, it must be straight: because those are naturally opposite, and the one follows upon the denial of the other. But it is not true, that a man must either be liable to eternal death, or have a right to eternal life, because these states are not naturally and immediately opposite: for God, after he had pardoned a sinner, might justly annihilate him; or otherwise dispose of him, without bestowing upon him the eternal joys of heaven.

And, therefore, pardon of sin and acceptance unto eternal life, being two such distinct things, may well be allowed to proceed from distinct causes; the one, from the imputation of Christ's satisfaction; the other, from the imputation of his active obedience.

(5.) So that you may take a brief description of justifi-

cation in these terms :—it is a gracious act of God, whereby, through the righteousness of Christ's satisfaction imputed, he freely remits to the believing sinner the guilt and punishment of his sins ; and, through the righteousness of Christ's perfect obedience imputed, he accounts him righteous, and accepts him into love and favour, and unto eternal life. This is justification : which is the very sum and pith of the whole Gospel, and the only end of the covenant of grace. For, wherefore was there such a covenant made with us through Christ, but, as St. Paul tells us, Acts xiii. 39. that, “ by him, all that believe might be justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses ?”

Possibly some things may occur, in the opening of this point, hard and rugged : and, though this doctrine be in itself sweet and refreshing, and like rivulets of water to the dry and parched earth ; yet this water must be smitten out of a rock. Rivers, generally, the deeper they are, the more smoothly do they flow : but these waters of the sanctuary are of a quite different nature, and the deeper they are, usually the more rough and the more troubled. But beware you do not think every thing unnecessary, that is not plain and obvious. It is the fault of many Christians, and a fault that deserves reproof, to pass slightly over the great mysteries of religion, under a vilifying conceit which they have of them as unprofitable and unpracticable notions. They do not find, when they sit under such discourses as these, that their affections are so moved, their hearts so warmed, their love so inflamed, their desires made so spiritually vehement, their whole souls so wrought upon and melted, as when threatenings are thundered, duties pressed, promises applied, and the more affecting part of religion dispensed ; and so they go away, reckoning they have but lost their time, and the opportunity of an ordinance. For my part, it should be my importunate prayer, that all Christians were so taught of God and built up in the truths of the gospel, that there might need no more instruction, but only admonition, exhortation, reproof, comfort, and the more practical part of the ministerial work : but, when we see so many old babes, so many monstrous and misshapen Christians,

whose heads are the lowest and most inferior part about them, still we find abundant cause and need to inculcate truths, as well as to raise desires ; that so, their zeal and affections may be built upon, and regulated according to knowledge. Certainly, the more you know of God and Christ, and the way of your salvation through an imputed righteousness, the more will you admire, adore, and advance divine love and wisdom, and the more humble and abase yourselves. And, though some of these things be difficult, yet it is very unworthy of a Christian not to take some pains to understand what God, if I may be allowed so to speak, took so much pains to contrive.

2. Having thus showed you what justification is, the next thing proponed was to open *the nature of justifying and saving faith*, which is the great condition of the covenant of grace.

And, indeed, of all gospel truths, it is most necessary to have a clear and distinct knowledge of this ; for it is in vain to press men to this duty of believing, as that whereon the whole weight of their salvation depends, if yet they know not what this grace of faith is, nor what it is to believe. There is no one duty, that the gospel doth more frequently command or ministers inculcate, or hath so great a stress laid upon it : and, yet, because men know not what it is, and how they must act it, this ignorance either discourageth them into an utter neglect, or else misleads them to exert other acts for saving faith, and to build their hopes of heaven and eternal happiness upon a wrong foundation.

And, truly, it is a point of some difficulty, precisely to state wherein lies the formal nature of this grace. For,

(1.) Many formerly, and those of the highest remark and eminency, have placed true faith in no lower a degree than assurance ; or the secure persuasion of the pardon of their sins, the acceptation of their persons, and their future salvation.

But this, as it is very sad and uncomfortable for thousands of doubting and deserted souls, concluding all those to fall short of grace, who fall short of certainty ; so hath it given the Papists too great advantage to insult over the doctrine of our first reformers, as containing

most absurd contradictions. Nor, indeed, can their argument be possibly avoided or answered : for, if pardon and justification be obtained only by faith, and this faith be only an assurance or persuasion that I am pardoned and justified, then it will necessarily follow, that I must believe I am pardoned and justified, that I may be pardoned and justified : that is, I must believe I am pardoned and justified, before I either am or can be ; which is to believe a lie. This will necessarily follow upon limiting faith to assurance. Faith therefore is not assurance : but this doth sometimes crown and reward a strong, vigorous, and heroic faith : the Spirit of God breaking in upon the soul with an evidencing light, and scattering all that darkness and those fears and doubts which before beclouded it.

(2.) Some again place faith only in an act of affiance or incumbence upon the mercies of God and the merits of Jesus Christ, reposing all our hope for heaven and happiness in them alone.

This indeed must be allowed to be one act of a true and saving faith, but cannot be the entire and adequate notion of it.

(3.) Others make faith to consist in an undoubting assent to the truths and promises of the gospel: An assent, not only forced and compelled by the mere evidence and light of the truths therein delivered : for so, the devils believe and tremble : and, from their natural sagacity and woeful experience, know the great truths of the gospel to be unquestionably so, as they are there revealed. But an assent, wrought in the soul from the reverend and due regard of God's authority and veracity ; yielding firm belief to all that the scripture propoundeth, because of the testimony of that God, who can neither deceive, nor be deceived : such an assent to truth, as prevails upon the conscience, and influenceth the conversation : a belief, that is not overborne by corrupt and vile affections, but conforms the life and practice, and makes them suitable, to the rules of God's word.

This many, and that with a great deal of reason, make to be the proper notion of a true and saving faith. And the scripture doth so far affirm that such an assent as this is true faith, that, in very many places, it seems to re-

quire no more than barely to believe those truths concerning God and Christ, which are revealed in it: as "that Jesus is the Son of God; that he came into the world to save sinners;" 1 John iv. 15. and chap. v. 3. and that God raised him from the dead. Yet these places must not be so understood, as if nothing more were required to constitute a true believer, besides a mere assent to these things; but that this assent is then true faith, when it overcomes the will, seasons the affections, and regulates our lives and actions. He hath true and saving faith, who believes that Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the true Messiah, is come into the world, and submits his conscience and his conversation to the consequences of such a belief; that is to say, to love and obey him as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. Now the very reason why the scripture doth express faith by an assent unto certain propositions, is, not that such a dogmatical faith as rests only in notion and speculation will suffice to bring any to heaven and happiness, but because the Holy Ghost aimed chiefly at that, which was least known and most gainsay'd by the Jews and the unbelieving world: for it was not at all unknown or contradicted by them, that, if Jesus Christ were the Son of God, all adoration and obedience ought to be paid unto him: but they denied that Jesus was this Son of God and the Saviour of the world. Therefore the scripture requires an assent unto these propositions: that "Jesus is the Christ:" that "he died for our sins and rose again from the dead:" and calls this true and saving faith, because, wheresoever this assent hath its due and proper effect to engage us to the performance of all those duties which naturally depend upon it and flow from it, there this faith is undoubtedly justifying and saving.

(4.) Some make faith to consist in the hearty and sincere acceptance of Christ Jesus, in his person and offices; as he is represented and tenders himself unto us, in his gospel.

These offices of Christ are three.—He is our Prophet, to instruct us in the will of God, and to declare unto us the way of salvation.—He is our Priest, to expiate our sins and reconcile us unto God by the sacrifice of himself, and to present our duties and services to God by his prevailing and eternal intercession.—He is our King, to rule

and govern us, by the laws of his word, and by the conduct of his Holy Spirit.

And whosoever he be, that doth cordially and entirely receive Christ in all these offices and submit his soul to the authority of them, he is the person, whose faith will justify him; for he believes to the saving of his soul.

Now between this description of faith and the former, there is no such difference, but that they may very amicably conspire and be joined in one. For he, that gives a firm assent to all the truths of the gospel, doth thereby own his subjection to the prophetical office of Christ, as the great teacher and doctor of his church. And if this assent influence both his affections and his conversation, it will make him likewise submit to the priestly office of Christ, in relying only upon his merits for the pardon of his sins and eternal salvation; and also to his kingly office, in submitting to his sceptre and conforming his heart and life according to his holy laws.

Yet, to proceed a little more exactly in this matter, let us observe, that when we speak of a true, saving, and justifying faith, it is not any one single act, either of knowledge or will; but a complicated grace, made up of many particular acts, and is nothing else but the motion of the whole soul towards God and Christ. For we are not now speaking of faith, philosophically taken; for that is no other than a bare act of the understanding, assenting to the truth of a testimony: but we speak of faith in a theological and moral sense; and so, though it bear the name but of one grace, yet it consists of many acts of the soul. It supposes knowledge: it connotes assent: it excites love, and engages to obedience: yet still, that, which gives it the formal denomination of faith, is assent to the truth. As for assurance, I look upon that, not as a distinct part of faith, but a high and exalted degree and measure of it: not vouchsafed to all, scarce to any at all times; but only to some few, through the special witness of the Holy Spirit with their spirits.

So that, if we would at once see in brief what a true and saving faith is, we may take the sum of it in this description. It is when a sinner, being, on the one hand, thoroughly convinced of his sins, of the wrath of God due

to him for them, of his utter inability either to escape or bear this wrath ; and, on the other hand, being likewise convinced of the sufficiency, willingness, and designation of Christ to satisfy justice, and to reconcile and save sinners ; doth hereupon yield a firm assent unto these truths revealed in the scripture, and also accepts and receives Jesus Christ in all his offices : as his Prophet, resolving to attend unto his teaching ; as his Lord and King, resolving to obey his commands ; and as his Priest, resolving to rely upon his sacrifice alone ; and doth accordingly submit to him, and confide in him sincerely and perseveringly. This is that faith, which doth justify ; and will certainly save all those, in whom it is wrought.

3. The next thing propounded, was to open *the nature of that obedience, which the covenant of grace requires as necessary to salvation.*

This I shall do very briefly. And, therefore, I take it for granted, that obedience is required under the covenant of grace as strictly as ever it was under the covenant of works ; and required, not only to show our gratitude and thankfulness, but necessarily and indispensably in order to the obtaining of heaven and eternal life.

If I should quote to you all the scriptures, which are plain proofs for this, I should repeat a great part of the Bible. The moral law requires perfect obedience from us, and condemns every failure as sinful : and this moral law is still in force even to believers themselves ; commanding and requiring from them the highest degree of obedience, as absolutely and authoritatively as if they were to be saved by a covenant of works : for faith makes not void the preceptive part of the law. But the covenant of grace insists not so much on the measure and degree of our obedience, as on the quality and nature of every degree, that it be sincere and upright.

Yet, certainly, that is not sincere obedience, which doth willingly and allowedly fall short of the highest degree of perfection. For this sincerity consists in an universal hatred of all sin, without sparing or indulging ourselves in any ; and in an universal regard of every command of God's law, not dispensing with nor exempting ourselves

from the most difficult, severe, and opposite duty to flesh and blood, that is therein enjoined us.

He, whose conscience can thus testify to him, that, though he doth too often transgress and offend, yet he ever hates what he sometimes doth; that he abhors every false way; that he opposes and resists, and is rather through the subtlety of Satan and the deceitfulness of sin surprised unawares, than voluntarily and premeditately contrives and determines to sin; and, though he doth fall infinitely short of the exact strictness and holiness of the law, yet that he hath a cordial respect to all God's commandments, and doth both desire and endeavour to conform his life and conversation to that most perfect rule; that man may certainly know, that, let his obedience be more or less perfect, according to the greater or less measures of sanctifying grace received from God, yet it is such as the covenant of grace requires, and God will accept unto his salvation. But, let no one take this for an encouragement of sloth and negligence in God's service: for let not that man think that his obedience is sincere, who doth not, with unwearied pains and industry, strive to his very utmost to please and serve God in all things. But, for those, whose consciences bear them witness that they do so, let them know, for their comfort, that, though they fall far short of what they should and would be, yet the sincerity of their obedience is accounted and accepted with God for perfection.

When God first established the moral law, which was when he first wrote it upon the heart of Adam, he made it a covenant, that whosoever should answer the perfection of that law should obtain life: but, by the fall we having lost the power of obedience, the grace of the gospel promiseth acceptance to our imperfect obedience, if performed sincerely. The law requires, as necessary to our conformity to God's purity and holiness, that our duties be perfect: the corruption of our nature makes them imperfect and defective, both from their rule and pattern. The covenant of grace requires, as necessary to salvation, that that obedience, which ought to be perfect according to the rule, but is imperfect by reason of our

corruption, should be sincere and upright : and this, God will accept and crown with eternal life and glory.

And thus I have opened to you, as briefly and clearly as I could, both what justification, faith, and evangelical obedience are.

4. There remaineth but one thing more, which when I have finished, I shall close up this subject of the doctrine of the covenants : and that is, *to show what influence faith and obedience have into our justification and salvation.*

(1.) And here I shall lay down these following positions.

[1.] That faith doth not justify us, as it is in itself a work or act exerted by us.

It is true, the apostle tells us, Rom. iv. 22. that Abraham's faith " was imputed to him for righteousness :" but this cannot be understood literally and properly, as if the very act of believing were his righteousness ; for then it would contradict many other places of scripture, asserting that Christ Jesus is our righteousness. It must therefore be taken tropically, as relating to Christ : that is, faith is our righteousness no otherwise, than as it makes over the righteousness of Christ unto us ; and not as it is in itself a work or grace. For, did it justify us as a work, then the apostle, Rom. iv. 5. had very incongruously opposed him that worketh, to him that believeth : " To him that worketh not, but believeth, his faith is counted for righteousness :" for were faith our righteousness as a work, then he, that believeth, would be he, that worketh ; and his work would be accounted to him for righteousness. Neither, indeed, is it any whit less absurd, to think that our faith, which is an imperfect grace, can yet be a perfect and complete righteousness : for faith itself hath its manifold failings, and is, as one saith well, like the hand which Moses stretched out in working of miracles ; for, as that hand was smitten with leprosy, to show that it was no efficacy in the hand itself that wrought those wonders, so even the faith that justifies hath a leprosy, an uncleanness cleaving to it, to show that it justifies not by its own virtue, not as it is a work and act of ours, for so itself needeth justification.

[2.] Neither doth faith justify, as it is the fulfilling of

the condition of the covenant of grace : " He that believeth shall be saved."

For, as I have observed before, faith is not properly and immediately the condition of this covenant, but remotely and secondarily. For we must resolve this covenant thus : He, that can produce a perfect righteousness, shall be saved ; but he, that believes, shall have the perfect righteousness of Christ made his : so, from the first to the last, " He that believeth shall be saved." Where it is to be noted ; that faith is not made the immediate condition of salvation ; but only it is the immediate condition of obtaining an interest in a perfect righteousness, by which we are justified and saved.

[3.] Faith justifying neither as a work nor as a condition, and therefore not as being itself our righteousness, it remains, that it must needs justify as it gives us a right and title to the righteousness of another, even of Jesus Christ.

So that we are not so properly justified by faith, as by the righteousness which faith apprehends and applies : for the righteousness of Christ being made ours, God is engaged in justice to justify us, because then we are righteous persons. This virtue, that faith hath to justify, is not its own ; neither proceeds from itself, but from the object, which it apprehends and makes ours, viz. the righteousness of Christ by which we are justified, directly and immediately ; but by faith, only correlatively and metonymically, as it relates unto the righteousness of Christ. When the woman was healed only by touching of Christ's garments, the virtue that healed her proceeded not from her touch, but from him whom she touched : yet our Saviour tells her, that her faith had made her whole : Mat. ix. 22. which can no more be properly understood of her faith, than of her touch ; for still the healing virtue was from Christ, conveyed to her by her faith, and that faith testified by her touch : so, when we say that we are justified by faith, we must understand that faith doth it not through its own virtue, but by virtue of Christ's righteousness, which is conveyed to us by our faith. This righteousness of Christ, as I observed

before, is both a righteousness of satisfaction and of obedience ; for we need both unto our justification ; and these must be made ours, or else we can never be justified by them : ours, they cannot be naturally, as wrought out by ourselves ; consequently, they must be ours legally, and by imputation ; the law looking upon what our Surety hath done, as though he had done it, and accordingly dealing with us.

Now if we can but apprehend how faith makes the righteousness of Christ to be ours, it will be very easy and obvious to apprehend the way and manner how we are justified.

[4.] To clear up this, therefore, faith makes the righteousness of Christ's satisfaction and obedience to be ours, as it is the bond of that mystical union, that there is between Christ and the believing soul.

If Christ and the believer be one, the righteousness of Christ may well be reckoned as the righteousness of the believer. Nay, mutual imputation flows from mystical union : the sins of believers are imputed to Christ, and the righteousness of Christ to them ; and both justly, because being united each to other by mutual consent, (which consent on our part is faith) God considers them but as one person. As it is in marriage, the husband stands liable to the wife's debts, and the wife stands interested in the husband's possessions ; so it is here : faith is the marriage-band and tie between Christ and a believer ; and, therefore, all the debts of a believer are chargeable upon Christ, and the righteousness of Christ is instated upon the believer : so that, upon the account of this marriage-union, he hath a legal right and title to the purchase made by it. Indeed this union is a high and inscrutable mystery ; yet plain it is, that there is such close, spiritual, and real union between Christ and a believer : the scripture often both expressly affirms it, 1 Cor. vi. 17. " He, that is joined unto the Lord, is one spirit ; " and also lively illustrates it by several resemblances. It is likewise plain, that the band of this union, on the believer's part, is faith : consult Rom. xi. 17, compared with the 20th verse. And, therefore, from the nearness of this union, there follows a communication of

interests and conceras: insomuch, that the Church is called Christ, 1 Cor. xii. 12. " So also is Christ; " and their sufferings called the sufferings of Christ, Col. i. 24. Acts ix. 4. So, likewise, from this mystical union, the sins of believers are laid upon Christ, and his righteousness imputed unto them: see this as to both parts, 2 Cor. v. 21. " He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him: " and, Gal. iii. 13, 14. He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; " that the blessing of Abraham might come on us." It is still upon the account of this union, that Christ was reckoned a sinner, and we are reckoned as righteous. And, therefore, as faith is the bond and tie of this union, so it is, without more difficulty, the way and means of our justification: by faith, we are united unto Christ; by that union, we have truly a righteousness; and, upon that righteousness, the justice of God, as well as his mercy, is engaged to justify and acquit us.

And thus you see this great truth explained, of justification by faith; which hath, indeed, been as great a torment and vexation to men's understandings to conceive how it should be, as it hath been peace and quiet to their consciences in the certainty it was so. And, if these things were duly pondered, they might perhaps put a speedy issue to many laborious and testy disputes; especially concerning faith's instrumentality and causality in our justification.

(2.) Concerning obedience, or good works, two things remain to be inquired into;—their necessity and influence into salvation, or our obtaining the state of eternal glory; —their necessity and influence into justification, which gives us a right and title to that eternal glory.

[1.] The covenant of grace requires good works of believers, as necessary to salvation.

There is a lazy and lethargic error, that hath seized on many, who make Christ not only their Surety to work out a righteousness, but also their servant to work out an obedience and holiness for them. What need they pray, or hear, or perform any other duty of religion or obedience; for Christ hath done all for them, and if they be-

lieve, they are sure of being accepted and saved? And, therefore, they count it the sign of a legal spirit, to do any more than idly sit down, and believe; expecting to be carried to heaven in such a vain dream and contemplation.

1st. Here, it is true, that obedience is not necessary as the procuring or meritorious cause of our salvation.

In respect of merit, we are to sit down and believe; and those good works are saucy and sacrilegious, that aim at heaven upon the account of desert: Eph. ii. 8, 9. "By grace are ye saved, not of works." Indeed the scripture doth frequently call salvation by the name of a reward: Col. iii. 24. "Of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance." Heb. xi. 26. "He had respect unto the recompence of the reward." And it doth as frequently call the obedient worthy of this reward: Luke xx. 35. "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain the world to come, and the resurrection from the dead." 2 Thess. i. 5. "That ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God." Yet neither of these expressions doth amount to a proper merit; such as commutative justice may require, where the price must fully answer the value of the thing purchased: but only such a merit and worthiness, as ariseth from the free promise of God. God hath promised salvation to those, who obey him; and, therefore, because of this promise, it is bestowed upon them as a reward of their obedience: and they are said to be worthy of such a reward, not because their obedience is in itself worthy of it; but, rather, because it is worthy of God to stand to his word, and to fulfil the promises he hath made.

2dly. Good works are necessary to eternal salvation, though not as the meritorious cause of the reward, yet as the disposing cause of the subject; for these are they, which do dispose and prepare us for salvation.

And therefore the apostle, Col. i. 12. speaks of being made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light." If a wicked person should be made partaker of this inheritance, how strange, how vexatious a thing would it be to him, to spend an eternity there in holiness, who had here spent all his time in sin and

wickedness ! And, therefore, God accustoms them, whom he saves by ordinary means, unto the work of heaven while they are here on earth. Let those consider this, to whom holiness is so irksome and unsuitable now : it is utterly impossible, that such men can be made happy and blessed ; for, if God should take them up to heaven with their natures unchanged, unrenewed, he would only free them from a painful hell, to sentence them to a troublesome one. How shall they sing the song of the Lamb, who never had their hearts and voices tuned unto it ? Or how shall they endure to behold the glorious majesty of God face to face, who never before saw him so much as darkly through a glass by the eye of faith ? It is a perfect torture, for eyes, locked up in a long and dismal darkness, to be suddenly stretched open against the bright beams of the sun ; and so would it be, if men, who have long lived in a blind and wicked state, should suddenly be stricken with the dazzling glory of heaven flashing in their faces. And therefore God usually prepares them, both to do the work and to bear the reward of heaven, before he brings them thither. It is said of the godly, Rev. xiv. 13. that they " rest from their labours, and their works do follow them :" this is especially meant, I doubt not, of the reward of their works ; but yet it holds true also of the works themselves : though in heaven, they rest from their labour in working ; in working against temptations, against corruptions, and under afflictions ; yet they rest not from their working, for those very works, in which they employed themselves on earth, they also perform in heaven, so far forth as they have there an object for them. Were it, therefore, only to dispose and qualify the soul for the everlasting work of heaven, this were reason and ground enough, to require obedience and good works as necessary to salvation.

3dly. I need not tell you, that good works are necessary, upon the absolute and sovereign command of God.

If God should command good works for no other end, but to show the authority which he hath over us, and for us to show our obedience again unto him ; yet that cannot be any longer an unnecessary thing, which the great God of heaven and earth enjoins. 1 Thes. iv. 3. " This is the

will of God : " that is, this is the great command of his revealed will, " even your sanctification." And we are said to be " the workmanship " of God, " created unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them :" Eph. ii. 10.

4thly. They are necessary, as a debt of gratitude.

If we had no other law, yet Christian ingenuity would oblige us to obey that God, who hath already done so much for us, and from whom we expect such great things for the future. Hath God given us a spiritual life in present possession, and an eternal life in reversion ; and is it possible we should be careless of his honour and service ? Certainly, the love of Christ must constrain us to live no longer to ourselves ; but to him, who died for us : as the apostle urgeth it, 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. It is such a powerful and persuasive motive, that we cannot resist it, without the blackest brand of disingenuity and ingratitude. Thus, again, the apostle argueth, 1 Cor. vi. 20. " Ye are bought with a price : therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." So that, upon the account of our redemption, we are obliged, by the strictest and most sacred bonds of gratitude, to serve and glorify our Redeemer. Yet, though this be the sweetest, it is not the only tie to duty. It will indeed be so, when we come to heaven, but, whilst we have the mixture of a base and sordid spirit, God hath not left his service to stand at the courtesy of our ingenuity ; but hath laid as absolute and peremptory commands upon us, as though he dealt only with slaves and vassals ; and yet urgeth it as much upon our gratitude and ingenuity, as if the only prerogative he hath over us, were but love and friendship.

5thly. Obedience and good works are necessary, as the way and means whereby we must obtain salvation.

And so, though they have no necessity of causality in procuring it by their own merit, yet they have a necessity of order or method, according to which God will bestow it, and not otherwise. And therefore, the apostle tells us, that God hath fore-ordained good works, " that we should walk in them." They are the pathway, that he hath chalked out for us to heaven ; and, therefore, as ever we will arrive thither, it is necessary that we walk in this way. Yea,

should it be supposed that an elect or a regenerate person should forsake this way of obedience, and betake himself unto the broad way wherein the most walk, we affirm that he is going the direct and ready road to hell: and hell he cannot escape, unless he stop and return. Let their mouths therefore be for ever silenced, who exclaim against the doctrine of justification and salvation by faith, as that, which destroys the necessity of good works. We are far from that libertinism, to conclude, that, because Christ hath obeyed the whole law for us, therefore we are exempted from obedience. He hath done for us whatsoever was required, in order to merit and satisfaction; yet he hath not done for us whatever was required, in order to obedience and a holy conversation: that is, Christ hath done his own work for us; but he hath not done our work for us: he hath done the work of a Mediator and Redeemer; but he never did the work of a sinner, that stood in need of a Redeemer, so as to excuse him from it. And, therefore, though men may be justified by a surety, yet they cannot be sanctified by a surety: but, still, holiness, obedience, and good works must be personal, and not imputative.

Thus then you see the absolute necessity of good works, in those who are capable of performing them, in order unto eternal salvation. They are necessary, not indeed as the meritorious cause of it, but as a preparing and disposing cause; necessary, by God's absolute and indispensable command; as a debt of gratitude; and, lastly, as the way and means, by which alone it can be attained. Thus the apostle, Heb. v. 9. Christ is become "the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."

[2.] The next thing to be inquired into, is the necessity and influence of obedience and good works into our justification.

And, in order to this, I shall lay down these following particulars.

1st. Good works, or obedience, doth not justify us in the sight of God, as it is itself our righteousness.

This the main scope and drift of the whole epistle to the Romans, and of a great part of the epistle to the Galatians. It were endless to cite all the texts: see only Rom. iii. 20.

"By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight:" and v. 28, the apostle lays down this great conclusion as the upshot of his dispute, "Therefore we conclude," saith he, "that a man is justified without the deeds of the law:" and, Gal. ii. 16. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the deeds of the law." It is needless to add more.

And, therefore, I shall only answer an objection or two, drawn from scripture, against this doctrine.

For some may say that the scripture seems to attribute justification unto works, as well as unto faith: for it is said of Phineas, Psalm cvi. 30, 31, that he "executed judgment," (viz. in killing Zimri and Cosbi,) "and that was imputed unto him for righteousness." But, to this, the answer is easy: that the psalmist speaks only of the righteousness of that particular act of Phineas, that it was imputed to him for righteousness; that is, it was accounted by God as a righteous deed; though, perhaps, others might censure it, as proceeding from rash and unwarrantable zeal, acting without a commission.

But, the great place, most urged and insisted on for justification by works, is James, chap. ii. from the 14th verse to the end; especially verse 24. "Ye see, then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

Here the grand difficulty is, how we shall reconcile St. Paul, asserting, that we are justified by faith only without works, with St. James, affirming we are justified by works, and not by faith only.

To this I answer: that there is no opposition at all between the two apostles. For St. Paul only excludes works, from being the way and means of our justification; and St. James only excludes that faith, which is without works. St. Paul disputes against legalists and self-justiciaries, who trusted to their own works to justify them; and, against them, he lays down this conclusion, that it is faith, and not works, that doth justify: but St. James disputes against the Gnostics and libertines, who trusted to an outward and fruitless profession of faith, or rather indeed to a vain fancy instead of faith; and, against them, he lays down this conclusion, That not by faith only, but by works, a man is justified. St. Paul's scope is, to show

by what we are justified ; and that, he tells us, is by faith : St. James's scope is to show what kind of faith that is, which must justify us ; not an empty, vain, fantastical faith, but such as is operative and productive of good works : his intent is not, to exclude faith from our justification, no nor so much as to join works with it in partnership and commission ; for, verse 23, he tells us, "the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness :" the very place, which St. Paul, Rom. iv. 3. Gal. iii. 6. makes use of to prove justification by faith : and, therefore, when he saith a man is justified by works, he contends for nothing else but a working faith : Abraham, saith he, was "justified by works," ver. 21. If you ask, how that doth appear, he tells you it was because his faith "was imputed unto him for righteousness :" now let any man declare, that can, what sense there can be in this proof, if, by being justified by faith, he should mean any thing else besides a working faith. So that the upshot of all that St. James here intends, is, to show us, that the faith, which justifies us, must be a faith bringing forth good works ; and that, we grant and contend for : and, likewise to exclude a barren speculative faith, which is not accompanied with good works ; to exclude it, I say, from having any influence into our justification. So, in the 14th verse, "What doth it profit though a man say he hath faith, and have no works ? Can faith save him ?" that is, can such a faith as hath no works save him ? This faith he calls a dead faith : v. 17. the faith of "devils :" v. 19. and the faith of a "vain man :" v. 20 : Now a dead faith, a faith that may be in devils and vain men, is no true faith, nor can any affirm that it will justify. Thus you see St. Paul and St. James fully accorded about this doctrine of justification by faith. St. Paul affirms, that it is faith alone that justifies : St. James denies, that a lonely faith can justify : and we assent to both as true ; for the faith, which alone justifies us, is not a lonely or solitary faith, but accompanied and attended by good works.

That is the first particular. Good works are not the righteousness by which we are justified.

2dly. Though we are not justified by works, yet good

works are necessary to our justification, so that we cannot possibly be justified without them.

There must, at least, be those inward good works of sorrow for sin, hatred of it, true repentance and humiliation, hope in the pardoning mercy of God through Jesus Christ. Yea, faith itself must be in the soul as it is a good work, before it can justify. This is evident, for if faith justify, and a justifying faith be a good work (though it doth not justify as it is so), then some good work is absolutely necessary to justification.

3dly. Yea, good works are absolutely necessary, to preserve the state of justification when once obtained.

It is impossible that we should maintain our justification, without believing, repenting, mortifying the deeds of the body, and performing the duties of new obedience; all which are good works: and the reason is, because, as soon as these cease, their contraries, which are utterly inconsistent with a justified estate, succeed in the room of them. If faith, repentance, and mortification cease, it is impossible that justification can be preserved: otherwise, a man might be a justified unbeliever, a justified impenitent, a justified slave to his lusts; which is a contradiction. You see then that good works are necessary, both for the first obtaining of justification, and for the preservation of it when obtained.

4thly, Hence, then, we may easily determine that much debated question, whether good works be required in the covenant of grace as a condition of justification. For if, by a condition of justification we negatively understand that without which we cannot be justified, then certain it is, that, in this sense, good works are a condition of it. But if we take condition positively, for that, whereby we are justified, so not works, but a working faith, is the condition. We are not justified by works, neither can we be justified without them. And, therefore, when the apostle tells us, Rom. iii. 28. that we are " justified by faith without the deeds of the law," this must not be understood without the presence of works, for that I have shown you is necessarily required, but without their causality and influence into our justification. Conditions we may call them, in a large sense, because they are indispensably

required in the person justified ; but they are, in no wise, causes or means of our justification.

So that you see the doctrine of justification by faith is no patronage for looseness and libertinism. Good works are now as necessary under the covenant of grace, as ever they were under the covenant of works ; but only to other ends and purposes. The covenant of works required them, that we might be justified by them ; but the covenant of grace requires them, that we might be justified by faith. Let none think, that the covenant of grace gives any dispensation from working ; or that an airy and speculative faith, and a barren and empty profession, are enough to answer the terms of this covenant : ‘ Can faith save him ? ’ and yet what other is the faith of many professors ? Should I bid them show me their faith by their works, I much doubt, that besides phrases and canting, we should have but very slender evidences of their Christianity ; and yet these men are very apt to condemn others for carnal legalists, and low attainers. But let such notionists flatter themselves as they please ; yet, certainly, they will find such low attainers, who work out their salvation with fear and trembling, more exalted saints in glory, than those, who think both working, fear, and trembling, too slavish and servile, and below the free spirit of the gospel.

“ Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ : to whom be glory for ever and ever.” Amen.

**THE  
NATURE AND NECESSITY  
OF  
REGENERATION,  
OR  
THE NEW BIRTH.**

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JOHN iii. 5.

*Jesus answered, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

THE former part of this chapter, in which division these words fall, reports the conference that passed betwixt Christ and Nicodemus. Their discourse is concerning the great mystery of the new birth ; of which this night-disciple had but a dark and midnight conception. In the third verse, our Saviour startles him ; and asserts, as he doth again in the text, the absolute necessity of this great change : " Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." In the verse following, Nicodemus objects against it ; and thinks to refute the second birth, by such pitiful doting arguments, as might alone prove him twice a child : " Can a man," says he, " be born when he is old ? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born ? No doubt but this learned rabbi thought he had brought a gravelling instance against this new doctrine of the new birth. Such

ignorant pieces are the most wise and learned, when they attempt by reason to search out those mysterious effects of God's Spirit, which cannot be known otherwise than by illumination and experience. Our Saviour, therefore, in the words of the text, takes off this gross and ill-conceited objection : and tells him, that he speaks not of a carnal, but of a spiritual regeneration and birth ; whereby we are begotten again to a lively hope, and are made the children of God : and so silenceth those impertinent impossibilities, on which Nicodemus insisted : " Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can in no wise enter into the kingdom of God."

These words are a description of a Christian's new-birth : which is here set forth both by the efficient cause of it, water and the Spirit : and also by the absolute necessity of it unto eternal life ; without this no man can enter into the kingdom of God, that is, into heaven, the place where the throne of God's kingdom is established.

" To be " born of water and of the Spirit," may admit of a double interpretation : for either,—first, by water is meant baptism ; the element being put for the ordinance, which is the sacrament of our regeneration : and thus you have it in Eph. v. 26. where the church is said to be sanctified and cleansed, through " the washing of water. There is, indeed, a baptismal regeneration, whereby all, that are made partakers of that ordinance, are, according to scripture language, sanctified, renewed, and made the children of God, and brought within the bond of the covenant : but all this is but after an external manner ; as being, in this ordinance, entered members of the visible church. This external regeneration by water entitles none to eternal life ; but as the Spirit moves upon the face of these waters, and doth sometimes secretly convey quickening virtue through them.

Now if you take this being " born of water " to signify external regeneration in the ordinance of baptism, the question will be, how it can be verified, that, without this, none can " enter into the kingdom of God."

It was a mistake of some of the fathers, and among

them of St. Austin, who excluded all, both infants and adult, out of heaven, that died without baptism; although by no default of their own, but by an insuperable necessity; unless they were such as died martyrs, their being baptized with their own blood, as St. Austin speaks, serving them instead of baptism by water. But this opinion is unwarrantable, and contrary to the most received judgment of the church in the primitive times: who, if they had thought this baptismal regeneration was indispensably necessary to salvation, would not certainly have stinted and confined the administration of it only to two times of the year, Easter and Pentecost; thereby to bring upon themselves the blood of their souls, that should in that interim have died without baptism. Therefore that opinion was rather private, than the public judgment of the church, though learned men were of it.

Therefore, if you will understand baptism by being "born of water," if it be true that none are saved that are not "born of water;" we must distinguish of being unavoidably and inevitably deprived of the opportunity of baptism, and a wilful contempt of it: and, in this latter sense, must our Saviour's assertion be understood. He, that contemns being born by baptism, and out of that contempt finally neglects being baptized, shall never "enter into the kingdom of God:" but, for others, whom not contempt, but necessity, deprives of this ordinance, the want of it shall not in the least prejudice their salvation.

Secondly. To be "born of water and of the Spirit," may denote to us the manner of the Spirit's proceeding in the work of regeneration. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit:" that is, except he be renewed by the Holy Ghost, working as water; leaving the same effect upon the soul in cleansing and purifying it from sinful defilements, as water doth upon the body in washing off contracted dirt and filth. Nor, indeed, is this manner of expression strange to the holy scripture: for John baptist, St. Mat. iii. 11. speaking of Christ, tells them, that he should baptize them "with the Holy Ghost and with fire;" that is, he should baptize them with the Holy Ghost, working as fire: for, as fire eats out and consumes the

rust and dross of metals ; so those, that are baptized with the Spirit, are as it were plunged into that heavenly flame, whose searching energy devours all their dross, tin, and base alloy. So then, here also, to be "born of water and of the Spirit," may be no more than to be born of the Spirit, purifying the soul, even as water purifies the body. So variously is the efficiency of the Holy Ghost, in the work of regeneration, expressed in scripture language : it consumes our dross as fire, and washeth off our filth as water.

These two interpretations may be given of the text, " Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit :" that is, except he be externally regenerated by baptism, when he hath such an opportunity to receive that ordinance, that nothing but his own wilful contempt of it can hinder it ; and be also internally regenerated by the Spirit of God working a mighty and thorough change upon his heart : he shall never be saved. Or, again, it may be understood thus : " Except a man be renewed by the efficacy of the Holy Ghost, cleansing the inward man from sin, as water cleanseth the outward man from filth, he shall never enter into heaven." In either of which senses you take it, the words will well bear it.

I. Having given you this explication of the words, for the more full and clear prosecution of this doctrine of regeneration, it will be expedient to show you,

*What this new-birth or regeneration is.*

And that I shall do both *negatively* and *positively*.

i. *Negatively.*

And, here, to be born again or new-born, is *not to have any essential change pass upon the essential parts of human nature.*

The essential parts of human nature I call the soul and body : which remain the same, for substance, after regeneration, as they were before. Indeed Flagicius Illyricus, that held original sin to be of the substance of the soul, was driven by force of consequence also to affirm, that regeneration made a change in the substance and essence of the soul : and the Familists, of late, have entertained strange and blasphemous conceits concerning regeneration, as if it were a metamorphosis of the creature into the very

being and nature of God ; making that change, that is wrought thereby, to be not so much a new creature, as a new deity. But these are wild and uncouth fancies : for, if regeneration wrought any such change upon man, as that he is not now the same person regenerated, as he was unregenerated ; how doth the apostle say, 1 Tim. i. 13. “I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious ?” then also grace, instead of converting, destroyed the sinner ; and, consequently, no sinner yet was or shall be saved. But enough of this. Grace, therefore, makes no such physical change upon the natural being or essence of man : but the understanding, will, and affections are the same for nature and essence, in the regenerate as in the unregenerate ; but only they are rectified and endowed with infused habits.

2. *Regeneration is not a conversion from an idolatrous and an erroneous way of worship, to the profession and acknowledgment of the true faith.*

Much less, then, is it not a conversion from one sect and party of Christians to another ; as many ignorant persons suppose, that, when they are won over from one truth it may be to an error, presently they think they are converted by it, because they join in with another party of Christians. But there may be proselytes gained over to the church, either from heathenism or from popish idolatry, whose souls notwithstanding may never be gained over unto Christ. As travellers, that come into a foreign land, still remain subjects to their natural lord : so these may come into the church, which is the kingdom of Christ upon earth ; and yet still remain slaves to their natural lord, the devil. Indeed, I find in scripture, that, when Christ and his apostles laboured to convert the Jews or others unto the profession and acknowledgment of Christ, and to bring them to a thorough work of regeneration, the chief thing that they insisted on was, to persuade them to believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. Now, though this dogmatical faith is not regeneration, yet it was then almost an infallible test of it ; and, to persuade them to believe that Jesus was the Christ, was to prevail upon them to be truly and really converted. It was seldom seen among those primitive Christians,

where there were no carnal respects nor outward advantages that could commend the Gospel to the secular interests of men; when the only reward of professing Christ, was reproaches, persecution, and martyrdom: seldom was it seen, that any were won over from heathenism or Judaism, to make profession of the despised name of Christ, but such, as were inwardly renewed by that almighty grace, that can conquer all the despites and affronts of the world: few were so foolish as to profess Christ in hypocrisy, when that hypocrisy would endanger their own lives; and yet, because it was but in hypocrisy, it could gain them no benefit by his death. Therefore it is, that the scripture speaks of those, that made a profession of the name of Christ, as if they were regenerated, because it was then almost an infallible mark of it: thus you have it in 1 John iv. 15. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God:" so, again, in chap. v. 1. "He, that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." But now, when the very name of a Christian is become a title of honour, and the same punishments do now attend the denying of Christ that then attended the acknowledgment of him, men may indeed be called by his name that never were effectually called by his grace, and may make a profession of the true faith and yet remain Christian infidels.

3. *The reformation of a dissolute and debauched life, falls short of this spiritual new birth.*

This is that, with which many do soothe up themselves, when they reflect back upon the wild extravagances of their former times: how outrageously wicked they were; drunkards, unclean, riotous, blasphemers, swearers, and the very worst of sinners: and, now that they find themselves deadened to these things, and that they are grown men of stayed and sober lives and conversations, straight they conclude, that, certainly, such a great change as this is could never be made on them otherwise than by a renewing work of the Spirit: and, yet, this amendment there may be, where there is no regeneration. Men may gather up their loose and dissolute lives within the compass of civility and moral honesty, and yet they may be utter strangers to a work of true and saving grace: and this

may be ascribed to two grounds ; partly, to the convictions of God's Spirit awakening natural conscience to see the horror, and to foresee the danger, that is in such infamous sins ; and, partly, to prudence, gained from the frequent experiences that they have had of the manifold inconveniences brought upon themselves by such sins formerly. These two may make a great amendment in men's lives and conversations ; and, yet, both these convictions and prudence fall far short of true regenerating grace.

All the seeming amendment of such men's lives may be effected two ways : either by changing their sins, or by tiring out the sinner.

(1.) The life may seem to be reformed, when men only change their rude and boisterous sins, for such as are more demure and sober.

When men, from riotous, grow worldly ; when from profane and irreligious, they grow superstitious and hypocritical ; from atheists, to be heretics ; when men make this change of boisterous and roaring sins, for those that are more demure and sober, they are apt to think that this change must be a change of their natures : whereas, indeed, it is but only a changing and bartering of their sins ; and usually it is such a change too, that, though it render the life more inoffensive, yet it makes the soul more incurable. St. Austin, long since, hath told us, that vices may give place, when yet no virtue takes it ; but one vice gives place to another.

(2.) The life may seem to be reformed, when men are only tired out with their sins, or have outgrown their sins.

There are sins, that are proper and peculiar to such a state and season of a man's life, upon the altering of which they vanish and disappear. The sins of youth drop off in declining age, being then incongruous. This is that, which deceives many : when they look back upon those numberless vanities that they have forsaken and shaken off, and find how deadened their hearts are to those sinful ways which before they delighted in, they conclude, that, certainly, this great change must needs proceed from true grace ; whereas, indeed, they do not leave their sins but their sins leave them, and drop off from them as rotten fruit from a tree : the faculties of their souls and the mem-

bers of their bodies, that before were instruments of sin unto unrighteousness, are it may be blunted and become unserviceable. This maim of nature is far from regenerating grace: that doth not disable a man from the service of sin; but only sets him free from it.

4. *To be endowed with eminent gifts and with the common graces of the Spirit, is not to be regenerated.*

These may be bestowed upon the worst of men. There is grace, that renders a man lovely in God's eyes; and there is grace, that renders a man lovely only in men's eyes. Of both these, one and the same Spirit is the author. In some, the Spirit sanctifies the heart; and, in others, it only illuminates the head. Balaam was irradiated with the supernatural light of prophecy. Judas was dignified with the extraordinary office of the apostleship; and sent out to work miracles, together with the rest of the apostles.

Yea, so much are the gifts of the Spirit, the operations of the Spirit, that they are, in a peculiar manner, called the Holy Ghost himself. See this in Acts i. 4. Christ commands his disciples there, to wait at Jerusalem "for the promise of the Father:" that is, for the gifts of the Spirit; for that was the promise of the Father; and he tells them, in the eighth verse, that they should "receive power after that the Holy Ghost was come upon them:" certain it is, that they had already received the Holy Ghost, in the sanctifying graces of it: we cannot think that they were in an unregenerate, unconverted estate, after Christ's death; but they had not as yet received the plentiful effusion of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, of speaking with tongues, of a bold and ready utterance, of working of miracles, and the like, which were then necessary to qualify them for the successful spreading of a new doctrine. And this is more clear in Acts viii. when Philip had preached at Samaria, it is said he converted many, in verse 12. so that, doubtless, many of them had received the Spirit already, in its saving graces: and yet it is said, in ver. 16. that the Holy Ghost was not yet fallen upon any of them; that is, though they were converted, yet they were not endowed with those wonderful gifts of the Spirit before mentioned, which

afterwards they received. Had we been among them, and heard them speak of Christ and gospel mysteries with affections and convictions beyond natural capacities; had we heard them speak unstudied languages, and seen them working miracles, healing the sick, raising the dead; could we have thought, that it was possible for any of those, who were so favoured and filled by the Holy Ghost, to be yet in an unregenerate state, in a state of wrath and damnation? Yet, that there might be some of them so is clear: for the apostle speaks of the like; such, who had "tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and yet might fall away, Heb. vi. 4, 6: that is, there were those, in those primitive times, that had an effusion of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost poured out upon them; of speaking with tongues, of a bold and ready utterance, of working of miracles, and the like: and yet such as these, that had tasted of these heavenly gifts, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, fell away, that is, they were never truly regenerate.

And, certainly, if these extraordinary gifts might be found separate from true grace, much more may those inferior gifts, that the Spirit now dispenseth among Christians be without true regenerating grace. A man may discourse of spiritual mysteries copiously and clearly: he may have gifts of knowledge and utterance: he may preach with evidence and demonstration, and pray with enlargement and affection; and yet, notwithstanding all this, be an utter stranger to a saving work of grace. Gifts prove nothing: these gifts may be but the gilding of a rotten post, the varnish of a corrupt heart. As it was a custom of old to crown those beasts' heads with garlands of flowers, that were ordained to be a sacrifice; so God may sometimes crown the heads of wicked men with flowery parts and gifts, whom yet he intends to make a sacrifice of to his wrath and justice.

*5. A civil and harmless demeanor is not this state of regeneration.*

There are many, that are of a good nature, that live blamelessly as to the world, and that nearly resemble grace: such as St. Paul was; who speaking of himself

saith, touching the law, he was blameless; and such was the young man in the gospel, that came to Christ and demanded what further lesson he should take out; having obeyed all the commands, as he thought: and, yet, this also is short of the regenerating grace of the Spirit, and argues only a sweet disposition, not a gracious heart.

And thus you see how easily men may mistake themselves in the great work of regeneration, upon which depends their eternal happiness; for, " Except a man be born again, he shall never see the kingdom of God :" and yet it is too much to be feared, that many, yea very many, rest upon these things; and think the great determining change is certainly wrought upon them, only because they are morally honest, or eminently gifted, or much reformed, or gained over to the profession of the truth with such a sect or party of professors; whereas, indeed, the new birth consists in none of all these things.

ii. Briefly, therefore, to inform you *what it is*, you may take it thus:—*Regeneration is a change of the whole man, in every part and faculty thereof, from a state of sinful nature, to a state of supernatural grace; whereby the image of God, that we defaced and lost by our first transgression, is again, in some good measure, restored.*

1. Now, as every science hath its proper terms, that are as so many keys to unlock the mysteries contained in it: so, especially, divinity abounds with terms, that are peculiar to its own doctrine; and, in no one point more, than in this of the great change that a sinner undergoes, when he is translated from a state of nature to a state of grace.

That grace, that concurs unto this great change, is of two sorts: either such as alters the relations, wherein we stand unto God; or such as alters the dispositions and habits of our souls.

Of the former sort, are election, which is antecedent to our faith; and reconciliation, justification, adoption, and mystical union, which are consequents unto it. Of these graces it is not my business now to treat, because they lodge only in the breast of God; and their formal effect is not a supernatural infusing of any new habits or principles, but only of new relations. When we speak of a person

justified and adopted, the true adequate notion of these terms doth not declare how his heart is changed towards God, but, if I may so speak, how God's heart is changed towards him; not that he stands otherwise affected unto God, but otherwise related to God, than formerly: of a guilty malefactor, he becomes acquitted and accepted, by the grace of justification; and, of an alien, he becomes a son and heir, by the grace of adoption.

But then there are other graces, that are inherent in us, and work a mighty change in our moral habits and principles; and whereby we also, though not so properly, are denominated gracious. God is denominated gracious, by the grace of justification, adoption, mystical union, and election: and we are denominated gracious, by the habitual graces, that his Spirit infuseth into us and worketh in us. And these are every where besparkled up and down in the scripture, where it speaks of faith, love, patience, self-denial, meekness, knowledge, temperance, and the rest of them: these, as so many stars, ought continually to shine forth in a Christian's life; and, though they may appear very differently; some obscure and cloudy and others bright and glittering, some at one season setting and others at another season rising, yet they all make up but one constellation, whereby we are "translated," as the scripture speaks, "out of darkness into marvellous light."

Now the framing of this complexion or body of grace in the heart, is that, which we call regeneration; it being a fixed constellation of all the several graces of the Spirit in the heart.

The scripture gives it divers other appellations. It is called the "new man," in Eph. iv. 24: the "new creature:" Gal. vi. 15: a transformation into the image of God: 2 Cor. iii. 18: a participation "of the divine nature:" 2 Pet. i. 4: and, in other places, too long to be insisted on now, it is called conversion, effectual calling, sanctification, and renovation: and sometimes, too, it is termed by the name of two principal graces, the two greatest limbs of the new man, faith and repentance, which are often put for the whole work of regeneration.

All these expressions set forth the same work of grace

upon the heart, though they may be understood under different notions. The new man denotes the greatness and entireness of the change. The new creature denotes that almighty power, whereby that entire change is wrought. The image of God and the divine nature denote that conformity, that is thereby made in us to the holy will and nature of God. Effectual calling and conversion denote our returning to God, after our wandering and straying from him. Sanctification denotes that influence, which this great change hath to set us apart for God from common uses; for sanctification, in propriety of speech, signifies a separation of a person or thing from profane and ordinary uses to the service and glory of God: indeed sanctification doth, in strictness of speech, differ from regeneration, though commonly we use them promiscuously; for regeneration is the implanting of the habits and principles of grace, but sanctification is properly the strengthening and increasing of them: it is the progress, that a holy soul makes, when it passes on from one degree of grace to another.

Regeneration is, in nature, before justification; but sanctification follows it.

And, hence, we may observe the order, in which the apostle rangeth them in that famous place, that climax, in Rom. viii. 29, 30. where every grace is a round of the ‘scala cœli,’ that Jacob’s ladder, whereby we ascend up to heaven. It is a place, if any in the book of God, that deserves our most serious thoughts. Says the apostle, “Whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate.” If you ask wherein God’s prescience and foreknowledge differ from predestination, a question that hath caused much strife, I answer,—prescience here respects the end: predestination respects the means, how to obtain it. So that the sense is this:—whom God foreknew that he would save, them he did predestinate to the means of salvation. “He hath predestinated us,” says the apostle, “that we might be conformed to the image of his Son:” that is, he predestinated them to grace, which is the way and means to glory. So, then, where it is said whom God foreknew, that signifies God’s purpose and intention of saving some: where it is said, those he did predestinate,

that signifies God's purpose of calling those, whom he did intend to save, unto the knowledge of his Son, and to the means whereby he might save them. It follows, "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called :" that is, with an effectual call, which is the same with regeneration : whom he predestinated, them he regenerated ; and "whom he thus called," or regenerated, "them he also justified." Here you see justification is put after regeneration, though, indeed, in order of nature, it follows regeneration : for we are justified by faith ; now faith is part of that new nature, that is bestowed upon us in regeneration : we are justified by faith ; wherefore faith is before our justification, and is part of our regeneration. The apostle now proceeds to the last link of this golden chain : "Whom he justifies, them he also glorifies : where we may observe, that it is at least probable, that the glorification, that the apostle here speaks of, may not be the glory of heaven, because he speaks of it as a thing already past and done ; whom he hath justified he hath glorified : we may, without offering violence to the words, interpret it of sanctification ; whom he hath justified, them he hath glorified, that is sanctified : so that glorification here is no more than sanctification ; for sanctification is also called glory, in 2 Cor. iii. 18. We also " beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord ;" from glory to glory, that is, from one degree of sanctification to another ; for, indeed, holiness, that is our sanctification, and the glory of heaven, are but one and the same thing for substance, differing in degrees and circumstances.

So much now for the names, whereby this great change is called.

## 2. Let us now proceed to consider *the nature* of it.

Which, because it is a mutation of the whole man, we cannot better do, than by considering the terms, both from which and to which, this mutation or change passeth.

Let us, therefore, first take a view what man is, in his unregenerate state ; and, then, behold him, as he is new, and as he bears the glorious lineaments of God's image upon his soul.

### (1.) In his unregenerate state.

I shall not consider him, as he is obnoxious to divine wrath and vengeance; for, so, he is a child of wrath, an heir of hell and perdition. But I shall consider him, as he stands alienated from the divine holiness and purity; and as he is despoiled of all those choice perfections, wherewith his nature was at first endowed.

And, here, give me leave to represent to your eyes a wretched and sad spectacle. Whose bowels cannot but yearn, to read that description, which the prophet makes, Ezek. xvi. 4, 5. of a poor, forsaken infant, swathed in its own blood, cast out into the open field, helpless for its weakness, and loathsome for its deformity? This is the very emblem of what we ourselves are, in our unregeneracy; cast out to the loathing of our persons, rolling ourselves in our own filth, and impotent that we cannot help ourselves.

But I shall not stand to represent it to you in generals. To come therefore to particulars, I shall give you these following positions; which may clear up, both wherein consists the state of unregeneracy, and also the misery of such a state.

[1.] The corruption of an unregenerate state consists, in blotting out the divine image; that resemblance of God, which was stamped upon our souls in our first creation.

What the image of God is, I shall more clearly show you afterwards; and how it is again restored to us in regeneration. In the mean time, it may suffice, that, by the image of God, I mean those spiritual habits of knowledge and holiness, that were conferred on Adam in his first creation, and on us in him. These habits were natural to him, and concreated with him; whereby his understanding was raised to a clear and satisfying knowledge of divine truths, and his will inclined to a free and unforced performance of divine and spiritual actions: in this consisted a great part of the image of God. It consisted also, in the harmonious subordination of the inferior faculties to the superior; the will being subject to the dictates of the understanding, and the affections subject to the commands and sovereignty of the will. But, now, all this is lost; in our unregenerate state we are deprived of it; and there is nothing but ruin and an undigested chaos left in an unregenerate soul. Darkness covers the face of

the understanding, that great deep ; and disorders and tumults sway the affections contrary to the guidance of the will, and these sway the will contrary to the dictates of reason : so that it is a state of mere confusion, disorder, and rebellion ; as of man against God, so also of man against himself. It is a state of utter blindness and impotency : When we were weak, then God sent his Son in the likeness of flesh. Yea, it is not only a state of weakness, but it is also a state of spiritual death : " You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins :" Eph. ii. 1.

[2.] The corruption of an unregenerate state consists, in our aversion from God, and in our inordinate conversion to the creature.

And this necessarily follows, upon the loss of God's image. The soul of man is still an active, busy creature ; and must still be putting itself forth in actions suitable to its own nature. Now while it did enjoy God's image, it had power to point every motion of the soul to God, and to fix upon God both as the object and end of all its actions, and that made them all to be holy and divine : but, being now deprived of the image of God, the soul grovels here below ; and, instead of aspiring unto God, pitches its affections and thoughts only upon the creature : and this becomes sin and misery to it; not because it affects the creature simply, but because it affects the creature in an inordinate manner, that is, without affecting God the Creator. Briefly and plainly, the soul must have an inclination and propension, one way or other : to incline to the obeying and loving of God, it cannot now, without the image of God, that should raise up the affections of the soul to a spiritual pitch. Now this image of God we ate deprived of, and that justly too, by our fall ; and, therefore, now the whole bent and inclination of the soul, that ought to be carried out to God, but cannot, pitcheth upon what it can, and that is upon the creature ; those things, that please the carnal sensual appetite, and that in an inordinate manner, to the neglect and slighting, yea to the contempt and hating, of God. And this is the state of the soul in its unregeneracy.

[3.] This corruption of an unregenerate state is spread

over every power and faculty of the soul ; not one escaping the contagion of it.

But, yet, as the sea is called by divers names, according to the divers countries and shores that it flows along by ; so also this corruption of our nature is termed diversely, according to the divers faculties and powers of the soul that it hath depraved. In the understanding, it is called blindness and darkness ; in the will, stubbornness and perverseness : in the affections, it is called disorder, sensuality, and irregularity : and yet, still, it is the same corruption of unregeneracy in every one of them, the same body of sin and death ; though stiled thus diversely, according to the divers faculties that it doth infect.

[4.] This corruption of an unregenerate state is unweariedly working out itself, in every act and motion of our souls.

Not so much as one good thought could ever yet escape to heaven free from it. It is as a corrupt fountain, continually sending forth corrupt and bitter streams ; and, though these streams take several courses, and wander severally into several ways and channels, yet they all taste of the same brackishness : so, though the soul is various in its actions, yet all its actions have a taint and relish from the same corruption, that corruption that hath tainted the fountain.

[5.] Hence it follows, that, whatsoever an unregenerate man doth, it becomes sin to him.

And that, whether you consider his religious, or his civil and ordinary actions. If you take the most splendid and gorgeous duty of an unregenerate man, when it is performed with the most pomp, when his affections are most upon the wing, when he is in the highest elevation of soul ; yet this glittering duty is nothing else but the steam and reeking of corruption, and so becomes offensive unto God, there being nothing of grace in it to perfume it. Hence the psalmist speaks, in Psalm cix. 7. " Let his prayer become sin :" and, says the wise man, " The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord ; " Prov. xv. 8. The best duties of unregenerate men are no better, in God's account and acceptance, than abomination, the " cutting off a dog's neck," or as " the offering

up of swine's blood," or whatever else the soul of God doth most abhor; and how then might such unregenerate men wish themselves rather stocks or stones, senseless and unacted things, than such as they are, men of vigorous and active principles; since every imagination of their hearts, and every motion of their souls, is only evil before God! There is nothing, that such men do, in the whole course of their lives, but, at the last day, it will be found in God's register-book among the catalogue of their sins. Yea, even their commendable and necessary actions : "The plowing of the wicked," says the wise man, "is an abomination to the Lord :" this man eats and drinks, plows and sleeps, and hath done so many thousands of such and such natural actions; but he hath done them in a state of unregeneracy, and therefore they stand all upon the account for so many thousand sins. Nay, he hath prayed so often, and heard so often, made so many prayers, and heard so many sermons, and done many good works ; but yet, all this while, he was in an unconverted estate : these, therefore, are set down in God's day-book, in black ; and they are registered among those sins, that he must give an account for; not for the substance of the actions themselves, but because they come from rotten principles, that defile the best actions which he can perform. His eating, as well as his gluttony ; his drinking, as well as his drunkenness ; his converse, negociation, and trafficking, as well as his covetousness, and inordinate love of the world ; are all set down, and reckoned by God for sins, and such sins as he must reckon for with God.

I speak not these things to discourage any, that may suspect themselves to be in an unconverted estate, from the performance either of the duties of religion, or the necessary and civil affairs of this life : you cannot possibly sit still and do nothing : your thoughts will be working : or, if you do sit still and do nothing, yet your idleness will be a sin. But I speak this only to show the absolute necessity of regeneration ; for, without this inward principle of grace, no action, how moral, how specious, how religious or necessary soever, but will be catalogued down in God's day-book among the number of men's sins.

(2.) Having now considered the 'terminum a quo,'

from which we pass to this great change, let us now consider what it is, that we acquire by the term to which we pass. And that I told you, when I gave you the description of regeneration, is the image of God. Of this I spake somewhat before, but shall now do it more fully.

The image of God is taken, in scripture, in two senses. First, for the essential and co-eternal image of God the Father. And, so, Christ is called the image of God, in Col. i. 15. He "is the image of the invisible God," says the apostle. So also, Heb. i. 3. He is "the brightness of his glory," that is, of God's glory; and he is "the express image of his person." Indeed, it is infinitely past our reach, to conceive what a wonderful impression that was, that stamped the image of the Father upon the Son, in such a sort, as to be the same in substance and duration with the original itself.—Secondly, therefore, to come nearer to our purpose, the image of God is taken sometimes, in scripture, for that resemblance of God, that is upon the soul of man. And so it is said, in Gen. i. 27. that "God created man in his own image." Now, to be this image, implies two things;—first, a likeness and similitude, that man bears unto God:—secondly, it implies, that God made himself the pattern and exemplar, when he drew this likeness of himself upon man. Two things, or two persons may be like each to other, which yet properly are not said to be the one the image of the other, unless the one be made purposely to resemble and represent the other: as milk is said to be like milk, but yet one part is not said to be the image of the other. So, then, when it is said, "God made man after his own image," it implies a likeness in him unto God; and it implies also, that this likeness is wrought in him by God, purposely to resemble him.

Now, here, to clear our passage, I shall consider three things;—wherein the image of God consisted, in which man was, in his primitive state, created:—what parts of that image are lost and defaced by the fall; and what of it still remains upon the soul;—and what of that image is again renewed and restored, in our regeneration.

[1.] What that primitive image of God was, in which he created man.

I answer negatively and positively.

1st. Negatively. The image of God doth not consist in any corporeal resemblance of him, or bodily similitude to him.

For our bodies, though they are of an admirable composure, yet they carry in them no resemblance of God, who is a spirit, and who is “ the God of the spirits of all flesh.” The learned do well distinguish, betwixt ‘ *imago*,’ and ‘ *vestigium Dei*.’ There are ‘ *quædam vestigia Dei*,’ ‘ certain footsteps of God,’ printed upon every creature; by the tracing of which footsteps, we may find out his infinite “ power and godhead,” as the apostle speaks. Thus, there is not the least pile of grass but points upwards to God, as its wise and powerful Maker: there is not the least leaf, but hath written upon it the wisdom and power of God. Every creature, brute and inanimate, bears the print of God’s footsteps upon it. And, of this rank, are our bodies; bearing upon them ‘ *quædam vestigia*,’ some footsteps and tracks of God: and, by how much the more wonderfully they are framed and organized, in which respect the psalmist saith, “ I am fearfully and wonderfully made;” by so much the more discernible are the footsteps of God seen in our bodies, than in the bodies of other creatures: but yet this is not sufficient to make them images of God; for they have not in themselves any resemblance of the divine nature, neither are they spirits nor intellectual substances as God is; and, therefore, though they are said to bear the print of God’s footsteps, yet they are not said to bear God’s image: indeed there were some, that were called Anthropomorphites, that fancied God to be corporeal; and that ascribed to him all members in propriety, that the scripture ascribed to him in condescension, as hands, head, eyes, and feet, and the like; and, consequently, thought that God framed man’s body, according to the image of his own: but this is a stupid error; and a heathen orator had more true information in this point, when he tells us, that the virtues of man make him to be more like to God, than his shape doth: so, then, it is not the body of man, that is the image of God.

2dly. Positively. And so we may take notice, that the image of God consists,

(1st.) In such perfections, as are spiritual: I say, in such spiritual perfections, as are essential and necessary to man as man: such as the rational soul itself, together with those powers and faculties that are necessarily subjected and seated in it: as the understanding, will, and affections.

For, by these, man may be said to bear the image of God, because these have in them some faint glimpses and shadows of the divine essence. The soul is a spirit; and so is God. The soul is an intellectual and free agent; and so is God. Indeed the resemblance betwixt God and us, even in this very thing in which we bear some resemblance of God, is infinitely unsearchable and great. Mark that place, for the confirmation of this, in Gen. ix. 6. "He that sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." Wherein lies the force of this reason? Do not all affirm, that man lost the image of God, by his sin and fall? Or, did God hereby intend to secure the lives of the regenerate, that have this image again restored to them? No, but the weight of the reason lies in this, that every man, whether regenerate or wicked, still bears the image of God, even in this, that he hath a spiritual soul, and that he hath an intellectual mind, that he hath a free and self-determining will: and therefore, whosoever murders man deserves death, because he murders God in 'effigies:' he murders the image of God. This now is one part of the image of God; the spiritual soul, and the rational powers and faculties of it.

(2dly.) Another part of God's image consists in those habitual perfections of man's human nature, that were not essential to him: but rather ornamental; and necessary, not simply to his being, but rather to his well-being.

To make man a rational creature, it was simply necessary to breathe into him a rational soul; and it was also necessary, that that rational soul should be endowed with faculties, with understanding, will, and affections.

But, over and above these necessary things, God gave

him righteous habits, that might rectify those faculties : and these are three.

[1st.] God darted into his understanding a clear and exact knowledge ; not only of those things that are natural, but of those things that are divine also.

Of his knowledge in things that are natural, we have a clear instance : when as all creatures passed before Adam as servants to do homage to their lord, he was able, by a transient view and intuition of them, to give them all names according to their several natures. And his knowledge of the divine nature appeared hence, because his love of him was perfect : and how could he love God, if he had not known him ? Now, in this particular of knowledge, man nearly resembled God, in his first estate : for God's infinite delight is in the knowledge and contemplation of himself, and of his works : and so also was man's. But yet this knowledge was not omniscience ; for there were many things, doubtless, that man was then ignorant of : but he knew whatever was necessary and expedient for him to know ; and that was sufficient for the happiness of his estate, and for the end for which he was created.

[2dly.] Man's will was endowed with a habitual proneness and inclination to all good.

There were then no such bandyings in his will, as now the holiest saints complain of : but the will clasped about every good and holy object, that was presented to its choice ; and that it did, freely and fully, with entireness and delight.

[3dly.] His affections also were all holy, and all of them subject to his holy will.

Now, the best complain, it is seldom that they will what is good : and when they have a will to it, yet they cannot do what they would : the good, which they would do, they cannot do. But in our first blessed estate, there was a harmonious obedience, in all the passions and in all the faculties of the soul, unto the command of the will, without the least tumult or disorder. There were, indeed, motions of the affections and passions in Adam, as of love, hope, joy, and the like ; but it was, as some divines express it, as the bubbling of clean water in a clear chrystal vial, that raised no defilement : whereas, now, it is in us

like the working of the sea, that casteth out mire and filth. These affections were under the command of the will then; and that, both as to the continuance and as to the degrees of them.—As to the continuance of them. The will might command them on and off, at its pleasure. They fixed upon nothing, but what holiness directed them to: and they made their stay no longer, than the same holiness commanded. Like the Centurion's servants, they went and came at the word of their superior.—As to the degrees of them. Now we find it a hard task, to set bounds to our love, fear, joy, and the like: we cannot give way to them, without running into strange excesses and intemperance: our love is become fondness: our joy is become wantonness: our fear is turned into a chilling ague; and our anger into a burning fever. But, in our first blessed estate, all these passions were guided by holy reason: both for their objects, upon which they ought to fix; and also for their measures, how far they ought to let forth themselves.

And thus I have opened the first proposal; delineating to you obscurely the divine image: for the best and most comprehensive notions and words of men can but obscurely trace out the tracks, lines, and figures of the glorious image of God, which the creating finger of the Almighty at first drew upon the soul of man; which, when we compare it with the ruins and rubbish of our present state of misery, may administer just cause of shame, grief, and sorrow.

[2.] Let us now consider, what parts of this image are lost and defaced by our fall; and what of it still remains in every man, as well unregenerate as regenerate.

1st. That part of the image of God, that consisted in those things that are essential to man, is not lost; as the soul, and its faculties of understanding, will, and affections. These still remain the same, for substance, as they did before.

2ndly. Some unregenerate men retain many rare natural perfections of these faculties. Some of them grow up in all ornamental, excellent parts; searching judgments, deep knowledge: when others are born fools and idiots, and are deprived of the use of common reason. Now, though reason and knowledge, even in natural things, be

some part of God's image, that all men have equally forfeited ; yet God is pleased to restore this, in a great measure, sometimes, to some unregenerate men, when he denies it to others : yea, it may be, his own children do not enjoy it in the same degree. This part of God's image is dispensed, in common, both to good and bad ; and, many times, the wicked have a greater share in it than the holy. These gifts, though they bear some weak and obscure resemblance of God, he keeps in the hands of his common providence ; and scatters upon the generality of men, in some measure : unto these we have all lost a right and title, but we have not all lost the actual possession of them ; but God restores them to unregenerate men, as he pleaseth.

3dly. As for that part of the image of God, that consists in holy habits, in spiritual knowledge and righteousness, these we have utterly lost and defaced. The mind is become palpably dark ; muffled up in error and ignorance : the will and affections are violently and unweariedly bent upon the pursuit only of what is evil. And this is the misery of our fall : thus, is our glory stained, and our silver become dross.

[3.] Let us now consider, what of the image of God is again restored to us, in our regeneration.

1st. To this I answer, briefly ;—regeneration restores to us that part of God's image, that consists in holy and spiritual habits, that rectify the operations of our natural faculties and powers.

The mind is illuminated with true knowledge : the will is made compliant to God's will ; and the affections are called off from the pursuit of vanity, and set upon spiritual and heavenly objects. And this is that image of God, that is drawn upon our souls in our regeneration, whereby we are made like to God ; yea, so like to him, that the apostle, in 2 Pet. i. 4. calls it, a participation "of the divine nature." There are, indeed, some strictures and beams of the holiness of God himself shining in a regenerate soul ; though infinitely more weak and waterish, than those in God's infinitely holy essence.

And, here, observe two things.

(1st.) That, in the very instant of our regeneration, all

the graces of the Holy Spirit are implanted in us, at once : for they are all linked together ; and whoever receives any one grace, receives them all. There are faith and love, and the fear of God, and patience, and humility, and self-denial, and the rest of the train of glorious graces : for each of these is a lineament and feature of the divine image, without which it were not complete. And, therefore, that Christian, that can but find any one grace wrought and acted in him by the Spirit of God, may comfortably conclude that he hath all other graces, at least in the habits and principles of them : they may all be weak, indeed ; but, yet, not any one of them is wanting. And it may also serve to stir us up, since we have graces of all sorts that lie latent within us, not to yield to any corruption or temptation ; as that with which we cannot grapple, so as to come off with victory and conquest : for our regeneration furnishes us with all grace ; and there is no particular sin, but we may within ourselves find a particular grace opposite to it, if we would but stir up and rouse it.

(2dly.) Observe also, that the Holy Ghost is, in a peculiar way, the author of this our conformity and similitude unto God. For he it is, that, according to the economy and dispensation of the blessed Trinity, begets us after the image and likeness of God. And, therefore, the text speaks of being “born of the Spirit.” And, so, in scripture, we have frequent mention made of the seal of the Spirit : 2 Cor. i. 22. and Eph. i. 13. Now a seal doth two things : it not only confirms the deed, to which it is annexed ; but it also conforms the wax, upon which the seal is imprinted, to receive its own stamp and image. So, when the Spirit of God doth ‘incubare animæ,’ when it ‘rests upon the soul,’ it casts and moulds it into its own image and shape ; and, of a fleshly carnal soul, it makes it become spiritual, life to itself : and therefore says our Saviour, in John iii. 6. “That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit ;” because the Spirit of God begets in its own likeness. It is like the seal on the wax, that leaves its stamp upon it : so, the soul being sealed by the Spirit, it leaves its own stamp and impression upon it.

2dly. But, betwixt that image of God, which the Spirit

stamps upon us, in our regeneration ; and that image of God, in which we were created ; there is a two-fold difference observable.

(1st.) That image of God, which is restored to us in our regeneration, though it bath a perfection of parts, yet hath not a perfection of degrees.

The image of God, in which man was at first created, had them both : it included all graces ; and it included them all, in their height and in their glory. Now, though the regenerate are as extensively holy as Adam was ; and have as many graces, yea more too, as some think, than ever Adam had : yet they are not intensively so holy, as he was ; but their graces are allayed with a mixture of sin and corruption. Their knowledge is not so comprehensive ; but it is subject to ignorance and errors : their will is not so perfectly guided by the will of God ; but, sometimes, it hath eccentrical motions of their own : and their affections are not so refined ; but that, sometimes, they are inordinate and earthly. Yea, and every faculty and every action are interwoven and intercheckered with grace and sin : so that, at once, the soul, though it be regenerate, yet bears a double image, God's and Satan's : it bears God's image, in its regenerate part ; and the devil's, in its unregenerate part. The best men are like your plaited pictures : wherein, if you look on one side, you may see an angel ; and, if you look on the other side of the light, you may see a devil : so, truly, if you look upon the renewed and regenerate part of a child of God, that is angelical, and bears some glimmerings and resemblances of the image of God upon it ; but, if you turn your eyes on the corrupt and unregenerate part, what appears there, but blackness and deformity, that shadow out the very image of Satan ?

(2dly.) The image of God, restored to us in our regeneration, differs from that, wherein we were first created, in this, that it shall never be totally lost and effaced, as the other was ; and herein, it excels the other.

You see how soon Adam lost his. One sin brought such a great blot upon it, that it was no longer discernible for the image of God. But, now, though this image shine not in such bright and orient colours as that did ;

yet are they more lasting and durable colours, than the former image had. Yea, though the regenerate commit many sins, that stain and sully it: yet the Spirit of God still refresheth it, by the continual influences of his grace; and will preserve it entire, that, in that great day when God shall come to examine every soul, "Whose image and superscription do you bear?" it may indeed be seen, that we bear the image of God, and may be owned by him as his children, and as those that belong to him.

The forming of this image of God, on the soul, is the product of the new birth.

iii. Now, in that the scripture calls the restoring of this image of God, a new birth; it will be expedient to consider *what this metaphor, to be born again, doth import.*

And, here, I shall touch upon some remarkable resemblances, that are betwixt a natural and a spiritual birth, between our first and our second birth.

1. To be born again implies, *that, as no man can bestow upon himself a natural being; so, much less, can any man bestow upon himself a supernatural being.*

What! where were all of us a hundred years since? All in that vast wild wilderness of nothing; all sleeping in our own causes; we ourselves not having then so much existence, as our very dreams have now: and could we awake ourselves out of that sleep? could we procure our own being? could we fetch from heaven those sparks of divine fire, those souls of ours which are now kindled in our breasts? Could we ourselves tie that vital knot betwixt our souls and bodies? No more, certainly, can any carnal, natural man, that is as much nothing in grace as we before we were born were mere nothings in nature, call down into his soul from heaven that living and active principle of grace, that should make him a new man and a new creature.

And therefore the scripture chuseth to express this new birth, by such terms, as do import in us an utter impossibility and impotency to effect it by our own power. It is called the quickening of the dead, in Eph. ii. 1. "You hath he quickened," says the apostle, "who were dead

in trespasses and sins." Look, how impossible it is, for a dead man, that is shut down under the bars of the grave, that is crumbled away into dust and ashes, to pick up again every scattered dust, and form them again into the same members; and how impossible it is for him to breathe without a soul, or to breathe that soul into himself: alike impossible is it, for a natural man, who hath lain many years in the death of sin, to shake off from himself that spiritual death; or to breathe into himself that spiritual and heavenly life, that may make him a living soul before God. Moreover, the grace of regeneration is said to be created in us, in Eph. iv. 24. "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." In creation, the creature is formed out of nothing; and what can nothing contribute to being? Such is every natural man; he is mere nothing in respect of grace; and, therefore, can work nothing of grace in himself. Thus you see the scripture carries it, that, no more than a child can beget itself, or a dead man quicken himself, or a non-entity create itself; no more can any carnal man regenerate himself, or work true saving grace in his own soul.

Indeed, there are a growing number of men, who think that regeneration is the effect of free-will, and that it is in our own power to convert and renew ourselves. Though it be abundant confutation of this spreading error, that it is against the common sense and experience of true Christians; who, as they sadly complain of the averseness of their wills to what is good, even after regeneration, so they have found that, before their regeneration, the greatest obstacle to it was the stubbornness and refractoriness of their own wills, that would never be brought to any terms of compliance with divine grace, had not the Spirit of God, by a sweet and irresistible efficacy, at once both persuaded and subdued them: though this now were sufficient, yet let me add one argument, which I think is unanswerable. If an unregenerate man can, by his own power, regenerate himself, then one of these two absurdities must necessarily follow: either that there are still left some holy habits and principles in the will, that were never lost by the fall; or, else, that

man may make himself truly holy, by a will that is totally corrupt and sinful : but it is very gross to admit either of these.

(1.) There are no holy habits or principles left in a carnal man, whereby he should be able to convert and regenerate himself.

For what holy habits can there be in the will of a corrupt man, unless they are true graces ? And, to affirm that man, in a state of nature, hath true grace inherent in him, whereby he is able to convert and regenerate himself, is dull nonsense, and a flat contradiction ; for it is to affirm, that he hath grace before he hath grace.

(2.) A corrupt will cannot make a holy man.

If there be no such habits and principles left in the will since the fall, then the will must be totally corrupt ; and a corrupt will cannot make a holy man : grace is above and beyond its sphere. Yea, an unregenerate will, in all its inclinations, is utterly contrary unto grace : there is not any one act of the will, but it is evil and sinful ; and it is strange divinity, to affirm that gracious habits may be wrought in us by sinful acts : as soon may a man become just by cozenage, and merciful by oppression, sober by drunkenness, and liberal by griping ; as any man can become holy by acts of his own will, since every act of his will is before conversion sinful and unholy. Besides, the will of man, by the fall, is become a fleshly will ; but, in regeneration, it is made a spiritual will : now it is a most strange kind of production, that a fleshly will should beget a spiritual will ; nor would that, which our Saviour affirms, any longer hold true, in John iii. 6. "That, which is born of the flesh, is flesh," if a fleshly will could beget a spiritual will. You see, then, by this, that no man, by the power and freedom of his own will, can regenerate himself. As for previous dispositions and preparatory works, I deny not but that an unregenerate man may, by the common assistance of the Spirit, and by the industrious and careful improvement of his own power, proceed very far in them, so as not to be far off from the kingdom of God ; but, still, the great change of regeneration itself is not wrought by our own power,

or by our own will: so saith St. John, speaking of believers; and he affirms it, in as express terms as may be, in John i. 13. " Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God :" a plain and undeniable proof, that our will is not the efficient cause of our new birth.

2. In that it is called a being born again, it is implied, *that there must be a father of this divine and heavenly, as well as of the natural birth.*

Now God himself is this Father; and hence is it, that the saints are said to be born of God, and to be the children of God. This is their parentage, their high original and extraction; in which, though they are poor, despised, and distressed, they may more truly glory, than the great ones of the earth in the paint and empty glittering of a noble or honourable title.

But, concerning the duty and dignity of a child under this consideration of being born again, I may have occasion to speak when I come to the application, and so I shall reserve it till then. I am yet on the doctrinal part.

God is now, under a different notion, a Father to his children, by regeneration, and adoption. By adoption, we receive the privileges of children, and are numbered among the family of heaven; made heirs of glory, and co-heirs with Jesus Christ our elder brother. By regeneration, we receive the divine nature, are made partakers of it: and, as natural children often bear such lively representations and resemblances of their parents, that we may know by their very countenances whose they are; so, in the new birth, there is such a resemblance of God stamped upon the soul, that, by the conformity of our wills and affections to his, it may well be discerned that he is our Father. In regeneration, we receive his nature: in adoption, we receive the privileges of his children: we are made sons, by both.

It is true, God is the author of all other things, as well as of the grace of regeneration. By him doth the whole frame of nature subsist, and all men owe their beings to his power and goodness: but, yet, the endearing, and sweet name of Father he appropriates to himself, not because he gives natural beings to his creatures, although

in that respect too he is “ *parens rerum*, ” “ the parent of all things ; ” but because also he gives supernatural grace to his own children, which indeed is a giving them of his own nature. To give them natural beings, is but to communicate to them the effects of his power and providence : but, to give them supernatural grace, is to communicate to them of his own nature, and therefore more especially he is called their Father ; the Father of those, that he doth regenerate. The rest of his works are but the effects of his common goodness and bounty ; but this is the effect of his special grace : wherein God doth more show forth the effects of a Father, than in the production of all the world.

3. *The seminal virtue or means, by which this new birth is effected, is the word of God.*

So you have it expressly, in James i. 18. “ Of his own good will begat he us with the word of truth.” In Ezek. xxxvii. 4. you read that the prophet is commanded to prophesy over a heap of dry bones : such an almighty power was in his words, that it is said, in verses 7, 8. “ as he prophesied, there was a great noise, and shaking among the bones ; and sinews and flesh came up upon them.” An almighty power indeed, that could speak dry bones into living men ! the same, that the prophet did only in a vision, the word of God preached doth in a reality. We are all of us dry bones, till this almighty word breathe life and quickening into us. The preaching of the word is the great means, which God hath appointed for regeneration : Rom. x. 17. “ Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” When God first created man, it is said, that he “ breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; ” but when God new creates man, he breathes into his ears. This is that word, that raiseth the dead ; calling them out of the grave : this is that word, that opens the eyes of the blind, that turns the hearts of the disobedient and rebellious. And, though wicked and profane men scoff at preaching, and count all ministers’ words and God’s word too but so much wind ; yet they are such wind, believe it, as is able to tear rocks, and to rend mountains ; such wind, as, if ever they are saved, must shake and overturn the foundations of all their

carnal confidences and presumptions. Be exhorted, therefore, more to prize, and more to frequent the preaching of the word. How knowest thou, O sinner, but, whilst thou art slothfully absenting thyself from the public ordinances, that word is then spoken, that might have been thy conversion? How knowest thou, but that, whilst thou art sleeping in the congregation, that word is then spoken, that possibly, if thou hadst attended to it, might have awakened thee from the dead sleep of sin and security? Such an energy is there in the word of God, when the Spirit of God clothes it with power, that it breaks in upon the conscience; ruinates and demolishes the frame of sinful nature; and, in an instant, conveys spiritual light, warmth, and quickening into the soul.

*4. There are pangs and throes, that do accompany this new birth, as well as the natural birth.*

And these are convictions and humiliations: when the soul is bowed down under the insupportable burden of its own guilt, and the sense of God's wrath: when it lies grovelling in prayer; rending itself, and heaven too, with its cries. In the midst of all these agonies, Christ Jesus becomes formed in the soul; and the work of grace is accomplished, which is the true ground of joy and comfort for ever after. Indeed these travailing pangs are not alike strong in all men. In some, they are distracting terrors; terrors, that break their bones, and drink up their spirits: and such, usually, they are in old-and customary sinners, that will not be won by more gentle and mild courses: with such knotty pieces as these are, the Spirit of God deals terribly; and, in their new birth, cuts them out of the womb, and saves them after such a manner, that to their present apprehensions he could not deal more dreadfully with them if he had destroyed them. But those, that are converted in their youth, before customariness in sin and hardness of heart had made them impenetrable to the ordinary works of the Spirit of God, with these God deals more mildly; and melts them down, by soft and sweet relentings of soul; and delivers them into the glorious liberty of the children of God, without those violent pangs and convulsions, that others do undergo: yet in all that are sanctified and regenerated, after they arrive at the use

of reason, it holds true in the new birth, as well as in the natural birth, that they do all of them bring forth in sorrow.

II. Thus you see what this work of regeneration is, without which, our Saviour tells us, that "no man shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."

And, to show both the certainty and weight of this truth, he doth twice assert it: once in the third verse; and, then again, in the text.

This is that very first doctrine, in which our Saviour instructs his novice-disciple. Nicodemus, being convinced of Christ's extraordinary mission by the miracles that he wrought, courts him with terms full of humble respect. "Rabbi," says he, "thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." To this our Saviour answers, more pertinently to his salvation than to his charesis, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God:" as if he should say, 'The miracles, that I do, prove my mission, that I am sent of God; but I do greater miracles than any, which thou hast seen or heard of. Thou hast heard, perhaps, that I restore sight to those that are blind; and life to those that are dead: but I am come to give eyes to those that do already see; and to give life to those that do already live. I am come to cause those, that are already born, to be born again: and this is a miracle, that must be wrought upon thee, and upon all that shall be saved; to turn flesh into spirit, to fashion lumps of clay into the glorious similitude of the image of God. This is the greatest of all miracles, and this great miracle must be wrought upon all; for, except this be done,' says our Saviour, 'no man can enter into heaven.'

The words contain in them a general proposition—a man cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; an exceptive limitation, added to this general proposition—except a man be born again.

And both these do deliver to us this proposition or doctrinal observation, *that regeneration, or the new birth, is of absolute necessity unto eternal life.*

There is no other change simply necessary, but only this. If thou art poor, thou mayest so continue, and yet be saved: if thou art despised, thou mayest so continue,

and yet be saved : if thou art unlearned, thou mayest continue so, and yet be saved. Only one change is necessary : if thou art wicked and ungodly, and continuest so, Christ, who hath the keys of heaven, who shutteth and no man openeth, hath himself doomed thee, that thou shalt in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. This is also definitively pronounced by the apostle, Heb. xii. 14. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

In the prosecuting of this doctrine, I shall first give you some demonstrations of it, and then apply it.

Very difficult it is to persuade men against the prejudices of their corrupt hearts. 'This great change,' say they, 'is more than needs.' Regeneration begins now to be decried, by as great masters in Israel, as ever Nicodemus was. Many understand not to what end the fabric of corrupt nature should be demolished ; and men, as it were, turned out of themselves. They think, if they are but baptized, whereby, as they suppose, the guilt of original sin is washed away ; and lead a sober religious life, keeping from gross actual sins ; that this is sufficient for the obtaining of heaven, without those hard and inexplicable notions of regeneration and the new birth.

I shall, therefore, endeavour to convince you of the indispensable necessity that there is, of being born again ; that so, when you are persuaded of it, you may give no rest to yourselves nor unto God, till he cause his Spirit, which is that "wind that bloweth where it listeth," to breathe spiritual life into you, without which it is impossible that you should inherit eternal life.

i. There is *an identity or sameness betwixt grace and glory* ; and therefore it is, that regeneration is so necessary unto salvation.

What is that illustrious thing, that we call the glory of heaven ? Is it, that we shall outshine the brightness of the sun ? or that we shall tread on a pavement of stars ? Is it a freedom from diseases, pains, and death ? Is it, that we shall hear the melody and songs of saints and angels ? These things indeed, and whatever the heart of man can desire or imagine to be excellent, do fill up this blessed estate : but, yet, that, which chiefly constitutes heaven, is

holiness ; that very holiness, that wicked men, who yet presumptuously hope to inherit heaven, do yet despise and hate on earth. We shall therefore be united to God by love, depend on him by faith, obey him with delight : and that, with the very same love, faith, and delight, as we do here on earth ; only these graces shall then be exalted above all imperfections and frailties. This is the glory of heaven. The glory of God himself consists, especially, in his infinite holiness ; and, therefore, in that most triumphant song of Moses, in Exod. xv. 11. God is styled “glorious in holiness, fearful in praises.” Now the glory of the saints in heaven is but a reflection cast upon them from the glory of God ; and, therefore, as he is especially glorious in his holiness, so are they also glorious in their holiness. If, then, grace and glory be the very same thing, canst thou, O sinner, ever hope for glory without grace ? Or, is not this the heaven, that thou dost desire and hope for ? Is it a place of ease and pleasure only, that thou wishest ; where thou mayest be free from cares and fears, from sorrows and sad hours ? why this is impossible : such a heaven God never made, nor canst thou in reason expect ; for God hath so linked sin and the curse together, that heaven itself would be no sanctuary to thee from the regrets and stings of conscience, nor from the horror and ghastly fear of wrath, if sin and guilt should enter there with thee.

ii. *Unregenerate men are utterly unsuitable to this state of glory* ; and, therefore, there must necessarily intervene this great change of regeneration.

All true pleasure and delight springs from the suitability of the object to the power or faculty that receives it. Thus Solomon tells us, “ It is a pleasant thing for the eye to behold the sun,” or the light ; it is pleasant also for the ear to hear melody ; because these objects are attempered and proportioned to the senses. Now as light brings no pleasure to a blind man, nor music to a deaf man : so there would be nothing pleasing in heaven to us ; but that God doth, beforehand, by his grace temper and proportion our souls to that glory, that he will then reveal unto us. Hence it is, that the apostle, in Col. i. 12. gives thanks unto

God, that " hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

But wicked unregenerate men are altogether unsuitable, both to the work, and also to the reward of heaven.

*1. They are unsuitable to the work of heaven.*

And what is the work of heaven, but the adoring, admiring, blessing, praising, loving, and serving of God for ever and ever ? This is that work, wherein saints and angels spend an eternity. And dost thou, O prophane wretch, think to crowd in among that blessed company, and join with them in this blessed work ? What ! must that heart of thine, which here on earth was used only as the devil's pot to seeth and stew wicked thoughts in, be now on a sudden filled with the spiritual praises of the great God ? Is this, thinkest thou, fit or likely ? Is it fit, that that tongue of thine, which hath even been blistered with horrid oaths, cursed revilings, and reproaches of God and godliness, should first in heaven begin to set forth the high praises of God ? There are none admitted to be free citizens of the new Jerusalem, but only such as have first served out their time of holiness, some more, some fewer years, here on earth. The work of heaven must be learned in the time of our apprenticeship on earth. And tell me now, what delight do you take in holiness ? Is it not a task and burden to you, I will not say always to keep alive in your thoughts constant meditations of holy things, and vigorous affections towards them ; but is it not a task and burden to you, to be sometimes drawn to the external performance of holy duties ? Why else do you engage so seldom, and so slightly in them ? What makes it thus your task, but an unholy and an unchanged heart ? And what think you would it be, a heaven or a hell, a happiness or a torment to you, to spend an eternity in the most fixed contemplations, and in a most ardent love of God ? You, who cannot bear the imperfect holiness of God's children, but rail at it as unnecessary and a puny preciseness, how will you be able to bear the most consummate holiness of heaven ? Now wicked men, though they vex at the purity of the saints and laugh at it at once, yet is it toilsome ; though it is a devilish contentment to them, that they can reproach their defects : should these men enter into heaven

with unchanged hearts, heaven would be a place of exact torture to them; to find nothing there but that purity which they hate, and that perfect purity which hath no defects for them to abuse.

Behold, then, the certain and unavoidable misery of unregenerate men; that even heaven itself cannot make them happy, nor is it scarce in the power of the Almighty to bless them! Tell me, thou, that, in holy duties, grudgeth at every word that is spoken, and at every sand that runs; that thinkest every summons to the public worship, as unpleasant as the sound of thy passing-bell; that sayest, "When will the sabbath be gone, and the ordinances be over?" what wilt thou do in heaven? what shall such an unholy heart do there, where a sabbath shall be as long as eternity itself; where there shall be nothing but holy duties; and where there shall not be a spare minute, so much as for a vain thought or an idle word? What wilt thou do in heaven, where, whatsoever thou shalt hear, see, or converse with is all holy? And, by how much more perfect the holiness of heaven is, than that of the saints on earth; by so much the more irksome and intolerable would it be to wicked men: for, if they cannot endure the weak light of a star, how will they be able to bear the dazzling light of the sun itself?

I speak all this to convince wicked men, how weak, vain, and foolish a thing it is, for them to hope for happiness without endeavouring after this great change. Misery pursues them, even to heaven itself; and they would not be happy, even there. Certain it is, that God never bestows heaven upon any, but beforehand he makes them agreeable to its holiness by their own. As for swines and dogs, filthy and impure sinners, God will never punish them with the purity of heaven: no; he hath provided another place for their torment; where they shall eternally and incessantly hate and blaspheme God, as the saints in glory love and praise God. It is therefore necessary, that, as musicians tune their instruments before they enter into the presence of any; so our hearts should be tuned to the songs and praises of heaven, before we enter into the glorious presence of God, to be made his music for ever.

*2. Unregenerate men are unsuitable to the reward of heaven.*

As the work there is spiritual work, so the reward is a spiritual reward. And it consists, especially, in two things; both of them unsuitable to a carnal heart: in a clear vision of God; and an unimaginable entireness of communion with him in heaven. And these two things, of all others, unholy persons cannot bear.

(1.) The sight of God, to a sinner, is infinitely full of dread and terror.

You read in scripture what dreadful apprehensions, even God's own children have had, after some, though but restrained and reserved, discoveries of himself to them; and that, because they had still some remainders of corruption in them, that grace in this life could not destroy. Thus, the prophet Isaiah cries out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of Hosts:" and, so, when Christ put forth his divine power in working of a miracle, the glory of it was so terrible and so unsupportable, even to holy Peter, that he cries out, Luke v. 8. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." And if these faint discoveries of God, even to holy men themselves, were so astonishing and unsupportable, what a confounding sight then will it be, to have all the glorious attributes of God break forth in a full flash upon the faces of wicked men; when, among the rest of those attributes, they shall behold the dread wrath and severe justice of God, to be sworn and armed against sin and sinners! Is this a sight, that will make heaven desirable to a wicked man? How dost thou think to endure the rays of that excellent glory and majesty, which make even the eyes of the angels themselves to twinkle with the dazzling brightness of it?

(2.) As for that near bosom-communion with God, wherein stands another part of the reward of heaven; this is that, which wicked men hate: yea, they hate that any should pretend to it.

Those sweet, endearing intercourses, that pass betwixt God and the soul, in ways of worship, of love for love, and of obedience for mercies received, they never knew on

earth, and how then shall they be fit for them in heaven? Certainly to be for ever tied up to such spiritualities as these, will make heaven but an uncomfortable place to an ungodly, unchanged heart.

Now tell me, after this representation made unto you, both of the work and of the reward of heaven, whether you are indeed willing to be in this eternal state or no. A strange question, you may think! ‘What! to ask men whether they are willing to go to heaven, and to be possessed of glory!’ But, let me tell you, it is an impossible thing, for an unsanctified heart really to wish to be in heaven; considering it under that notion of perfect purity and true holiness, which hath now been laid before you. Do you wish to be for ever employed in the loving, praising, serving, and enjoying of God, without interruption or cessation? why then do you not endeavour to fit yourselves for it, against the time of your appearing in glory? why do you not labour after true grace, that alone can fit you for that holy and blessed work? That idea and notion, that wicked men frame to themselves of heaven, only as a place of ease, rest, and all blessedness, makes them to believe that they do really wish themselves possessed of it; but, yet, if it could be supposed that such a person were taken up into heaven, he would find it a place so contrary to his fancy and corrupt inclinations, that he would soon wish rather to be on earth again in the pursuit of his more sensible and suitable pleasures.

I have the longer insisted on this particular demonstration, because I look upon this as a most convincing argument, to make every wicked man see how unfit he is, in a state of unregeneracy for the state of glory. As ever, therefore, you hope for heaven, and I dare assure myself that this is the hope of all of you, make sure to yourselves this great change. It is no notion, that I have now preached unto you: your natures and your lives must be changed; or, believe it, you will be found at the last day under the wrath of God. For God will not change or alter the word that is gone out of his mouth: he hath said it, Christ who is the truth and word of God hath pronounced it, that, without this new birth or regeneration, no man shall inherit the kingdom of God.

iii. *Whatsoever a man doth in a state of unregeneracy is sin; and, therefore, the change of regeneration is absolutely necessary, unto eternal life.*

Whatever such a man's whole life is, it is nothing else but a continued course of sin, without either interruption or cessation: and, in this one particular lies a main difference betwixt a regenerate and unregenerate man. The regenerate man, through that corruption that is remaining in him, sins in every thing that he doth; but, whatever an unregenerate man doth is sin: there is the difference: the one doth, as it were, tread awry, in a right path; and the other runs out into a crooked and perverse one. And how then is it possible for such men ever to arrive at heaven, since every step they take leads down to the chambers of death and destruction?

I spake somewhat to this before, in opening to you the misery of an unregenerate state and condition; and showed you then, that the scripture every where speaks of the civil actions and the religious duties of wicked men as sins: their ploughing is sin; and so also is their praying: yea, whatever they do is sin; they sin in doing evil, and they sin in doing good.

But I shall pass by that, and briefly inquire what it is, that makes all the actions and all the duties, that wicked men perform, to be thus sinful. And this may be reduced to two particulars: and these are the principle from which, and the end to which, their actions are done.

1. *The principle from whence all the actions of an unregenerate man flow is corrupt; and when the fountain is corrupt, the streams also, that issue from thence, must needs be tainted.*

That principle, that is necessarily required to make our actions to be truly good and holy, is the sincere and superlative love of God. What we do becomes then a good action, when we do it from the commanding motive of divine love: and, therefore, our Saviour saith, in John xiv. 24. "He, that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings." Our whole duty consisteth, either in that which immediately respects God, or in that which immediately respects man; and, accordingly, God hath comprised the

whole law in two tables: in the one, he prescribes the services due to himself; and, in the other, he requires from us what is due to men: and both these are fulfilled by love. So, saith the apostle, Rom. xiii. 10. "Love is the fulfilling of the law: and, therefore, our Saviour reduceth all the ten commandments unto two, in Mat. xxii. 37—39. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. This is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Our Saviour reduceth all unto two, and these two speak but one and the same thing, love, which is the fulfilling of the commandment. Now this teacheth us, that, whatever external conformity our actions may carry in them to the letter of the law, yet are they not true obedience to God's commandments, if they flow not from a principle of love. Though you may perform each particular duty required in each particular command, yet this is not fulfilling but transgressing the law, if what you do is not done out of a principle of divine love. This is that universal qualification, that can alone make our duties truly good and acceptable unto God. So that, either to do contrary to the law, or to do actions that the law requires without love to God, are both of them sins; the one against the express letter, and the other against the true sense, of the law. Now no unregenerate man can act any thing from this divine principle of the love of God; for this is implanted in us, only by regeneration: and, therefore it is said, 1 John iv. 7. "Every one, that loveth, is born of God." The great moving principle in a carnal man, that sets him on to work every thing that he doth, is love indeed, but it is only self-love; not love to God, but love to self; a love, that is enmity and hatred against God; and, therefore, whatever he doth is sin.

2. As all unregenerate men fail in the principle, so they also fail in *the end of all their actions*. For, such as a man's principle is, such also will be the end that he proounds. Water will naturally rise no higher than the spring-head from whence it flows: so neither can any man's principles carry him out to act above themselves. Now as the love of God is the moving principle to a re-

generate man, so the glory of God is his determining end: and so, on the contrary, self-love being the only principle of an unregenerate man's actions, self-preservation must be his utmost end into which he resolves all. And, because God hath in his word of truth threatened destruction to those who persevere in sin, and promised an unconceivable reward of glory to obedience, self-love here interposes; and excites to the external duties of religion, that thereby it may escape the one and obtain the other. Now, herein, self-love is very blind: for, by propounding himself as his end, he loseth the reward sought for, and all his services become only sins.

I would not be thought to condemn this kind of self-seeking in religion, for I know that it is one of the greatest incentives to obedience. Moses "had respect unto the recompence of the reward," and encouraged himself by it: yea, of Christ, a greater than Moses, the apostle saith, he had an eye upon the glory set before him, to encourage him to undergo those humiliations and abasements that he was sent into the world for. Only when a man's self-concernments stand so full in his eye, that he cannot look either beside them or above them, then do such self-ends become sinful in themselves, and turn also every action that is directed by them into sin.

Here, then, let every carnal, unchanged sinner see the sad and deplorable condition he is in: what little ground he hath to hope for heaven and salvation. Alas! sinners, how do you hope to be saved? The only way, that leads to heaven and happiness, is faith and good works: not such equivocal good works, as most men rely upon; but such genuine ones, as have the love of God for their principle, and the glory of God for their end: and such no unregenerate man can produce. All the rest are but trash and lumber; and such, as will rather burden, than crown your souls, at the last day. Think of it seriously: unless the foundation be laid in a real change of grace wrought upon your souls, all that afterwards you build is but hay and stubble; such, as will only add fuel to your unquenchable fire. Think not, therefore, as many ignorant, sottish people do, of balancing your evil deeds by your good: for, if you are in an

unregenerate, in a natural state and condition, if in the same that you brought into the world, there is nothing but what is evil and sinful. And it is very sad to consider, that, when God and your own consciences shall come, at the last day, to take a review of your lives; those lives, that have been full of actions, perhaps for forty, fifty, or three-score years together; that then they shall be found to be but one continued series of wickedness, one sin succeeding another without the least gap made in it by one good and holy work. This is the condition of every unregenerate sinner. And, therefore, if ever you hope for heaven, endeavour for regeneration: for this change is absolutely necessary, for the raising of any of your actions from being sinful to be holy.

*iv. Heaven, in scripture, is promised to be given by way of inheritance, and no otherwise.*

So you have it, in Acts xx. 32. and, in Acts xxvi. 18, and in many other places. Now an inheritance denotes sonship: God will not give that inheritance unto any, but to those, that are his own children. We are all of us naturally strangers to God: and, before we can become his children, we must be new born; and, by this new birth it is, that we are made heirs of glory, and, co-heirs with Jesus Christ our elder brother: and therefore regeneration is absolutely necessary unto eternal salvation.

*v. It is not for the honour of God, to bestow heaven and happiness upon sinful men, unless they are changed.* The glory of God is chiefly manifested in our regeneration. Should he admit sinners into heaven, many of his attributes would suffer thereby. His truth would suffer, in saving those, whom in his word he had doomed to damnation. His justice would suffer; for, if he should save all wicked men, and leave none as vessels of wrath, what would become of the glory of his justice and severity? if he should save some, and not all, this would be partiality; seeing all, according to the terms of the gospel, are equally liable to damnation. His holiness would suffer also, in the admitting of unholy and impure men to inhabit for ever before him, who is of purer eyes than to

behold sin on earth with approbation, and therefore certainly will not behold sin in heaven with countenance.

*vi. Both the persons and the performances of unregenerate men, while they are such, are displeasing unto God; and, therefore, this change is necessary in order unto salvation.*

Certainly, if God neither loves what they are nor what they do, it will be impossible for them to enter into heaven, while God keeps it garrisoned against them; unless they can break down the eternal fence, and take it by another force than ever John Baptist's hearers did.

Now that God neither loves unregenerate men's persons nor performances, neither what they are nor what they do, is clear.

*1. He loves not what they are: their persons are displeasing to him.*

Neither is this displeasure founded upon a small dislike, but upon that most bitter and implacable passion of hatred: Psalm v. 5. "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity." And this hatred is reciprocal: for, as wicked men are hated by God, so they are haters of God: Rom. i. 30. "Haters of God." Hence the apostle tells us expressly, "they, that are in the flesh," that is, in their unregenerate state, "cannot please God," Rom. viii. 8. and he gives the reason of it, in verse 7. "Because," says he, "the carnal mind is enmity against God." Thus you see the opposition is mutual: and amounts to no less than a hatred on both parts, both on God's and on the sinner's. Now, though anger be for the present a sharp and eager passion, yet is it soon pacified by a retribution of wrong for wrong; but hatred is irreconcileable, and rests satisfied in nothing less than in the utter destruction of its object: and thus wicked men hate God, and wish at least there were none, and do what they can to dethrone him; and God again so hates them, that he resolves he will have no peace with them; "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked:" but will pursue them to destruction. Let sinners then seriously consider, that they are mortally hated by that God, who is of infinite power; and can, when he pleaseth, bring upon them the dreadful effects of his hatred. And

is it like that such men shall ever enter into heaven, where there is such a hatred armed with power to their just and eternal perdition ? Are you stronger than God ? or are you more mighty than the Almighty ? Can you reverse his decree, whereby he hath doomed all the wicked unto hell ? or can you compel him to make other terms with you, than he hath already propounded in his unalterable word ? Can you distress him to surrender heaven to you ? or can you break down the walls and ramparts of heaven ; and burst open those everlasting gates, that he hath shut and sealed against you ? Alas ! then, what are all your hopes ? Where-to is it, that you trust ? Do you think, at last, to enter heaven as friends, who now daily assault the God of heaven as enemies ? Assure yourselves, so long as God is able to hold it out against you, not one wicked wretch shall ever enter there. When the angels rebelled, God chased whole millions of them out of heaven ; and do you think that ever he will admit rebellious men into heaven ? No : doubtless the same hatred, that cast them out headlong, and pursues them down to the pit of hell, will also pursue all the wicked of the world thither, who are as well enemies to God as the devils themselves. Let all unrenewed sinners, therefore, sadly and seriously consider with themselves what hopes they have of heaven, since God counts them for enemies ; and professes that he hates them, nay, not only hates them, but hates the very places where they are for their sakes : so you have it, in Amos. vi. 8. " The Lord God hath sworn by himself ; I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and I hate his palaces." And should wicked men come into heaven, heaven would become a hateful seat unto God.

2. As their persons are hateful, so also *all their performances are displeasing unto God.*

This follows upon the former : for where the person is not accepted, the services cannot. And therefore it is said, Gen. iv. 4. " The Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering :" first, to his person ; and, then, to his service. If your persons be hateful to God, never expect that your performances should be acceptable. And the reason is clear, because there is but one way of acceptance for ourselves and for our duties, and that is through Christ.

As the best are not, in this life, free from the remainders of sin ; so neither are their best duties free from the mixtures of sin : now these sinful mixtures are so manifest unto God, that he must needs reject and abominate them, were it not that Christ, into whose hands they are first delivered, separates those mixtures, and fills up all their defects by the redundancy of his own merits : but the duties of wicked men are not accepted in Christ ; so audacious and bold are they, as to come before God without a mediator to present them ; and that God, who is pleased with nothing but what is absolutely perfect, if not so in itself yet at least in the mediation of his Son, seeing so many faults and flaws in the services of wicked men, cannot but cast them back as dung and filth in their faces ; for God, accepting of nothing but what is perfect, and the services of wicked men wanting the merits of Jesus Christ, they come up before God as unsavory stenches instead of sweet smells. This is the fruitless issue of wicked men's duties : and, therefore, the apostle tells us, in Heb. xi. 6. that "without faith it is impossible to please God ;" because faith is that grace, that unites and makes us one with Christ, and gives us an interest in those merits that alone can procure acceptance for ourselves and for our services : but wicked and unregenerate men have not this faith ; and, therefore, nothing that they do is well-pleasing unto God. They may, for the good works that they do, be rewarded possibly with temporal blessings, and certainly with the mitigation of future punishments ; but the reward of eternal life belongs to none, but to those, whose services are accepted through Him to whom their persons are united.

See here, then, the miserable shipwreck of all the hopes of carnal men : who regard not what they are, but look only, and that too with a too favourable eye, upon what they do ; and, with the boasting pharisee, make large inventories of their good works. They fast twice a week, and give alms often : they are frequent in prayer, and constant at the ordinances : and therefore they think, certainly, that they shall enter into heaven with the forwardest. But, alas ! what is all this ? God respects what thou art, as well as what thou dost ; and if all your duties proceed

from an unchanged, unrenewed heart, he neither accepts them, nor regards them. Thou, perhaps, thinkest that thou hast laid up a great mass of treasure for thy soul, against the time to come; whereas, at the last day, it will be found to be but great heaps of dung and filth. Nay, let me tell you, should you pray till your knees took root in the earth, could you nail your eyes to heaven, could you melt your hearts into tears, and vanish away into sight, yea and spend every moment of your lives far better than ever you spent the best, and yet should you remain unsanctified and unchanged, all this would be of no account with God; but, instead of a ‘Euge,’ “Well done, good and faithful servant,” you would meet with that unexpected demand, “Who hath required these things at your hands?” Consider seriously and sadly of this, you, who think that you have many duties upon the file in heaven, as so many evidences of your right and title unto heaven. As you would not have all these to be lost, and utterly in vain; so look to it, that they proceed from hearts, that are truly sanctified and renewed: without which, they will be of no avail at all in God’s esteem.

And so much for the demonstrations of this point.

III. I come now to make some *use* and *application* of what hath been spoken concerning this great and necessary doctrine of regeneration.

It is not a particular doctrine, that concerns some persons, and not others: upon this lies the eternal salvation of the whole world.

i. And, therefore, in the first place, seeing it is impossible ever to obtain life eternal without regeneration or the new birth, let us then by this *try our title to heaven*.

Put it seriously to the question;—are we indeed born again? Are we become the children of God: such as have a right and title to the purchased inheritance? The question is of vast concernment: and a mistake in this, either hazards our souls, by presumptuous conceits that we are the children of God, when yet we are strangers and enemies to him; or destroys our comfort, by sinister apprehensions that we are aliens and outcasts, when yet we are begotten again by his Spirit, at least to the grounds of a lively hope.

I shall endeavour to manage this use of trial, by laying down some particular attainments of carnal men, that possibly they may mistake for evidences of their regeneration; by laying down some particulars, that the scripture hath made infallible marks and tests of a regenerate person.

1. As to the first of these, the usual mistakes of those, whose convictions ever awaken them to a self-examination, are in that they rely upon works preparatory to regeneration, for the work of regeneration itself: for as, in natural generation, there is some previous disposition of matter, before there is the existence of a form; so, in regeneration, commonly, though not always, there are some preparations of the soul by the common works of the Spirit, before the new creature is formed in it.

Now, by regeneration, there is a five-fold change wrought;—upon the understanding or judgment, by enlightening it;—upon the conscience, by awakening and pacifying it;—upon the affections, by spiritualizing them;—upon the will, by converting it;—upon the life and conversation, by reforming it.

From each of these particulars, carnal men may collect mistaken evidences for their regeneration: and these I shall endeavour to discover to you.

(1.) Touching the mind or understanding: that may be greatly irradiated with a clear and sparkling knowledge of spiritual objects, when yet the soul is not truly regenerated.

It is true, as, in the creation of the world, light was numbered amongst the first of God's works; so, in this new creation, the first work of the Spirit of God is to shed abroad a heavenly light into the understanding: and, therefore, we have this first in order, in the commission, that Christ gives unto St. Paul, Acts xxvi: 17, 18. "I send thee to the Gentiles, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light;" and, then it follows, "from the power of Satan unto God." But, yet, notwithstanding there is an illumination about spiritual things that may gild and beautify the understandings of unregenerate men; who, like the toad, may be full of poison, though she hath a precious stone in her head. The apostle lays down this as one of the first attainments that un-

regenerate men may have, and yet be apostates : Heb. vi. 4, 6. " For it is impossible for those, who were once enlightened ; if they shall fall away, to renew them again by repentance." They may not only have a deep knowledge of gospel mysteries, so as to see the whole compages and concatenation of the doctrine of Christ, and be able to unfold them also unto others ; but also have particular discoveries of the glory and beauty that is in those things. See it in Balaam's ecstasy, Numb. xxiv. 5. " How amiable are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel !" where, besides, that prophetical illumination which was darted into him immediately by the Spirit of God, he had also a glorious discovery made to him of the beauty and excellency of the spiritual state of the church : it was not only a view of the order and discipline of the Israelitish camp, that made him break forth into high admirations ; but also a seeing of them ranged under Jesus Christ the Captain of their salvation, which was an extraordinary illumination to such an unregenerate wretched man as Balaam was. Such discoveries of the most spiritual objects, carnal hearts may have made unto them : they may see their lost estate by nature, the way of recovery by grace, the suitableness of Christ to their souls, the riches of his grace, the freeness of his love, the readiness of his heart to save them, the desirableness of happiness, and the beauties of holiness ; and yet, for all this, remain still in a carnal and unregenerate state.

Now such illumination of carnal men falls short of being a good evidence of regeneration in two particulars.

[1.] Because it is a barren light.

That illumination, that is saving, is not only light, but influence also. As the light of the sun doth not only serve to paint the world, and varnish over the variety and beauty of the several creatures that are in it ; but, by the grateful heat that its influence insinuates and soaks into them, doth also refresh them ; and, as its light discovers their beauties, so its influence increaseth them : so, saving illumination not only illustrates the soul by its light ; but, by its congealing influences, nourisheth it, draws sap into it and fruit from it. But the illumination of wicked men

is but a barren light; and hath no influences in it, to make the soul to grow and bring forth the fruits of holiness.

[2.] It is an ineffectual, idle light.

The illumination, that is saving, is also transforming: 2 Cor. iii. 18. "We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory." If a beam of the sun fall upon a loooking glass, it not only makes the glass to have a greater and a more glorious light, but it represents the image of the sun in it; but let it beat never so clearly against a mud-wall, though it doth enlighten it, yet it leaves no image upon it: so, truly, the illumination, that is saving, not only irradiates, but transforms. If you look upon the sun when it is in its full strength, the light thereof will imprint the shape and image on the eye; so that, look where you will, still the appearance of the sun is visibly before you: so, every sight, that a true Christian hath of the Sun of righteousness, makes a parallel, another sun in his soul. But the illumination of wicked men only enlightens, but doth not change them: their understandings may be irradiated with glorious discoveries of God, and Christ, and the things of another world; but this doth not transform them into the image and likeness of these things. The illumination of a regenerate person is like light, that breaks through the air in an instant, and turns all the vast body throughout into light: but, in a carnal heart, it is but like light falling upon jet or ebony, that makes it shining, but changeth not its hue and blackness. Yea, it is with them, as it is with men that lie long tanning in the sun; who, though they are enlightened by the sun, yet they are also made black and swarthy by it: so, though men may have the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ shining strongly upon them, yet that very light tans their souls, makes them more black and deformed, and aggravates their sins. So, then, thou mayest have as much notional knowledge of God and of the mysteries of the Gospel, as any regenerate person whatever; yea, and much more: and yet, for all this, have no good evidence of thy regeneration; for this knowledge is not therefore saving because it is clear, but because it is influential and transforming.

And that is the first thing, which many mistake for regeneration; because they are enlightened.

(2.) As to the conscience, neither the peace nor yet the trouble of conscience, are good evidences of a man's regeneration.

[1.] Not the peace of conscience.

For though, where this peace is true, it is always an effect of grace; and therefore we have them so often coupled together, as Rom. i. 7. and 1 Cor. i. 3. "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God the Father:" yet there is that which looks very like peace of conscience, though it is not so in reality; and this is a supine presumption, a carnal stupidity and ossitancy of conscience, in men, that never have been troubled with the sight of sin or the sense of wrath, nor ever had any serious thoughts of their vileness by it: but it is with them, as it was with those presumptuous sinners in Deut. xxix. 19. who bless themselves in their hearts, saying, "they shall have peace, though they walk on in the imagination of their hearts, adding drunkenness to thirst." Now this peace is founded only upon a bold and confident persuasion, without any examination of their interest in God, and of his love and favour to them: "God is infinitely merciful and gracious, and he will exalt his mercy above all his name; and, therefore, as he hath exalted his power in creating and sustaining us, will he not also much more exalt his mercy in saving us?" Thus, as madmen often fancy themselves to be kings or some great persons, when indeed they are wretched and miserable spectacles; so do these spiritually mad men: they not only, with the devil, look upon the glory of this world, and say, "All is mine;" but they look upon the glory of heaven itself, and say presumptuously all this is theirs. This is a spiritual frenzy, that makes them speak of great matters, in which they have no interest at all. Yea, this presumption is often accompanied with a fiducial, or rather a confidential application to themselves, in particular, of the love of God, and of the merit of Jesus Christ, so as to appropriate them unto themselves as their own: now this is the highest act of faith, when it flowers up into assurance, to say with St. Thomas, "My Lord and my God;" yet,

through a mere wretched security, sinners take it for granted that God is theirs, though they never examined their evidences, and scarce know upon what terms God hath promised to become ours. To such I may say, as our Saviour doth, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living :" he is not the Father of such, as live in and love their wickedness : it were a dishonour to him, to be a Father to such children. As we must not discourage the broken and contrite spirit, but embolden him to appropriate Christ to himself in particular : so we must let wicked men know withal, that they call God their God and Father in presumption, and in the security of their hearts only ; and their disappointment will be sad, when, instead of finding him their God and Father, they shall only find him their Judge. Now it appears that this peace of a carnal man's conscience is only from a deep spiritual security : because, if you come to examine the grounds of it, what is it that such plead, except the goodness of their hearts ? they bless God that their hearts are good ; and in this they trust, and of this they boast and glory : though they live in the constant neglect of holy duties, and though they wallow in the filth of customary sins, yet still they boast of this, that they have good hearts : but this is a mere self-delusion ; for it is as utterly impossible, that the heart should be good where the life is wicked and profane, as that a good root should bring forth evil fruit. Such a secure peace is no good evidence, that this great change is wrought upon the heart by regeneration ; but is only founded upon mere obstinacy and carelessness of the great concerns of men's everlasting salvation.

[2.] As peace of conscience is not, so neither is trouble of conscience a good evidence of a man's regeneration.

A dull lethargic conscience, that hath lain long insensible under the commission of gross sins, may at length by strong convictions be startled, awakened, and troubled with the sense of sin, and frightened with the sight of wrath ; and yet, all this while, remain an impure and polluted conscience. God may set an unregenerate man upon the rack, break all his bones, and give him some foretastes of

that cup of trembling that he must for ever drink of; and as he made himself a devil incarnate by his sins, so God may make his conscience a hell incarnate with his torments: you hear Cain, that primitive reprobate, crying out, " My punishment is greater than I can bear :" nor could Judas find any other way to choke his conscience, than with a halter. Though in a course of sinning, conscience may be dead and seared : yet God will awaken this sleepy conscience : and, when it shall then see that it hath slept only on the top of a mast and on the brink of hell, and that it is falling into it irrecoverably, what fears and terrors will this cramp it with ! and yet this may leave it short of true grace ; under the horrors of sin, and yet short of grace ; torment it here, and yet possibly leave it to be for ever tormented hereafter. Take heed, therefore, of collecting evidences of regeneration, only from the trouble of your consciences, which deceives many who take up with preparatory convictions, which do often vanish away without leaving any saving effects of true grace. Many, if their consciences are awakened to admonish, reprove, and threaten them, think this a good argument of the goodness of their condition : St. Paul saith of himself, in his unregenerate state, touching the righteousness, which is of the law, he was blameless ; so strict and rigid an observer was he of the law, that his conscience had little to accuse him of. And will you build your hopes upon a worse foundation, than he did in his unregeneracy ? not that conscience hath nothing to accuse you of, but that it doth accuse you ? not that you are not guilty, but that you are sensible of your guilt ? What is this more than sinners shall find in hell ? It is a great and insufferable part of those torments, to be pursued with the stinging regret of an enraged conscience, which is that worm that never dies : and will you take that for an evidence of grace, that must be for ever the punishment of sin ? And, yet, do not many of us rest only on this, that conscience is awakened, frightening us in sin and deterring us from sin ? Those sins, that, before, we could swallow down without straining at and digest without nauseating, now conscience riseth at, and we dare not commit them for a world : and those duties,

that, formerly, we lived in the neglect of, conscience now straightly enjoins, and we dare not for a world neglect them : those sins, that, heretofore, we committed quietly, conscience now returns upon us with torment. And is not this a work of grace ? Is not this regeneration ?' No : it is not, if there be no more : all this only proves conscience to be awakened, but not to be sanctified. Conscience may be defiled, though it be not seared : a filthy puddle may be stirred and troubled, as well as a clear stream ; and conscience may work horrors and terrors in that soul, where the Spirit of God never yet wrought grace.

So that you see we cannot argue from the peace of conscience, nor yet from the trouble of conscience, that we are in a state of regeneration ; which is of absolute necessity to obtain heaven.

(3.) As to the affections, those sweet motions of the heart, though they are usually much relied on, yet even these affections unto holy and heavenly objects are not always infallible evidences of a man's regeneration.

In Matt. xiii. 20. some are said to receive the word with joy : and yet that they were unregenerate is clear, for it is said they had no root : and so, John v. 35. Christ tells the Jews, that they did rejoice for a season in the light of John Baptist, that is, in his doctrine and preaching : and Herod also is said to hear him gladly. So that you see these affections, of delight in holy duties and ordinances, may be in those, that are yet without a saving work of grace. And, as there may be these affections of joy and delight, so also of sorrow for sin : thus, Matt. xxvii. 3. it is said expressly of Judas, that he repented himself; and Ahab's humiliation was so great, that God took special notice of it, 1 Kings xxi. 29.

Now all these affections are but temporary and vanishing, and they may be excited from several advantages, that holy things have in them to commend them to the hearts of carnal and unregenerate men.

[1.] Sometimes, the very novelty and strangeness of them may affect us.

Novelty usually breeds delight, which longer custom and acquaintance somewhat abate. And this may be given

as a true reason, why, soon after conversion, a new convert's affections are more strongly drawn out in the ways of God, than, afterwards, when he is a grown and settled Christian: his affections then, may not have such full spring-tide, as when he was but a novice in Christianity: the reason is, because novelty, in that way and course that he is entered upon, doth naturally affect him, besides the real desirableness of the things themselves. And this also may satisfy us, though many have turned aside from the truth as it is in Jesus and from the ways of his worship that he hath appointed, and do yet boast that they have in those new ways found more new comfort and sweet affections than they did before, that yet this is not because those ways have any thing in them that really yields more comfort and delight, but only because they are new ways, and new things will for the present affect: after some continuance in those ways, they find that joy and delight, that they spake of, to flag; and then they seek out other new ways and commeud them as much, having as great delight in them: and it is no wonder; for new ways will stir up new affections. And thus may the affections of carnal unregenerate men be stirred up, by their entering upon the profession and external practice of religion, because of the novelty of it to them.

[2.] Good affections may be stirred in us, from the affecting nature of spiritual objects; for spiritual objects may affect us in a natural way.

Who can read the history of Christ's passion, without being affected with sorrow for all that sorrow that he underwent for us? He hath a heart certainly harder than a rock, that can think of the agonies, reproaches, cruel scourgings, and cursed death, that so innocent and so excellent a person as Christ was underwent, and that for sinners also, and not be moved and affected with grief and compassion to him. And yet it is possible, that these affections may be deceivable; and move no other ways, than they would do in the reading of some tragical story in a romance. To read some sad and dismal story, will naturally affect the heart with grief and sorrow. And so it may be with the truths revealed in the Gospel: upon thy reading of them, they may affect thee, according as those

truths are : if they promise blessings, they may affect thee with joy : if they threaten, and thou readest sad and dismal events, they may affect thee with sorrow : and, yet, all this may be only from the nature of the objects, and not from any divine affections that are in thy soul.

[3.] The affections may be stirred from or by the artificial rhetoric of others ; by the abilities of the ministers, whom you hear.

And thus God tells the prophet, Ezek. xxxiii. 32. "Thou art unto them as a very lovely song, as one that hath a pleasant voice, and canst play well on an instrument." They may have their judgments pleased with the learning showed in a sermon, and with the well methodizing of it; and their affections may be pleased with the oratory, and powerful utterance of it. Now, though these are good helps to spiritual affections, yet are they not good trials of them.

[4.] Pride and self-seeking may, in the performance of duties, excite good affections.

And men may be much deceived in this particular. As, in prayer, they may think they are affected with the things that they pray for : when as, possibly, their affections are moved only with the manner of their prayer ; with their words ; with that copious, free, and admirable gift, which they have, of expression : whereas a contrite heart, that is moved with true spiritual affections, may not be so adorned with such an admirable gift of expression. As the ground, that is fullest of precious mines, hath least grass growing upon it ; so is it, many times, with the children of God in holy duties : where the heart is most full of grace, and where there are many precious affections stirring in it towards God, yet there are the least flourishings of expressions in their words. So that you see you cannot gather the truth of regenerating grace from the strong workings of your affections, which are very deceitful, even about spiritual things.

(4.) Every change wrought upon the will is not an infallible evidence of regeneration.

It is, indeed, the thorough change of the will, in which this great work principally doth consist. This is the first principle of spiritual life ; without which whatsoever other

change is wrought upon us, is no more than to set the hand of the watch right to the hour when the spring is broken. The will is, by the philosopher, called the commanding and swaying faculty of the soul; which controls the affections and inferior faculties, and makes them obey its inclination: so that, such as the will is, such is the man. And, therefore, the scripture, in setting forth the twofold estate of men, of nature and of grace, doth it by showing the temper of their wills; what their wills are. Unregenerate men are described by their wilfulness: John v. 40. "Ye will not come to me," says our Saviour, "that ye might have life." And the regenerate men are described by their willingness: Psalm cx. 3. "Thy people shall be a willing people in the day of thy power."

Here I shall endeavour two things;—to show you after what manner the Spirit of God works this renewing change upon the will;—to show you what other changes may be wrought upon it, that are not good evidences of a man's renovation.

[1.] For the first, after what manner the Spirit of God works this renewing change on the will, you must know that there are two ways, whereby God doth effectually change the heart of a sinner: and they are moral persuasions; and physical determinations, or real efficiency, which is nothing else but God's all-powerful grace, whereby he doth immediately turn the bent and inclination of the will towards himself.

And both these always concur, in this great change of the will. God doth convincingly persuade us of our own vileness, and of the emptiness of all those vain things that our desires are so eagerly pursuing: and, on the other hand, he clearly represents to us the great excellency of himself and of his ways; that he is the greatest good we can enjoy; and that there is no other way of enjoying, but by loving and serving him. To do this, he makes use of moral persuasions; working upon our reason by cogent and prevailing arguments: and then diffuseth such a heavenly sweetness through the heart, as makes it disrelish all those fulsome delights of sin, that would separate us from that Infinite Good, with which they can hold no comparison: so that, finding more true delight in God and

his ways, more charming and alluring joy than ever before we did in sensual pleasures, we are thereby carried forth to them by an infallible, yet altogether a free, voluntary, and amorous motion. And this is done by the real and immediate efficiency of the Spirit of God upon the will itself: and this operation of the Spirit of God upon the will is so sweetly attempered to the native liberty of the will, that it would be a pain and torment to the soul to be separated from that God, whom now its understanding apprehends, and its will clasps about as its chief and only good.

Here, you see, are both a moral suasion and a real determination of the will, in the work of regeneration. God really determines it, by the efficacious touch of his own grace; whereby he powerfully turns the bent and inclination of it to himself, which before stood to sin and vanity. And, that this might be no infringement upon the will's prerogative in acting freely, at the same time he morally persuades it; representing himself as the best and most satisfying object for all its inclinations to centre in.

And, thus, the efficacy of divine grace and the liberty of man's will do fully accord, in this work of regeneration, which some have thought to stand at an irreconcilable distance one from another. For the freedom of the will doth not consist in its indifference to act or not to act; either to love and fear God, or not to love and fear him: for, otherwise, the saints and angels in heaven, who are under that blessed necessity that they cannot but love God, should not then love him freely. But the liberty of the will consists in the will's acting upon rational grounds; which, by how much the more strong the grounds and reasons are that the will acts by, so much the more do they in a sort necessitate the will to act, and yet by so much the more free is the will in its actings: so that here, that the liberty of the will may not violate the certainty of God's purpose and decree, he changeth it by the power of his irresistible grace; and, yet, that this irresistible grace may not violate the liberty of the will, he persuades it by such powerful and rational arguments that it should not act freely if it should dissent from it.

Though God useth an infinite power in regenerating and

converting a soul, yet he useth no violence : he subdues the will, but he doth not compel it. This is that victorious grace, that doth not more overcome a sinner's resistances, than it doth his prejudices : it overcomes all oppositions, by its own irresistible power ; and it overcomes all prejudices, by its attracting sweetness : and when it brings a sinner to submit to God, it makes him apprehend also that it is his chiefest happiness and joy so to do. This is the sweet nature of regenerating grace.

And it is the same winning sweetness, that afterwards preserves the regenerate from a total apostasy from grace : for, though there is a constant supply of grace, to keep them that they shall never certainly draw back to perdition ; yet, withal, their own freedom is such, that they may if they will : but how can they will it, since the will never inclines but to that, which most pleaseth it ; and nothing pleaseth a regenerate and sanctified will, so much as that sovereign good, that comprehends in it all other good, and that is God himself ?

And thus you see how God disposeth of the will of man, in changing it to himself, without constraining it ; turning it, as unforcibly, so infallibly to himself : when he draws it by the sweetness of his own efficacious inspirations.

And thus I have dispatched the first particular, in showing you after what manner the Spirit of God works this change on the will, by persuading it with rational arguments, that it cannot gainsay ; and by overcoming it by his irresistible grace, that it cannot oppose.

[2.] The second particular is to show you what other changes may be wrought upon the will, that are no good evidences of a man's renovation and regeneration. And,

1st. An unregenerate man may have many faint velleities and wishes after grace.

When he hears so much spoken of the beauty and excellency of holiness, he is convinced, in his judgment, that these things are true : that without holiness no man shall see the Lord : that though now, whilst he is carnal, spiritual duties are tedious and burdensome to him ; yet, were he himself but spiritual, they would be pleasing and delightful to him : that those very pleasures of sin, which now keep him off from closing with grace, were he but

renewed would all be but an unsavoury thing to him: and, that what he is afraid to lose should he turn to Christ, he would not value the loss of were he but in Christ. When an unregenerate man is fully convinced of this, it makes him break out into pangs of affectionate wishes for grace: 'Oh, that I were holy and gracious! Oh, that my heart were changed and renewed! Oh, that I were better, and could do better!' Let every man appeal to his own conscience, whether, when he hath been convinced of the excellency and desirableness of holiness, he hath not breathed forth such wishes as these. When you have seen a Christian, eminent and exemplary for piety, have you not wished yourself in his condition; not only in respect of his future reward and glory, but also in respect of his present grace and holiness? and wished not only with Balaam to die the death of the righteous, and that your latter end may be like his; but also to live the life of the righteous? and yet still you continue, notwithstanding these wishes, in the same sinful course and state as formerly you did. Now these are but empty velleities, and idle wishings and woudlings. An unregenerate man may possibly wish he were a saint; as a man may wish he were an angel: but such a man's wishes put him not upon any serious and constant attempting of the means whereby he may become so. No man, that wishes he were an angel, is thereby put upon the means of making himself an angel: so, many wish they were saints, but never put themselves upon the use of those means, that might make them such. Generally, their wishes and sighs vanish away together; and the one leave no more impressions on their hearts, than the other do in the air: they run to the commission of sin, even with a wish in their mouths that they might not commit it; and they neglect duty, and yet at the same time wish they were performing it. Such contradictory wishes have they! They wish themselves holy; and yet they are willingly sinful: they wish themselves better; but yet they never endeavour and strive after their own amendment. These are idle and empty wishes and velleities; and are no good evidences of a man's regeneration.

2dly. An unregenerate man may not rest in these slight wishes, but he may rise up to resolutions.

He may be resolved, that lust shall no longer enslave him, that the pleasures of the world shall no longer bewitch him, that the difficulties of religion shall no longer fright him ; but that he will break through all, and that he will act like a man and like a Christian. With such generous resolutions as these, men, that are in a sinful estate, may fortify themselves. Grace they know they must have, or they must eternally perish : and they know, withal, that God doth not use to be wanting to men's endeavours ; and they are peremptorily resolved, therefore, that they will not be wanting to themselves. See the same strong resolutions, in those, that came to inquire of the prophet Jeremiah, in ch. xlvi. 5, 6. "The Lord," say they, "be a true and faithful witness between us, that we will do even according to all things, for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good or evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God. And yet, in the next chapter, you find none so rebellious against God, as these men, that had formerly made this remonstrance.

3dly. But, yet, notwithstanding these wishes and resolutions, the will of an unregenerate man falls short of a saving change ; usually in some of these particulars.

(1st.) In that it is fickle and inconstant.

Their desires may sometimes be violent and eager, as if they would take heaven by force, and wrest mercy out of the hands of God : their prayers may be so importunate and earnest, as if they would take no denial from God : but yet this volatile spirit is soon spent, and this full bent of their souls soon flags ; and they return to the road of as dull and formal a profession as ever, and it may be to the commission of the same foul gross sins as before. Such a will as this, though at first it seems to hurry men on apace, yet soon tires and leaves them far short of grace. A Christian's race is not run at so many heats, but by a constant course and progress ; still getting ground upon lust, and approaching daily nearer to the kingdom of God. It is with such men, as I have sometimes told you it is with the sea : which, when it is spring tide, covers all its shores ; but, when it ebbs, it discovers that there is nothing but sand, where it seemed to be a deep sea before.

So, these ebbing and flowing Christians discover plainly, that there is nothing but a barren sand at the bottom: they are unstable as water, and cannot excel; as Jacob speaks of Reuben, Gen. xlix. 4. A Christian is not made in a fit: nor is regeneration wrought in a passion; but it is a settled, solid, and constant frame of heart, that brings a man unto Christ, and makes him persevere to be a new creature.

(2dly.) The will of an unregenerate man is never universally changed; but he reserves still to himself some lust or other, that he will not part with.

His resolutions are such as were the resolutions of Naaman the Syrian: 2 Kings v. 17, 18. "Thy servant," says he, "will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto any other god, but unto the Lord. But in this thing, the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth to worship in the house of Rimmon, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." So, many peremptorily resolve to forsake their sins; but yet still there is some one dear lust or other, concerning which, they cry out, with Naaman, "the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing:" all their other sins they will willingly sacrifice to Christ, may they but be allowed to retain this one sin. Now that thin partition, that any one sin makes betwixt the soul and Christ, will keep it from ever closing with Christ: as, if there be but a thin film betwixt the scion and the stock, they can never be engrafted and grow together.

(3dly.) The will of an unregenerate man is usually very irrational.

He would obtain the end; but yet he will not use the means. Grace, he would willingly have; but you cannot bring his averse will to close with the performance of those unpleasing and irksome duties, wherein God usually bestows grace. Could they be holy with a wish, and suddenly metamorphosed to other men, none should be better Christians than themselves: could they enter into heaven by being willing to have it, none should shine higher in glory than they: but, when so much hard and unpleasing work must be done, first that they may be regenerate, and then after that they are regenerate to

perfect them for glory, they look upon these things at a great distance and afar off; and so they sit down with idle wishes, far short of grace and glory.

(4thly.) The will of an unregenerate man is usually a general not a particular will.

If God should ask them, ‘Sinners, what would you do to be saved?’—‘Oh, any thing, every thing,’ say they. ‘Leave off such and such a sin: perform such and such duties.’—‘Yes, Lord: we will do any thing, but this duty: or leave any thing, but that sin.’ Just so is it with many men: they will do any thing, every thing in general: but, bring it down to particulars, to the doing of this or that duty, or to the leaving of this or that sin, and then they are willing to do just nothing.

And thus you see how far the will itself may be wrought upon in unregenerate men, and what it is that usually hinders this change from being a thorough work of regeneration.

(5.) There may be also a great and wonderful change wrought in their lives, and yet they may continue in their former unregenerate state.

They may have *escaped*, as the apostle speaks, “the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ,” and yet be “again entangled;” which shows them to be unregenerate: as it is in 2 Pet. ii. 20. To escape the pollutions of the world is no argument of the truth of grace, unless yourselves also are cleansed from the pollutions of your own hearts: for sins may be left merely from external, forced principles; such as are the terrors of conscience, or the heavy judgments of God; when God sets a flaming sword, betwixt a sinner and those sins, that he counted his delight and paradise. To leave sin upon such constraints as these, is to leave sin with a great deal of reluctance and unwillingness: as a mariner, in a storm, casts his goods overboard: he doth it, indeed, with a kind of will; but it is with an unwilling willingness: he is frightened and terrified to it, for fear he and they should sink together. So, when a soul is tossed in a tempest of divine wrath, ready to split against the rock of ages, and to sink and be swallowed up in a sea of fire and brimstone, it is forced to lighten itself, and to

cast this and that dear lust overboard ; and this it doth from a will : but, yet, it is with such a forced will, as that with which the mariner throws his goods into the sea in a storm ; and, as soon as the tempest is allayed, the one gathers up his wreck, and the other gathers up his sins again. These men leave their sins, as Lot's wife left Sodom : they dare not longer continue in them, for fear fire and brimstone should rain down upon them ; and yet, in leaving them, they give many a look back towards them, and at last they return again to them. I have spoken to this formerly on this subject : I shall not therefore insist on it longer now : only, be sure you rely not upon these broken reeds, as evidences of eternal life and glory ; for these things are deceitful, and have deceived many, at least for a time.

And, so much, for the first branch of this use of trial ; which was to show you what changes may be wrought upon carnal men, which they may mistake for evidences of their regeneration.

2. The second branch of this use of trial, is, *to lay down some particulars, that the scripture hath made infallible marks and tests of a regenerate person.*

(1.) But, before I come to mention these in their particular order, it will be expedient, briefly to premise something concerning the manner of obtaining assurance of grace, by the signs and characters of grace.

[1.] It is possible for a Christian to attain an assured knowledge of his regeneration.

I say, an assured knowledge, to carry it higher than the papists do, who allow no more than a conjectural probability ; which may well enough preserve from despair, but yet doth not exclude all fears and doubtings. But it is no wonder, that they, who will not trust their natural senses in the doctrine of transubstantiation, should not much less trust their spiritual senses in the doctrine of assurance. A Christian's assurance is many degrees above these weak guesses ; and arrives at a far greater certainty, than any demonstration can be : for the evidence of sense and reason is not so clear as that of assurance is : the testimony, that sense and reason give, is but human ; but the testimony given in a Christian's assurance is

divine, and therefore is far more certain and more infallible.

The apostle groundeth the evidence of assurance upon the divinity of the witness, in Rom. viii. 16. "The Spirit itself" (mark that) "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." What greater ground for assurance can there be than this? "The Spirit itself beareth witness :" and what God speaks is infinitely more certain, than that, which our very eye sees : and therefore it is very injurious to his truth and veracity, when he, by the secret and sweet whisperings of his Spirit informs the soul, that it is in a state of grace, to think that this testimony only gives probable guesses and conjectures. The witness, that the Spirit gives, is such a full assurance, as removes all doubts and fears ; for it is the witness of God himself.

Now such a witness as this is, a Christian may have ; and therefore it is possible, and it necessarily follows also, that he may have a full assurance beyond all doubts and fears. Nor is this possible by way of revelation, as special privilege indulged only to some few, and them the choicest of God's servants : for, in 2 Pet. i. 10. the apostle exhorts all Christians, to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure, which he would never do, were it an impossibility, and could not be obtained with our diligence. So, in 2 Cor. xiii. 5. "Examine yourselves," says the apostle, "whether ye be in the faith : prove your own selves. Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates :" reprobation, in this place, by the way, doth not stand opposed to the decree of election, as if none were elected but those that were already actually in Christ ; but it stands opposed to approbation, for God doth not approve of any in whom Christ is not formed : now, says the apostle, since you know this, try and prove yourselves whether Christ be in you : but it were a vain thing to put a Christian upon self-examination and trial, if there were no ordinary means to attain to the knowledge of it, but he must expect and depend upon some extraordinary revelation from heaven, a thing that is never but rarely given unto some few.

It is true, among Christians some may not have this assurance at all, and none have it at all times. As in a walk, that is shaded with trees and checkered with light and shadow, some tracks and paths in it are dark, and others are sunshine: such is usually the life of the most assured Christian. Sometimes, he walks in the light of God's countenance, and rejoices in the smiles of his favour: and, at other times, he walks in darkness, and can see no light: he steps out of the bright manifestations of God's love, into the umbrages of sad and cloudy apprehensions concerning his present state of grace and his future state of glory. So that some Christians never have any full assurance at all, and no Christian hath this full assurance at all times.

Now this inequality of assurance proceeds from a double cause.—Sometimes, from the free and various dispensations of the Spirit, who is arbitrary in his workings; who is that wind, that bloweth when and where he pleaseth. For the treasures, as well of comfort as of grace, are in his hand. As the sun, he disposeth to the soul its summer and winter days, according to his approaches to or recesses from it.—Sometimes, it ariseth from new contracted guilt, that blots our evidences; and makes them illegible, till it be taken off again. It is frequent with Christians, when they have done sinfully or hypocritically in one particular instance, then to begin to question all their sincerity; and, upon the prevalency of one corruption, to doubt of the truth of all their graces. We do not therefore affirm, that there is in all, or may be in any at all times, this full assurance: but, in some there is; and, in all, there is ground for it, and a possibility by diligence to attain it. “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.”

That is the first thing.

[2.] The marks and signs of our regeneration, in which the scripture abounds, are, of themselves, insufficient to raise us to a full assurance, without the testimony of the Holy Spirit of God.

I doubt not but this appears very clear to those, who have taken pains to search out their spiritual estate by

marks and signs. If the Spirit comes not in, to satisfy them by his own witness, they may soon run themselves to a loss ; and, at the end, sit down as doubtful and perplexed as when they first began. As, for instance, if a gracious soul should call into question the truth and sincerity of his love to God ; and should begin to examine himself; ‘ How shall I know whether I do indeed love God ? Why, the scripture tells me, by keeping his commandments, by obeying him sincerely. Yea, but the sincerity of our obedience is as difficult to be known, as the sincerity of our love : and how shall I know whether my obedience be sincere ? ’ Now here, though many signs might be given as evidences of this, yet still the doubting soul will be driving itself from one sign to another, and never find satisfaction in any of them, unless the Spirit of God comes in by its undeniable witness to silence all its objections, and to resolve all its doubts by a kind of peremptory and discussive voice that it is so : otherwise, there is no end of looking after signs, for they will still leave the soul full of perplexities. Unless the Spirit of God comes in as a satisfactory witness, we may run from one sign to another sign to inquire after grace, whether it be there and there ; and, when all is done, we may be as much at a loss concerning that sign, as we were at first concerning the grace which we inquired after.

And there are two reasons, why signs of grace, without the testimony of the Spirit, cannot work in us a full and absolute assurance. Because, usually, one grace is the sign of another. Signs of grace are graces themselves ; and, therefore, stand in need to be evidenced by other signs ; and those signs, being graces too, do stand in need to be evidenced by others : and so we shall run to an “ infinitum,” unless the Spirit of God, by his witness, puts a stop to this search.—Because most of the signs and evidences of true grace may be so exactly counterfeited by hypocrites, that the judgment, that we pass upon ourselves by these alone, will still leave place for perplexing doubts and fears, lest all our graces, and all our signs of them too, should be but hypocritical delusions.

So, then, unto a full assurance, there is necessarily re-

quired an inward peremptory witness of the Holy Ghost. Signs and marks, without his infallible testimony, are insignificant and unsatisfactory things.

[3.] That assurance, that Christians have of their regeneration, is not wrought in them merely by the testimony of the Spirit, without the help of signs and marks.

As marks and signs cannot raise up to a full assurance, without the Spirit of God; so neither do we obtain a full assurance merely by the testimony of the Spirit, without the help of signs and marks. For, to what end doth the scripture so much abound in giving characters of men's estates, which is the main scope and drift of the whole first epistle of St. John? These were all superfluous, if the usual way of the Spirit's evidencing were without them. I am regenerated: but how come I to be assured of this? not barely because the Spirit testifies to me that I am so: that looks too much like enthusiasm, and a wild and groundless delusion. But the Spirit proceeds in a more rational way: I am a Christian and regenerated, because I find those marks upon me, that can belong to none but to such who are so. Indeed, all our assurance must be ultimately resolved into the alone verdict of the Spirit of God, and that, without the help of farther signs and marks: for when a Christian gains assurance, he doth not with the sun run through all the signs of the zodiac to know if he be a Christian by this and this sign, and then to try the truth of that sign by another, and that other by a third, and so onward: that were endless and unsatisfactory: but when he is brought to signs that lie a remove or two off from the grace that he inquires after, he doth not usually make a farther search whether they be truly in him or not; but the Spirit darts in a clear and heavenly light, that discovers them to him, not discoursorily but only intuitively, so that he is able to say they are in me beyond all deceit.

[4.] The usual way, whereby Christians come to be assured of their regeneration, is by the joint testimony, both of marks and signs of grace, and also by the Spirit's witnessing to us that these marks and signs are in us.

The word and the Spirit are the twin lights, that discover to us our condition. And, as mariners presage to

themselves a prosperous voyage, when two lights, Castor and Pollux, appear; but a dangerous voyage, if only one appears: so, here, it is unsafe, in the trial of our regeneration, to take up with one single, solitary light; but, when both the light of scripture marks and signs and also of the Spirit's witnessing appear together, we may then prosperously and happily proceed to a discovery of ourselves. So, in Rom. viii. 16. "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." To evidence that we are born again, there comes in a twofold witness; the witness of our spirits, and the witness of God's Spirit: our spirit deposeth that we are so, that we are born again, and become the children of God; and this it doth, by observing the proper marks and characters, that the scripture gives of a child of God; and the Spirit of God comes in as another witness, that, in the mouth of two witnesses, this may be established; and, by his immediate light, clears up the truth of that attestation, that conscience did make; which takes away all doubtings and hesitations, and fills us with a full assurance, yea, gives us a plerophy. So that, still, marks and signs are of great use, for the discovery of the truth of grace; 1 John ii. 3. By this we "know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." But, still, we may be puzzled to know, whether our keeping of God's commandments be such a ground for our comfort; therefore, the witness of the Spirit is here required, to seal and confirm this unto us; without which, still, we shall be to seek assurance, for all the marks that the scripture lays down for evidences of our graces.

These things I thought fit to premise, before I give you any signs and marks of regeneration: that so you may be exhorted and moved, when you hear those signs that the scripture gives, to examine your hearts, whether they are transcribed within you; and also to lift up your hearts unto God, that his Spirit may dart into you such a spiritual light and clear illumination, as may infallibly demonstrate to you that these marks are indeed in you; it being the proper work of one and the same Spirit, to work grace in us, and to manifest it to us: it is he alone, that can draw that curtain that hangs before it, and gives us a view

of it. As it is the light of the sun only, by which we can see the sun; so is it the light of the Spirit only, by which we can know the Spirit to be in us. Let us, therefore, in the trial of ourselves, look to marks and signs for a testimony in our own consciences; without which, all our assurance may be well suspected for enthusiasm: and let us also beg the testimony of the Spirit; without which, all marks and signs will be but vain and unsatisfactory.

(2.) Now, to give you some signs of the truth of grace, I shall not insist upon all that might be mentioned: for they are very numerous; since there is no one grace, but is the sign of another grace, yea the sign of all other, for all graces are concomitant. I shall only, therefore, select out a few.

[1.] It is a good sign of grace, when a man is willing to search and examine himself, whether he be gracious or not.

There is a certain kind of instinct in a child of God, whereby he naturally desires to have the title of his legitimation tried: whereas a hypocrite dreads nothing more, than to have his rottenness searched into. David therefore prays, Psalm xxvi. 2. "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me: try my reins and my heart." God, indeed, hath many ways of trying us; but especially by the word and ministry: the scripture is the great treasury of all spiritual light: God hath amassed and stored it all up there; and whatever comes with spiritual illumination upon the conscience must borrow it from thence: the preaching of the word is the darting abroad of those beams, that pierce into the very entrails of sinners, and discover the secret thoughts and intents of their hearts.

Now try yourselves by this. Do you love the word of God, because it is a searching word? because it brings home convictions to you, and shakes your carnal confidences and presumptions? Do you love a soul-searching ministry, that speaks as closely and particularly to you, as if it were another conscience without you; a ministry, that ransacks your very souls, and tells you all that ever you did? Do you delight in a ministry, that forceth you to turn inward upon yourselves: that makes you tremble and look pale at every word, for fear it should be the

sentence of your damnation? This is a sign, that your condition is good, because you are so willing to be searched. "He, that doeth evil," saith our Saviour, John iii. 20. "hateth the light; neither cometh he to it, lest his deeds should be reproved." But, if you are pleased only with a formal, general ministry; and such prophets, as sing only pleasant songs to you; such, as never touch the conscience to the quick, that keep aloof off, and, instead of brandishing the word that is "sharper than a two-edged sword," reaving the heart with it, only make a flourish of it: if you can brook no other, but such a quiet, unconcerning ministry as this is, this is a bad sign, that yet you are unsound. A thief hateth the light, says our Saviour, lest he should be detected and discovered: so a hypocritical professor hateth that a beam of spiritual light, by the ministry of the word, should break in upon his conscience, to show how rotten and unsound he is.

And that is the first trial. It is the sign of a good estate, when a man is willing to put himself on the trial.

[2.] Love to those, who are truly godly, is a certain and infallible sign of regeneration.

1 John iii. 14. "We know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." This is a certain sign, that a mighty change is wrought on the heart: for, naturally, we are inclined to hate the children of God, upon that very account because they are godly. It is a true rule of the schoolmen, borrowed out of Aristotle, that the affections of the soul are the same towards the image of a thing, as they are towards the thing itself: if we love or hate any person, we shall accordingly love or hate his picture and resemblance: now all wicked men naturally hate God, because he is a holy God, and thereby is contrary to their very natures, that are corrupt and sinful; and so they also hate the children of God, because they are living pictures of God, and bear his image upon them, being made conformable to him by a work of regeneration. "He, that is born of the flesh," says the apostle, "will persecute and hate him that is born after the Spirit;" because he is the copy of that original, betwixt whom and them there is an antipathy founded in

their very natures. Now when a man, who before did thus hate, scorn, and despise the people of God, as a company of affected and turbulent hypocrites, shall find in himself a love and esteem for them, and shall see the beauty and glory of that holiness that before rendered them odious to him: this is a sign, that, certainly, a mighty change is wrought upon that man; and that he himself is transformed into the image of God, because he loves that image, in others.

Now this trial will proceed upon these three particulars.—That this love be to them, because they are godly. We may possibly love godly men, for other respects; because they are wise or learned, or because possibly they love us, or are related to us: but these are but by-respects, and grace hath no interest at all in them. That love to the godly, that can assure us of being godly and regenerate, must be a love to the children of God, merely because they are godly.—As we must love them because they are godly, so the more godly they are the more we should love them. “My delight,” says David, “is in the saints, and in the excellent ones of the earth.” The more holy a child of God is, if we love him aright, the more we shall love him.—If we love all, that are godly. Not only those of our temper, constitution, and opinion in all things; but all of them: with a valuation and esteem for them, with a prizing love, which the image of God upon their souls and their similitude to him challenge. Indeed, our familiarity and intimacy may be with some of them, more than with others; but our high and cordial esteem must be of all of them.

Now try yourselves by this. Do you love the brethren? And so little, truly, is this love to be found, that the name of brethren is become a mock and a jest by many! But is your delight in the saints? Do you account them the excellent ones of the earth? How few are there, that love them that love God! or, if they do love them, possibly it is for other respects and reasons: could you not love them better, if they were not so rigid, strict, and precise as they are? Let such know, as St. John speaks, in 1 John v. 1. “He, that loveth him that begetteth, loveth him also that is begotten.” It is in vain

to think that we are born of God, if we have not a sincere and cordial affection for all those, that are the children of God, and our brethren.

[3.] Another sign of regeneration, is a universal respect and obedience unto all God's commandments.

This St. John expressly gives us, in his first epistle, chap. ii. 3. "Hereby," says he, "we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments :" and so, in ver. 5. "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected : hereby know we that we are in him."

It is observable, that the work of regeneration is itself called the writing of the law in our hearts, in Jer. xxxi. 33. "I will put my law into their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."

God hath written this law three several ways. When he first created man, he wrote it then upon his heart by his creating finger: man was the transcript of God: as he was his handy-work, so he was his hand-writing also: man was then the only copy of the law extant in the world: this copy was perfect; but yet it was such, as might be blotted and torn. Next, God wrote his law in his word: the holy scriptures exhibit to us an entire system, both of commands and duties: and this copy is both perfect and durable; such, as neither hath suffered, nor can suffer, any decays from length of time, or from the rage and malice of men or devils. And, lastly, God hath again wrote his law upon the heart of man, in his new creation: and this copy is eternally durable; but yet it is but as a writing upon sinking and leaky paper, which in this life is very obscure and full of blots.

Now this writing of the law upon our hearts, is a figurative expression: and denotes nothing else, but an inclination, joined with some ability, to fulfil the commands of God contained in his word; a conformity, betwixt the commands of the law and the affections of the heart, that, whatever the law enjoins, the heart also desires and delights in. Thus David explains it, Psalm xl. 8. "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." So that the heart of a regenerate person answers to every tittle in the law, with sincere

desires at least to perform it. And, as, betwixt an indenture and the counterpart of it, there is an exact correspondence word for word: such an exact correspondence is there betwixt the law of God and the heart: whatever the law commands, the heart readily embraces and endeavours to fulfil. This harmony is expressed by David in Psalm xxvii. 8. "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." This is to have the law of God written on the heart; which is the proper work of regeneration.

Let us now, therefore, try whether our conformity and obedience to the law and will of God written in his word, be such as may give us good ground to hope, that his law is also written in our hearts in our regeneration.

There is, therefore, a two-fold obedience to God's commandments: first, perfect; secondly, imperfect, but yet sincere.

1st. There is a perfect obedience: such as carries in it an absolute perfection, both of parts and degrees.

To make up this, two things are required:—That it be such an obedience, as is stretched forth to the utmost latitude of all God's commands; such, as is fully commensurate to the fullest bounds of duty; so as to leave nothing undone, that the law requires;—that it be such an obedience, as is wound up to the greatest intensioness of spiritual love and delight in the performance of it; insomuch, as not to permit in the least any carnal ends, any straggling thoughts, or any wavering and unfixed affections at all so much as to breathe upon it. And this the scripture calls a serving of God with all our hearts, and minds, and souls: Deut. x. 12.

This is obedience, that is absolutely perfect and universal; both in respect of the object, and also in respect of the subject.

Now, here, I shall lay down two particulars.

(1st.) That, in the examining of our regeneration, we must not proceed by this absolute and perfect obedience; so as to conclude we have no grace, because we have some remaining sin.

Obedience to God's commandments is a sign of regeneration, where it is not thus consummate and blameless.

Nay, indeed, never any man since the fall did or can keep God's commandments, in this absolute and perfect manner, Christ only excepted: "There is no man that liveth and sinneth not :" 1 Kings viii. 46. It is true we are commanded, in Mat. v. 48. to be "perfect, even as our heavenly Father is perfect ;" but, as soon may a clod of earth shine as bright as the sun, as we who have sinful natures ever attain to a sinless state in this life. And yet such an excess of commands as these are, though they are impossible ; yet are they not unjust, nor unuseful. They are not unjust : because God commands nothing that is simply in itself impossible, but is equally proportioned to that strength which he at first gave us ; and, if we have wilfully lost our power of obeying, we have no reason to complain of God as rigid and severe, because he will not also lose his prerogative of commanding. Neither are they useless : because to command beyond what we are able to perform, proves a means to excite us to perform so much at least as God will be pleased to accept of ; who always accepts of sincerity in the desires and endeavours, where absolute perfection is wanting and unattainable : "If there be a willing mind," says the apostle, 2 Cor. viii. 12. "it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not." Let none, therefore, conclude that they have no grace, because they have many imperfections in their obedience. A weak child is not therefore a bastard or illegitimate : so, thy grace may be very weak and imperfect, and yet thou mayest be truly born again to God, and be a genuine son and heir of heaven.

(2dly.) It is a good evidence of the work of grace in our obedience, when, though our obedience be very imperfect, yet we restlessly aspire, both in fervent prayer and in earnest endeavours, after the most absolute degree of perfection.

Both of these must be concerned : for prayers, without endeavours, are but hypocritical ; and endeavours will never be without prayers, or at least they will never be successful. If we pray with unfeigned desires, that God's will may be done by us on earth with the same fixedness, delight, constancy, and perseverance, as it is done by the

saints and angels in heaven : if we rest not in our present attainments, nor sit down contented with what we have already ; thinking that sufficient to defray our charges, and to bring us safe to heaven at last : if we think we have attained nothing, while there is any thing defective in us : if we strain every sinew, and bend every faculty of our souls, pressing forward to the mark for the prize of our high calling ; and, with a holy impatience, breathe after farther measures of grace, still strengthening ourselves against lusts and temptations, and striving after the spiritual performance of duties : while we thus endeavour and strive, it may be a good evidence to us of our sincerity ; and, in God's account, sincerity passeth for perfection.

Thus much, concerning the first sort of obedience, which is absolutely perfect. It is not attainable by Christians in this life : and therefore, the want of it should not deject us with a suspiciency of the want of grace : yet we must pray for it, and aim at it ; and if we do so, it may be a good evidence of sincerity, which is evangelical perfection.

2dly. As for that obedience, that is attainable in this life, in imperfect measures and degrees, it becomes an evidence to us of our regeneration in these following particulars.

(1st.) When it is universal in respect of the subject : that is, there must be an obedient frame and rectitude of the whole man, both inward and outward.

[1st.] Sincere and evidencing obedience must be internal, of the inward man ; such, as may regulate the heart and conscience itself.

“ The law is spiritual,” says the apostle, and reacheth the soul and spirit of a man ; and hence, says St. Paul, “ I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” There is a spiritual force in the law of God, that, in a truly regenerate soul, checks all sinful thoughts, and quenches and damps the flames of sensual affections and desires. It judgeth those secret and retired motions of the soul, over which human laws have no command or prerogative.

Now examine yourselves by this. Do the commands

of God pierce and insinuate unto your inward man? Do they conform that to obedience? Dare you not cherish those sins in your souls, that possibly you dare not commit in your practices? Do you not dandle them in your thoughts, and hover and flutter over them in your affections? Are you not content with a fair and plausible appearance towards man? But do you labour also to approve your hearts unto God, and to bring every thought unto obedience to Jesus Christ? This internal obedience is a good evidence of the truth of that grace, which always begins with the heart, and from thence influenceth the life.

[2dly.] Sincere obedience must be external.

It is a vain plea, to pretend, as many ignorant people do, that their hearts are good, when their lives abound with ungodly practices. The life is the index of the heart: and, as the hand of a dial never goes amiss, but the fault is in the wheels that move it; so the life is never disorderly, but the fault lies in the heart and in the affections, that are the wheels and springs that move it. "An evil man," saith our Saviour, "out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things." True grace seasoneth the whole man; and makes a thorough change, both in the inward disposition, and also in the outward deportment: as it makes the thoughts holy, so it also makes the discourses savoury, and the affections and conversation heavenly. Both must be conjoined in a regenerate person: for, in the tendering unto God only an external conformity of the life when the heart is required, is but to mock God; and, to think that we please God with good affections when we take no care of our lives and practices, is but to mock ourselves.

Now try yourselves by this. Is your whole man, both soul and body, formed to the will of God? Do you serve him with your inward and with your outward man? Christ calls his law 'a yoke,' and certainly it is a yoke, wherein both must be coupled. Do you desire and endeavour to yield the obedience of the heart, and the obedience of the life also, as he requires: neither contenting yourselves with a slight and overly performance of duties, where the lips outrun the heart, and the heart

gives the lie to the lips ; nor yet slighting that outward reverence, that is necessary to testify the due sense which you have of his glorious presence, and that care which you have to serve him both in soul and in body that are his ? Do you so live, as not to defraud God of any part of his service, or of his servant ; but sacrifice yourselves entirely unto him ; your bodies, upon the altar of your soul and affections ; and both soul and body upon that altar, that alone can make both acceptable, even the Lord Jesus Christ ? This is a good evidence, that you do so keep the commandments of God, as that it may be a ground of assurance to you that you do know him, and are in him.

And, so much, for the first branch.

(2dly) Obedience is a good and infallible sign of our regeneration, when it is universal : as in respect of the subject, the whole man, soul and body ; so, also, in respect of the object, that is, the whole law in every particular command of it.

The whole law is contained in two things : in those duties, that immediately concern God ; and in those duties, that do immediately concern men. Now, if thy obedience be sincere, thou wilt have a general respect unto all God's commands : to those, that concern thy Lord and master ; and, to those also, that concern thy fellow-servants.

Bring this also to the trial. Art thou just and upright in thy dealings with men ? Art thou loving and helpful to thy neighbours ? it is well. But what then is thy religion to God ? is not that a dull and formal thing ? is not this the best character that can be given of thee, that thou art a good neighbour, better to men than thou art to God ? Again, if thou hast taken up a glorious profession of religion, and art frequent in those duties of it that concern God, what art thou then as to men ? Religion hath of late suffered upon this very account, while the professors of it have acted high things in a way of duty, and pretended to high things in a way of enjoyment ; but yet have been as unjust, oppressive, self-seeking, covetous, and over-reaching, as if their only reward were to live upon the spoil of others : thy religion to God, cer-

tainly, is no sign of grace, if thou art not also conscientiable in thy dealings towards men : "Herein do I exercise myself," says the apostle, "to keep in all things a conscience void of offence both to God and men." But, more particularly, the duties, that respect others, are either general, as thou art a man to men ; or particular, as to thy relation in which thou standest, relative duties. Now, how is it, that you perform these duties, that belong to thy special relation ? for herein the life of Christianity is seen. How dost thou demean thyself, in the place where thou livest, as a magistrate, in checking sin and in punishing vice ? how, as a minister ? how, as a parent ? how, as a yoke-fellow ? how, as a child ? and how, as a servant ? Whatever a man doth, as to the general duties of Christianity, yet if he be negligent and careless in these particular relative duties, he hath great cause to suspect himself : it argues truth of grace, when we are careful in the fulfilling of these particular relations and stations, that we stand in towards others. I shall close up this note of trial with that of the apostle, in James ii. 10, 11. He, that offendeth in one, is "guilty of all :" if there be a willing and indulging sloth, in the neglecting of any one duty that God hath commanded, how difficult and how opposite soever it be unto flesh and blood, that man hath ground to suspect, that whatever other duties he performs, be they never so many and never so admirable, yet they are not such as manifest sincerity, and, may give him a good evidence of a good estate.

[4.] Another sign of regeneration, which is the last that I shall mention, is that which St. John speaks of in his first epistle, chap. iii. ver. 9, 10. "*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him : and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.*"

This place may, perhaps, be among the number of those, that had been more clear, if they had been less expounded. I shall only give you the genuine native sense of the words, and then proceed to manage them to my present purpose. "*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.*" Some

from hence have concluded a possibility, at least, of a sinless state in this life : others, the infallible certainty of it ; not only that a child of God might attain to such a perfection as is exclusive of all sin, but that whoever is a child of God cannot upon that very account be guilty of any sin : so like are errors to precipices, that, if a man lose his firm footing, usually he falls headlong ; nor doth he stop, till he dash himself against the bottom and foundation of all religion and piety : had these men but seriously pondered what the same apostle saith in his first chapter, v. 8, 10, " If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us :" and, " If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar," they would not have entertained such an over-weaning conceit of a spotless perfection of life here : whereof the greatest part is no better than sin, and the best of it but too, too much defiled with it. Others interpret it thus : ' So long as we are the children of God, so long we cannot sin ; ' and so the Papists go : but these go upon an erroneous supposition, that every mortal sin, as they call them, makes an intercision of justifying grace ; and doth, as it were, annihilate the new creature. Others interpret it thus : ' In quantum sumus Dei filii ; ' we cannot sin under that respect and notion, as we are the children of God ; but even so far as we are, the best of us in the most part, unrenewed ; though this is a certain truth, yet it is but a dilute and waferish exposition of this place ; and it amounts to no more than this, that a regenerate man sins not as he is regenerate, that the principle of grace in him is not that principle from whence sinful actions proceed : and certainly, no man, that considers the weight of this scripture expression, will think that the apostle, by such an instance and ingemination, would press so thin a meaning as this is. The interpretation, therefore, that I judge to be the most natural and unforced is this : " He, that is born of God, doth not commit sin ; " that is, he doth not sin in that malignant manner, in which the children of the devil do ; he doth not make a trade of sin, nor live in the constant and allowed practice of it. Neither can he thus sin, because " his seed remaineth in him ; " that is, either the energy of the word of God whereby he is begotten again

to a spiritual life, or the complexion of the graces of the Spirit that are as it were the seminary and seed-plot of glory. Nor he cannot sin because "his seed remaineth in him: this seed remains, and keeps him that he cannot sin; either as apostates do who totally forsake the ways of God, or as profane persons do who never embraced them. There is a great difference between regenerate and unregenerate persons, in the very sins that they commit: all, indeed, sin; but a child of God cannot sin; that is, though he doth sin, yet he cannot sin after such a manner as wicked and unregenerate men do: there is a vast difference betwixt them, even in that wherein they do most of all agree; see that place in Deut. xxxii. 5. "Their spot is not the spot of his children;" even deformities themselves are characteristical; and a true Christian may come to know by his sins, that he is not a sinner. And, as they differ in the committing of sin, so much more in the opposing of it.

Let us, therefore, examine ourselves what evidences we have in respect of the keeping of ourselves from sin, that we are regenerated and born again.

1st. It is a good evidence of the work of grace, when our opposition against sin is universal. When we do, as David speaks of himself, "*hate every false way.*"

The reservation, indulgence, or allowance granted to any one known lust, is utterly inconsistent with a state of grace. One lust, that hath obtained your pass to go to and fro unmolested, and to traffic with the heart undisturbed, whatever opposition you may make against other sins, is a certain sign of a corrupt heart. One lust will serve as a spy, to hold intelligence with the devil. A scion can never be incorporated into the stock, while there is the least skin or film betwixt them: no more can we ever be incorporated into Jesus Christ, if there be but the separation of any the least allowed sin to interpose betwixt him and us. Our opposition, therefore, must be against all sin. It is true, in our bodies there are such parts, that, if we were wounded in them, there need no other wounds to dispatch us, but the wound is instantly mortal: as, if a man be wounded in the heart, you need not strike him on the head; but, in the body of sin and death, there is

no such wound: it is not sufficient to destroy the old man, that we wound him in any one part; but he must be made, as our natural state is described to be by the prophet, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, all full of wounds and bruises.

Let us now try ourselves by this. Is there no lust, that your eye spares, nor that your heart pities? Doth the sword of mortification draw the heart-blood of every sin? When they fly for shelter into your bosom, can you rend them from thence, and slay them before the Lord? When they plead profit or pleasure, can you, with a holy disdain, destroy them with such arguments in their mouths? Can you then cut off a right hand, when it is lifted up to plead for mercy? Can you then pluck out a right eye, when it sheds tears to move you to compassion to it? If so, this is a good evidence of regenerating grace: whose proper effect it is, to beget an antipathy and hatred in the heart against all sin. But, if there be any one sin, that you allow and indulge in yourself, whatever other sins you may abstain from, assure yourself that the greatest change that is wrought upon you is only some external change of the life, but no change of the heart or state; still you are in your sins, if you allow yourself but in one of them. One allowed sin is vent enough for the old man to take breath at; and, while it hath a breathing-place allowed it, it is in vain to think that you have mortified and destroyed it.

2dly. As this opposition must be universal, against every sin in general; so it must be, more especially, against the sins of the heart.

He, that will destroy a toad crawling on the ground, will much more destroy it should it crawl in his bosom. Now these sins are the bubblings up of evil thoughts, and the motions of evil affections and desires; those lurking and invisible lusts, that hypocrites may foster, and yet have a large testimonial of their saintship, to which all the world almost will be ready to set their hands. But this doth one, that is truly born of God, most of all complain of and strive against. In this, indeed, lies the most unerring test and trial of true grace. What the apostle tells us, in Rom. ii. 28, 29, that is not "circumcision which is

outward in the flesh ; " but that, which is inward, in the heart and spirit, the same may I say : it is not striving and struggling against sins, that are outward in the flesh ; but against sins in the heart. A numbness may seize on the outward members of the body ; when yet the heart beats strong and quick, and the brain works in sprightly and vigorous motions : so, truly, is it in this case ; the old man may sometimes be benumbed in its outward limbs, and denied in its executive part ; when yet the head may work busily in building and shaping sinful objects, and the heart eagerly beat and pant after them. It is, usually, the only care of a wicked man, to keep his lusts from raging and breaking forth into outward act : though his heart seeths and stews in malicious, unclean, worldly thoughts ; yet these he regards and laments not, nor suppresseth, so long as he can but keep them from boiling over, and from raising ashes and smoke about him. But here lies the chief task of a regenerate person : for, though it seem possibly an easy thing to destroy such little naked infant things as thoughts are that flutter up and down in the soul, and that light strokes would lay them dead ; yet, certainly, a true Christian, who by experience knows what it is to deal with his own heart, finds it infinitely more difficult to beat down one sinful thought from rising up in him, than to keep a thousand sinful thoughts from breaking forth into open act. Here lies his chief labour, to fight against phantasms and airy apparitions, such as thoughts are : he sets himself chiefly against these heart-sins ; because he knows these are sins, that are most of all contrary to grace, and do most of all weaken and waste grace : outward sins are but like so many caterpillars, that devour the verdure and flourishing of grace ; but heart-sins are like so many worms, that gnaw the very root of grace : and, therefore, God calls upon Jerusalem, in Jer. iv. 14, " O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness : how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee ? "

Now try yourselves by this. In the opposition, that you make against sin, what is it, that you chiefly resist ? Do you not content yourselves, that you have beaten corruption from the outward works into the very fort ; that, whereas

it sallied forth before at its pleasure and wounded your consciences, now it is pent up in a narrower room and compass? Do you not content yourselves with this? but do you still oppose it, and follow it into the heart; and, when it hides itself in a sinful thought, do you stifle and kill it there? If so, this is such an opposition, that proceeds from true grace, which works in you an antipathy against all sin. But, when a swarm of lusts is up, which perhaps some external principles only may keep from flying abroad: if they cluster in thy heart, and thou hivest them there: and if thou canst, for the satisfying of conscience, abstain from the outward acts of sins; and yet, for the satisfying of thy corruptions, canst also tolerate and allow the inward motions of sin: it is a sign that thou never knewest the power of regenerating grace; which first begins to cleanse the heart, as being the most compendious way and method to reform the life.

3dly. Look how you oppose those sins, that are more spiritual sins: such as reside in the refined and exalted part of a man, his mind; but have little traffic or commerce with the dreggy part, his body.

Such are pride, envy, unbelief, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, slighting of Jesus Christ, and the like. These are spiritual wickednesses: and, if thou art truly regenerate, thy chief endeavours will be bent against these; for these are sins of the deepest and blackest guilt in themselves, though they are not branded so in the account of the world. And, therefore, when our Saviour rakes up the bottom of hell, who do you find lies there? Is it the drunkard, the unclean person; such sottish and swinish sinners? no: but it is the hypocrite, the spiritual and refined sinner: Matt. xxiv. 51. These are those sins, that are so inconsistent with the image of God upon the soul, that, of all other sins, they make men nearest to resemble the devil: to be guilty of these sins, is to be a sinner like him. Those brutish lusts, wherein sensualists wallow, are not the proper sins of the devil: no; they are intellectual sins, clarified from such dregs; such as pride, malice, hatred of God and goodness, and the like.

Now try yourselves by this. You rush not, possibly, "into the same excess of riot" with others: you resist and

refrain from outward, gross, self-condemning sins : but, do you strive against pride, hypocrisy, unbelief, and hardness of heart ? If so, this is a good sign, that you are the children of God ; unto whose spiritual nature, and unto yours also, these spiritual sins are most of all contrary. But, if you are only cleansed from the pollutions of the flesh, and not also from the pollutions of the spirit ; if you indulge yourselves in pride, malice, murdering and revengeful thoughts, and the like ; know assuredly, that you do not bear the image of God, but the image of the devil, whose peculiar sins these are.

4thly. A regenerate person bends his opposition, as against heart-sins and spiritual-wickedness ; so also against his own iniquity, in a peculiar manner.

David produceth this as a clear evidence of his integrity, in Psalm xviii. 23. " I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity." Indeed, a child of God can have no sin his own, by any deliberate choice and approbation of it ; as one culled and chosen out from the rest, and reserved for him to commit. Thus to have any sin a man's own, is inconsistent with true grace. But sin may be called a man's own, by a too frequent practice of it, and by a too violent inclination of his heart unto it. Every one of us hath his peculiar sin, that we may call our own, that is more deeply rooted in us than others are : whether they arise from the temper of our nature, or from custom that is a second nature, or from the verge and tendency of our callings and employments, or from what account soever they proceed ; yet there are some sins, that a child of God may call his own, and against these doth he more particularly bend himself, and single them out unto the combat.

5thly. A truly regenerate person will be careful to avoid all temptations unto, and all occasions of sin.

And, therefore, in that prayer, that Christ hath taught us, we first pray, that we may not be led into temptation ; and, next, that we may be delivered from evil. So is it the first care of a child of God, that he be not tempted ; and his next care, how he may escape when he is tempted. It is a sign of a heart woefully entangled with the love of sin, when men choose to walk upon the very borders of sin and

temptation ; and, when they are under strong temptations, secretly please themselves with it, because now they think they have some excuse if they yield.

6thly. Our opposition against sin is a good sign of the truth of grace ; when it is not only universal against all sin, but universal from our whole man ; when it is not only from our reason and conscience, but also from our will and affections.

For, in regeneration, there is a principle diffused through the whole man, that is contrary to sin, and destructive of it in every faculty. As it was with Elisha, when he stretched himself over the Shunamite's child ; his eyes were against the child's eyes, and his mouth against the child's, yea every limb in him corresponding to every limb in the child : so is it in a regenerate man ; the new man, that is spread all over and covers as it were the whole old man, limb for limb, is spread over every faculty of the soul and body also. It is not enough, that our consciences check us for sin ; but the will and the affections must be bent against sin : the opposition must be from the whole soul, or it is not an evidence of the truth of grace.

Be exhorted, therefore, to deal impartially with your own souls. Look into your own state. Examine yourselves. Try whether Jesus Christ be formed in you. If your state be good, searching into it will give you the comfort of it. If your state be bad, searching into it cannot make it worse : nay, it is the only way to make it better ; for conversion begins with conviction.

ii. Now if you have tried yourselves by any of these marks, either you find that you are such as are already passed from death to life, or that you are still in a state of sinful nature : accordingly, I shall direct to you *a word of exhortation*, and so shut up the whole subject.

1. *If you have a comfortable evidence of your regeneration, that the habit of grace is indeed wrought in you, be exhorted to draw it forth into act. If you are born of God, live then as those that are the children of God.*

This exhortation I shall branch out into three particulars.

(1.) Endeavour, that the graces of the Spirit be fruitful in good works,

Your corruptions are always vigorous and operative; and why should not your graces be so, much more? Grace is in you the ruling and prevailing principle: why should it not also be most active in you? Yet so it is, as it was with Sarah and Hagar: Sarah, the free-born mistress, is barren; but Hagar, the bond-woman, is fruitful. So is it even in the children of God themselves: the noble, spiritual, and free-born part is usually barren and unfruitful; when the carnal and servile part is too, too fruitful, still conceiving, and still bringing forth. What is the reason, that corruption that is conquered should have a more numerous offspring, than grace that is triumphant? Grace is no sluggish, unacted principle; no; it is ethereal: it carries a divine and heavenly fire in it; and tends as naturally to what is good, as the corrupt part doth to what is sinful: it hath a natural propension to breathe itself forth into holy thoughts, holy affections, and desires. Do not you, then, be wanting to it; but stir up the grace of God that is in you: think how becoming a thing it is, when God hath framed you according to his image and likeness, that you also should frame holy thoughts and heavenly affections, according to God's likeness, and have a numerous progeny like unto him. But, alas! the children of God are much wanting to themselves, in this particular: if the Spirit, at any time, is pregnant upon their hearts with holy motions, how do they neglect and stifle them! so that there are but very few of them, but prove mere abortives. Our hearts, at last, will be found to have been the graves and sepulchres of thousands of holy thoughts and motions, which we have starved in their very infancy.

(2.) Oppose indwelling grace against the prevalency and power of indwelling sin.

Grace is an immortal seed, that will certainly sprout up and flourish into glory: it is a living fountain, that will certainly spring up unto eternal life; a ray of heavenly light, that will wax brighter and brighter to a heavenly day. It is immortal, in its seed; victorious, in a spark: triumphant, in its dawn: yea, take it when it is weakest, when this dawn is clouded, when this spark twinkles, when this seed is uninspired; yet, even then, is it mighty

through God, and is still an over-match for sin. To set grace against sin, is to set God against Satan, heaven against hell, the Spirit against the flesh : and what odds can any Christian desire more? Have we a principle of grace in us, which will go forth conquering unto conquer, and will assuredly crown us with victory ; and shall we not bring it to the trial ? Yea, let me tell you, you must detain grace in unrighteousness, and depress and keep it under by violence, if you do not prevail with it : if you do not strive against your sins, you must strive against your graces ; and, therefore, it is the greatest shame in the world, for you, that have a principle of grace in you, that principle that shall never totally be overcome, basely to yield to any temptation or lust whatsoever.

(3.) Be exhorted also, since you are born of God, to live as becomes the children of God, and to express your heavenly parentage by your heavenly conversation.

I have formerly, in the handling of this subject, told you that we are the children of God, two ways ; by regeneration, and by adoption : adoption gives us the inheritance of children ; and regeneration gives us the nature of our heavenly Father. As we then bear the relation of children, so let us have the affections of children.

[1.] Let us possess our hearts with a filial fear and reverence of God.

God calls for this, in Mal. i. 6. "If I be a Father, where is mine honour?" And so the apostle, 1 Pet. i. 17. "If ye call God Father, pass the time of your sojourning here with fear." This holy awe and fear of God will be a great check upon us, when we are apt to grow wanton and extravagant. Children, whatsoever they do at other times, yet will strive to deport thomselfes respectfully in the presence of their father. Consider, you are always in the presence of your heavenly Father, who is omnipresent : he is with you wherever you are : his eye is upon you, whatever you are doing. Oh, therefore, behave yourselves with that holy reverence and composedness, which becomes so awful a presence as his. Thou, who wouldest abstain from any lewd and unbecoming action before the reverent face of thy earthly parents, wilt thou not much more reverence the all-controlling looks of thy heavenly

Father? There is not a thought in thy heart, nor a word upon thy tongue, but God knows it altogether; and if this be not a most powerful restraint to keep thee from evil, know this, that the very immodesty of thy sinning is a clear proof that thou art no child. When Joseph's brethren committed that horrid fact of selling him, they contrived how they might hide it from the knowledge of their father: doubtless, if the authority of Jacob's presence had been with them, it would have overawed them from that wickedness. Behold a more awful and dread Father than Jacob was, is always with you: and, therefore, since you can hide none of your sins from your dread Father's sight, be careful that you commit none in his sight.

[2.] Imitate your heavenly Father in his goodness and bounty unto all.

He is kind to the foward, and to the disobedient: He causeth his sun to shine upon the good and upon the bad, and doth good both to the just and to the unjust. Should God have avenged all those petulant wrongs and those arrogant affronts, that sinners have done against him, the whole world ere this time would have been utterly destroyed; but he hath not left himself without witness: it is the witness of his patience and forbearance, that the sun yet shines upon us, that the air supports us, that the heavens give forth their cherishing influences to us. Here is a pattern for you to imitate. Alas! you cannot be so much injured by men, or so beneficial to men, as God is. They depend no more upon you, than you do upon them: but we all depend upon a patient and forbearing God; and yet we are apt, upon every slight provocation, to break forth into fire and fury. This is not the disposition of God, neither should it be the disposition of his children. The divine nature, whereof we are made partakers, prompts us to be long-suffering, and full of bowels of mercy and compassion, and is pleased when it can like God forgive others. Jesus Christ, who had all the host of heaven and earth in pay under him, and could have commanded whole legions to have secured and revenged himself: yet, when he was, under his sufferings, hanging upon the cross, how patiently did he endure the scoffings, shout-

ings, and mockings of men; and open not his mouth otherwise than in prayer for them! "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," "When he was reviled, he reviled not again." Imitate your Lord and Master, your God and Father; and, when the world reproaches you and persecutes you, show that you have learned one thing, that nothing but true godliness can teach you; to wit, that you are able and willing to forgive them.

[3.] If you are the children of God, be patient and submissive under his correcting hand. Is it not thy Father that afflicts thee?

The apostle argues this strongly, Heb. xii. 9. If we suffer our earthly parents to chastise us for their pleasure, how much more should we suffer patiently the chastisements of our heavenly Father, who doth it only for our good, and if need be! Nothing puts a sharper sting into afflictions and makes them more intolerable, than to look upon them as punishments inflicted by an avenging God. The soul is not able to bear up under such afflictions, because then it looks upon the lightest and smallest evil that befalls it, to be but, as it were, the pledge and earnest of a far greater that is to ensue. But when we can look upon afflictions as the chastisements of a gracious Father, this will enable us to bear them, not only patiently, but thankfully also; as being the testimonies and effects of his special love unto us: for, says the apostle, he chastiseth "every son whom he receiveth." The end, for which God casts thee into the furnace of affliction, is to purify thee from thy dross, not to consume thee: he knows what afflictions, and what measures of them, will best conduce to this end, for he is a wise God; and he will bring no other affliction upon thee than what shall accomplish this end, for he is also a gracious Father.

These three exhortations belong to those, who, by the signs before named or any other, have attained to some assurance that they are renewed and born again.

2. In the second place, let me speak to such, as are yet in a natural and sinful estate; in the same deplorable state of sin and misery, in which they came into the world.

Unto these now I shall only direct a two-fold exhortation, and so conclude the whole subject.

(1.) Beware that you do not flatter yourselves with any deluding hopes of heaven : you are, as yet, without any right to it.

This is, indeed, a dreadful caution. What ! to beat men off from their hopes of heaven ! And, commonly, it proves as fruitless, as it is dreadful : men's hopes, of all things, frequently deceive them. They maintain themselves with little, especially the hopes they have of heaven ; and they live either upon weak probabilities, or upon strong fancies. And, hence, the scripture compares the hope of a hypocrite to " a spider's web :" Job viii. 14 : men spin their hopes out of their own bowels, and settle themselves in the midst of them, and doubt not but they shall catch heaven itself in their foolish cobwebs. Should I come and ask you all, one by one, ' Do you, and you, hope to be saved ? ' where is the person, that would not, by his disdain at the very question, testify how high and how great his hopes are ? Would not the drunkard, the swearer, the profane person, and the whole rabble of wicked and ungodly wretches speak as confidently of their salvation, as if they were born with sure proofs of heaven in their hands ? What ! are these men regenerate ? or is the price of heaven fallen ; and God become willing to part with it upon lower terms than the new birth ? Art thou regenerated, that hatest God and godliness, and all those that bear the least resemblance to the divine purity ? Art thou regenerated, that makest an impudent scoff at the name, and deridest the very title that fallen man hath unto happiness ? is it likely, that the new nature should be hid under an old life ? Regeneration is the ransacking of the soul ; the turning of a man out of himself ; the crumbling to pieces of the old man, and the new moulding of it into another shape : it is the turning of stones into children ; and a drawing of the lively portraiture of Jesus Christ upon that very table, that before represented only the very image of the devil. This mighty change is wrought by regeneration. Man's partaking of the divine nature is the greatest change, that ever was wrought in

heaven or in earth, unless it were God's partaking of the human nature. Art thou thus changed? are all old things done away, and all things in thee become new? hast thou a new heart and renewed affections; and dost thou serve God in newness of life and conversation? If not, what hast thou to do with hopes of heaven? thou art yet without Christ; and so, consequently, without hope. Sinners, what is it you trust to? Is it your own good works? this, indeed, is the common refuge of those, that have fewest good works to produce: but, alas! what confidence canst thou repose in these, when the very prayer of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord? Is it the merit of Christ, that you rely upon? why Christ becomes a Saviour to none, but to those in whose hearts he is first formed. Is it some slight and general notions of God's mercy, that you trust to? it is true, God is infinitely merciful, though he hath already damned thousands for their sins; and he will remain for ever infinitely merciful, when thou also art damned among them: it is in vain to press the mercy of God to serve your foolish hopes, against that inviolable truth of his, that hath excluded you out of heaven: " Except you be born again, you can in no wise enter into the kingdom of God." This is that irreversible sentence, that is written on heaven-gates: no entering there, but by passing first through the new birth: no dogs nor swine must come into that holy city; and such are all unrenewed persons: yea, the scripture calls them the children of the devil: John viii. 44. " Ye are of your father, the devil:" and, certainly, that God, who hath chased devils out of heaven, will never admit any of his rude offspring into it. And therefore let me, in the first place, exhort you not to flatter yourselves into hell and destruction, with false and deluding hopes of heaven.

(2.) Give no rest, either to God or to yourselves, till this thorough change be wrought upon you in your regeneration.

It is, as you have heard, of absolute necessity unto eternal salvation; and, unless you think that salvation itself is not of absolute necessity, what can be the reason, that you trifle and dally in that, which is of so vast a concernment? What is it that you can plead for yourselves?

Is it, that it is not within the compass of your power to regenerate yourselves ? it is true : but, although you cannot form this new nature in you, why do you not yet do your utmost to prepare and dispose yourselves to receive it ? Though we are all lamed and crippled by our fall which we took in Adam, yet such cripples as we are may notwithstanding make shift to get into that way by which Christ useth to pass, and may possibly be healed by him. It is a sure rule, Though God is not bound to give grace upon men's endeavours, yet neither is he wont to deny it : do you expect that this change, like that of the surviving saints at the last day, should pass upon you ere you are aware of it, " in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye ?" It is true, man's change of heart is the greatest miracle that God works in the world ; but yet, he works it in an ordinary way, by our own endeavours, as well as by his own irresistible and victorious grace : and, therefore, God calls upon us, Ezek. xviii. 31. " Make you a new heart and a new spirit : for why will ye die ?" Do not therefore cheat your souls into eternal perdition, by such lazy conceits of your own weakness and impotency. Do not content yourselves with a few yawning, drowsy wishes ; expecting till divine grace doth of its own self drop down out of heaven, and of its own accord change your hearts : possibly, before that time you yourselves may irrecoverably drop into hell. Will you lose your souls for ever, only out of a wretched sloth ? doth one end of them lie burning as a brand in hell-fire, and will you not stretch out your hand to pluck it thence ? Believe it, so long as you continue in a sinful state you are wrapped about with ten thousand curses : the wrath of God is continually making its approaches unto you ; and there is only a thin mud wall of flesh to fence it out, which is still mouldering and falling away, and whether it will be able to hold out one day longer you know not : you hang over the bottomless pit, only by the weak thread of a frail life, which is ready to be snapped asunder every moment ; and, if some consuming sickness should fret this thread or some unforeseen casualty should break it off suddenly, if death work a change upon you before grace works a change in you, of all God's creation you are the most miserable : Better,

that you had been the most loathsome creature that crawls upon God's earth, yea better that you had never been, than that you should forget and neglect this great work of renovation one moment too long. Therefore, use no delay. Every moment, that is not this present, is too long a delay. While you are dreaming of repentance and converting, some months or possibly some years hence, God may snatch you away before the next sand is run in time's glass ; and where are you then ? " Now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation." Whatever is not now, may be too late ; and, ere that time comes that you have prefixed to yourselves, God may set up your souls as flaming monuments of his displeasure, justice, and severity in hell for ever.

If you ask me what you shall do to be renewed, I answer, the directions are not many : take only these two.

[1.] Be instant with God, by prayer, that he would, by his omnipotent grace, new-create you to himself, and stamp again upon you his effaced image.

There is a prevalency in the prayer of a mere natural man, when he prays for grace ; else St. Peter would never have exhorted Simon Magus, who was " in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity," to pray that so the thought of his heart might be forgiven him.

[2.] Improve diligently, all the means of regeneration ; whereof the word is the chief.

Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth, says the apostle : Jam. i. 18. Attend it constantly : meditate upon it frequently : endeavour faithfully to practise it. This hath been the way, in all ages, that hath proved successful for the bringing in of sinners unto God. Heaven is full of happy souls, that have been fitted for that glorious estate, by such very ordinances as these are, that now you sit under. It is true, these are not of themselves a sufficient means. Alas ! what is the weak breath of a poor man, to make impressions upon hearts that are harder than the nether mill-stones ? What can we do, to give sight to the blind, and life to the dead ? but only God, who demolished the walls of Jericho by the sound of a few rams' horns, doth likewise make use of the preaching of the Gospel to demolish the strong-holds of Satan ; which

would have been as impertinent and insignificant a sound as that was, had not God put his institution upon it, and his Spirit into it. Wait upon the ordinances, therefore; that that happy soul-saving word may at length be spoken, that may cause thee to arise, and to stand up from the dead. Endeavour to do whatever lies in thy power, in order to thy regeneration. It is true, it is not in our power to make ourselves new creatures: but, when God sees thee conscientiously improving that power that thou hast, he will then give thee that power that thou wantest. Never yet was there an instance of any, that did vigorously to their utmost labour after grace, that did not also leave some good evidences behind them that they did obtain it: and, certainly, thou hast no reason to think, that God will make thee the first instance and precedent.

So much, for this time, and for this subject.

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ACTS XXVI. 28.

*"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."*

IN this chapter we have St. Paul, in his fetters, pleading before that honourable sessions of Festus and Agrippa. His plea we have largely set down, from the first to the twenty-fourth verse ; in which he opens his commission, that he had received in an extraordinary manner from heaven, for preaching that doctrine which was every where spoken against, and for worshipping God in that way which was called heresy.

I shall not at all enter into the consideration of the apology : but let us only look at the different effects, that it wrought upon the hearers. Festus and Agrippa were both of them unbelievers : the one, an unbelieving heathen : the other, an unbelieving Jew : and thus they both continue.

Yet St. Paul's speech works very differently upon them. In the twenty-fourth verse you have Festus raving. He said with a loud voice, "Paul, thou art beside thyself ? much learning hath made thee mad ; thy thoughts of a vision and an apparition, of a man dead and buried, lying safe under ground, that he should rise again and appear from heaven to thee, being the Saviour of the world, is a mere fancy, proceeding from a strong frenzy :" thus he scoffs and raves. But this very sermon, which seemed

madness and an idle tale to unbelieving Festus, carries a strong conviction in it to Agrippa, who was an unbeliever too. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Hence observe, that the word of God hath a far different effect, even upon those, upon whom it hath no saving effect. One raves and rages against it, and is seared and stupified by it; another is convinced and terrified by it. Festus scoffs and mocks, and goes away laughing at the doctrine and reviling the preacher: but Agrippa is convinced, and half persuaded to believe and practise that very doctrine, and highly to esteem the preacher of it.

And is it not so even among us? Are there not many, who may come to the ordinances in a natural and sinful estate and condition? The same word of God is cast among them all: yea, but what is the success? When the sword of the Spirit is brandished amongst a great crowd of consciences, it is not likely, that it should miss all, and strike none of them: one, perhaps, goes away slighting and contemning; another goes away scoffing and railing against it; and another half-persuaded by it to become a Christian, to be almost a Christian. If every man's breast had a casement in it, by which we might see the inward estuations and boilings of their hearts, how they work after a powerful and terrifying sermon; should we not behold and see some, shifting and shuffling their sins out of the way? some, holding up the bucklers of prejudicate opinions to ward and fence off the stroke of the Spirit? some, fretting and storming at the lancing of their consciences? some, scoffing and scorning, with Festus, that it is no better than folly and madness? some, trembling, with Felix? some, convinced and wrought upon, as Agrippa, to faint resolutions and half-purposes? And, yet, all these remain under the power of unbelief and unregeneracy. It is, indeed, a wonder, that, among such diversity of operations which the word hath upon the souls and consciences of men, it could be possible that such a multitude should go away without any saving operation by it; some, blinded and hardened; some, terrified; some, stupified; some, exasperated and enraged; some, convinced and half-persuaded, and such are those that we now speak of: such as are, as it were, half of one

complexion and half of another, that stick in the new birth, whose hearts have been warmed with good motions, who have entertained approving and admiring thoughts concerning the ways of holiness, who have taken up some resolutions of doing better and of being better; and, yet, do not come off roundly and speedily from their sins, nor close fully with Christ. These are the half Christians which the text speaks of.

The words are plain in themselves: and, therefore, do not require much explication. Only the word translated “*almost* thou persuadest me,” &c. if accurately rendered, according to the original, is “*a little* thou persuadest me,” &c. So in the reply, which St. Paul makes, with a holy kind of gallantry, in the ensuing verse, you find it is opposed to much, which we render altogether: but the grammatical construction is, “Would to God they were both all, and in much, such as I am, except these bonds!” So then “in a little, thou persuadest me;” that is, ‘I could, methinks, be contented to be a Christian in a little, in some few things: some part of the way I could willingly go,’ saith Agrippa: but St. Paul concludes, it must not be only in a little, but in much, in all.

If we follow this sense and interpretation of the words; then observe,

*Doct. 1. There goes much to the making of a true Christian; a little will not serve.*

It is not a little will serve: for many precious ingredients go to the making of a true Christian; and much of each ingredient goes to the making of a strong Christian. There must be profession, faith, obedience, self-denial, patience, humility, outward preparation and inward graces, outward embellishments and inward ornaments; and a little of it is but little worth. There are many, that are persuaded to be Christians in name and profession, to be Christians in outward participation of ordinances and communion with saints, and the like: yea, but this is to be a Christian but only in a little. Are you persuaded to obey Christ in all, to take up his cross and deny yourselves, to oppose and mortify your lusts, and to perform the harshest and severest part of religion? this is indeed

to be a Christian, not only in a little, but in much; yea, in all, to be such as St. Paul himself was.

But, then, if you take the words according to our translation, which the original also will very well bear; so it is, "Within a little or almost thou persuadest me;" for king Agrippa was fully convinced of the truth of those things, which Paul related; as you may see, v. 26. He knew these things, and was ignorant of none of them: they were not hidden from him; for these things were not done in a corner. He could not be ignorant of the miraculous conversion of him, who had been so furious and notorious a persecutor of Christians. He, who was expert in all the customs that were among the Jews, v. 3, could not be ignorant of what the apostle affirms, v. 22, 23. This, that Moses and the prophets foretold, that Christ should suffer and be raised from the dead, and should give life to the Gentiles, of all this king Agrippa was fully convinced: and, yet, when Paul so insinuatingly presseth upon him, "Believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest," the result of all is this, that he was but almost persuaded, not fully persuaded of the truth of what St. Paul speaks concerning Christ, concerning himself, and concerning Christians: yet, for all that, he was but almost persuaded to be a Christian.

Hence, likewise, observe,

*Doct. 2. That persons, who are fully and truly convinced, are many times but almost and half persuaded.*

There may be a powerful persuasion in the judgment and the conscience concerning Christ and his ways, when there is but half a persuasion in the will and affections to cleave with them.

These observations I gather up, as they lie strewed in my passage. I shall not insist upon them, but only as they are subservient to the fuller prosecution of the general doctrine, which you may take thus:

*Doct. 3. That those, who never were in Christ, yet may be almost Christians.*

I need not here stand to tell you, that Christianity may be taken either, first, for an outward profession of Christ, as it is opposed to all other religions in the world, whether

heathenish idolatry, Mahometan stupidity, or Jewish ceremony ; or, secondly, for an inward and cordial embracing of Jesus Christ, thus professed, as it stands opposed, either to the profaneness or hypocrisy of carnal gospellers.

Evident it is, that the Christianity, that Agrippa was almost persuaded into, was of the first sort ; not excluding the second.

Nay, it was seldom seen, that, in those primitive times, wherein no carnal respect or outward advantage could commend the gospel to the interests of men, when the reward of professing Christ was persecution and martyrdom ; then, I say, it was seldom seen, that any would take Christ by profession, who would not also take him by faith and adherence : few there were, that would take up religion, even upon this condition, to lay down their lives for Christ ; who yet, through their own profaneness or hypocrisy, were to receive no benefit from the death of Christ : so that, to persuade men then to be Christians in profession, was the same with persuading them to be Christians in reality. But now, when the name of Christ is so much courted, when the denying of Christ would be repaid with the same punishment that formerly the owning of Christ underwent, you need not so much persuasion to take upon you the outward profession of Christianity : for you are not only almost, but altogether Christians, in the external garb ; but our persuasion to you must be, that, as you own Christ in an outward profession of him, so you would cleave to him by a true faith in him and obedience to him.

We are not, then, to speak to pagans, to convert them to a new religion ; but, if I may so say, we are to speak to Christian Infidels, to convert them to a new life and conversation. Nor yet, among these, doth my subject lead me to the profane and looser sort ; whose being called Christians doth not more honour them, than they disgrace and reproach that holy name : but to those, who are more elevated and more refined ; who go far in Christianity, so as to be near the kingdom of God ; in a word, such as are almost Christian ; and yet are strangers to Christ, and remain in their sinful state and unregenerate condition.

In the prosecution of this point, I shall inquire into these following particulars, in this method :

I. What progress men may make towards Christianity, and yet fall short of it.

II. Whence they are enabled to proceed so far ; and what it is, that carries them out to all their attainments.

III. What it is, that hinders them from proceeding further ; and, when they are almost Christians, what keeps them from being such altogether.

IV. To show you the folly and misery of those, who proceed thus far only, as to be almost Christians, and no farther.

I. Let us see *what progress a natural man may make towards grace and christianity, and yet remain in a sinful state.*

i. Before I can come, in particular, to determine this, I must premise these three particulars.

1. That when we inquire what progress an unregenerate man may make towards grace, this *supposes, that there is a tendency in what such a man doth or may do, towards the obtaining of grace* : or how else can he make any progress towards it, if that, which he doth, hath no tendency to it ? Let us, therefore, inquire what kind of tendency this is.

There may be a two-fold tendency supposed in the actions of an unregenerate man, towards the acquisition of grace,—effective, subjective.

(1.) Actions may be said to have an effective tendency, when they do, by their own efficiency and causality, produce that, which they tend to.

And, in this sense, it must be denied that the actions of an unregenerate man have any tendency towards grace : be their progress what it will, thereby he cannot efficiently produce or cause grace in himself : and, therefore, grace is called the new creature, as being the effect only of creating power, which is the sole prerogative of God ; and it is as utterly impossible, for a man to create grace in the soul, as to create the soul itself.

Take but this one demonstration to evince it. If an unregenerate man, by his own power and efficiency, can

produce grace in himself, then one of these two gross absurdities must needs follow, either, that there are still left holy habits and principles in the will, which were never lost by the fall of man : or, that a man may make himself truly holy, by a will that is totally corrupt and sinful. But either of these is very gross.

[1.] There are no holy nor divine habits left in the will of a carnal man, whereby he should be able to regenerate and convert himself. For what holy habit can there be in the will of one, that is wholly corrupted ? If any such be supposed, it may also be supposed that it is true grace : and, to affirm that a man, in a state of nature, hath true grace inherent in him, whereby he is able to convert and regenerate himself, is double nonsense and a flat contradiction ; for it is to affirm, that he hath grace before he hath it.

[2.] A will, totally corrupted, cannot make a holy man, cannot produce grace, nor make a man holy. Grace is beyond and above its sphere. The motions of the will in its fallen estate, what through defect of a right principle from whence they flow and a right end to which they tend, are all evil and sinful : and it is very strange to affirm, that a gracious habit may be wrought in us by sinful actions. And, besides, the will of man, by the fall, is a fleshly will ; but, in regeneration, it is made spiritual : now it were a strange kind of production, if fleshly could beget spiritual : nor would it any longer hold true, that our Saviour saith in John iii. 6. "That, which is born of the flesh, is flesh." So that I think it is very evident, that all that a man can do by the power of nature cannot tend efficiently to produce grace in him.

(2.) There is a subjective tendency towards grace. And this lies in those moral preparations, and those dispositions of the heart, which fit it for the receiving of grace, though it be wrought there only by the Holy Ghost. And thus we affirm, that, while men are in an unregenerate state, they may have and do somewhat that hath a tendency in it to grace : that is, one unregenerate man may have more of these previous dispositions, and of these preparations for the receiving of grace, than another hath : for, though it be not in itself singly necessary that such previous dis-

positions should be wrought in the soul before the implantation of divine grace; since such a subject, as the soul is in respect of grace, doth not, as the schoolmen determine, require its previous dispositions for the production of its form; yet this is the usual common way of the Spirit's work, first to prepare the heart by some common works of conviction, legal terrors and remorse of conscience, before it works any saving and real work of grace in it. And, therefore, when any unregenerate man hath much of these previous preparations, we say that he goes very far towards grace, and he may be said to be almost a Christian. And this is all that tendency, that an unregenerate man hath, or can possibly do towards it: viz. a preparatory, and not an effective operative tendency unto saving grace and regeneration.

2. Another thing premised is this; that, *what through wilful sloth and wretched negligence, no unregenerate man doth make so great a progress towards grace as he is able and can possibly do.*

None go so far as they can do, in those previous preparations and dispositions towards it. When they find difficulty in opposing temptation, in crucifying their lusts, in performing duties, in denying their sinful delights and pleasures, having nothing supernatural within them to naturalize and facilitate these things and carry them on resolutely through all, they never keep up to the utmost of that power which they have: but, as they yield to those temptations that they might resist, and commit those sins that they might reject, and neglect those duties which for matter and substance of them they might perform; so, none of them go so far as they have a natural power to do. No man goes so far in the work of grace as he might, if he would improve that power which he hath by nature.

3. *Did they make as great a progress towards grace as they might, they would not fall so far short of grace as they do.*

I say, if wicked unregenerate men did but as much as they are able by the power of nature to do, without the special assistance of the Holy Ghost, they would not fall so far short of grace as they do. I would not enter into that dispute, whether God be engaged to bestow grace

upon the right improvement of their natural power; yet, it is certain, and agreed on by all, that he doth certainly do so. God usually bestows true and saving grace upon those, who do rightly and to their utmost improve their natural power and ability for the acquiring of it. If God be not obliged, by promise, to assist them: yet, through his goodness and mercy, he is not wont to desert them. Let them but labour to improve their natural ability to the utmost strain and pitch, that their own capacity can elevate, God will, according to his usual method and wonted goodness, come in by supernatural grace; and enable them to do that, which by nature they are not able to do: for no instance can be given to the contrary.

So, then, we may conclude, that wicked men never go so far as they can; and did they, yet they could not efficiently work grace in themselves: but, nevertheless, they would be disposed and prepared for the receipt of grace; which God, upon such preparations, would undoubtedly bestow upon them. For, although he be not obliged to give it them: yet, usually, he is wont to work it in them merely through his own natural goodness, free grace and mercy to them, pitying the weakness of their lapsed and fallen nature.

ii. I shall proceed to the answer of the first question, *in the general.*

Unregenerate men may make a great progress, and may go very far towards grace, and yet fall short of it: that, in general, is to be almost a Christian. This I laid down in the method propounded to you. Although I say not that they go so far as they can by the power of nature, and yet fall short of grace; for that can never be instanced in any; yet the sad and wretched apostacy of those, who have been eminent professors, shining yea and glaring lights, exceeding and also despising common attainments of others, hath too evidently confirmed it to us, that men may go very far towards grace, and yet fall short of it. See what Christ saith, Mark xii. 34. of that young man, that forward young man, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God;" that is, thou art not far from grace; for so the kingdom of God is oftentimes taken in scripture for the kingdom of grace: so that we may say of

such men, they were not far from the kingdom of God, not far from grace, not far from heaven ; climbing up almost thither, within view and ken of it, having one foot, as it were, upon the threshold of the heavenly gate ; and, yet, even these tumble headlong, and never rest until they have plunged themselves to the bottom of hell. It is with such men, as it is with the vapours, that are drawn up into the air : they shine with the same light, with the same apparent magnitude as the fixed stars themselves do ; and we may think them moving in the very same sphere with them : but, when we see them dart down to the earth, and spill all that light and glory which they glistened with by the way, and fall into a filthy jelly, a thicker and more loathsome substance than when they were first exhaled, we then conclude that all that elevation of those false and blazing lights was vastly short of that heaven, in which they seemed sometime to be fixed. So it is with many unregenerate men : you cannot tell with what they are fraught, till you see them shipwrecked : then it is a sign, that, though they were never right and true treasure, yet they are something very like it : when we see them tumbling down off a glorious profession through fatal precipices of great, gross, and desperate sins, we may sadly conclude that that man was not far from the kingdom of God, though he was never yet there.

Indeed, every unregenerate man, when he winds up himself to the highest pitch and strain, may be said to be far from the kingdom of God, in respect of his total deprivation of grace : though his actions be never so fair and specious, yet they are very far from being gracious ; as far as darkness is from light.

Yet he may be said not to be far from the kingdom of God, likewise, in a four-fold respect.

1. In that *he is far from that, which is furthest from grace* : and that is gross, flagitious, and notorious sins, which are farthest off from grace of all others ; and these a natural man may be very far and free from, and therefore not far from grace.

2. *He may have that, which very much resembles and counterfeits grace* : so that, as to outward appearance, there is but very little dissimilitude discernible between

them: now that, which is like another, may be said not to be far from that, which it is like.

3. He may be said not to be far from grace, because, as I told you before, in the ordinary works of the Spirit upon his soul, *he may have those preparations and dispositions laid in them, which usually are previous and antecedent to grace*, because these are wrought usually before grace; and therefore the person, that hath these wrought upon him, may be said not to be far from grace.

4. He may be said not to be far from grace, because, *if he did proceed but a little farther, he would possibly attain to true grace*. Had such but improved their natural power to such a degree farther, God would have come in with power supernatural; and have wrought that true and saving principle in their lives, which would have been sure to have brought them to eternal life. Grace, indeed, hath such a kind of dependance upon that which is natural: and that dependance is not so much of causality, as of order and consequence; which, though it be not necessary, yet is commonly granted on all hands.

Thus then, in the general, I have shown you that unregenerate men may go far, yea very far towards grace. A man may be almost a Christian, and yet be out of Christ; be near the kingdom of heaven, and yet not in it: and, possibly, be for ever excluded and shut out of it.

iii. I shall proceed to the next thing propounded. As we have seen, in the general; so now let us consider, *in particular*, what progress a natural man may make towards grace.

And that I shall do, by considering the several steps and degrees by which they may arise up to a great height and glory of outward profession.

And this we cannot better do, than by showing what grace is;—what resemblance that, which is wrought by a mere carnal man, may carry in it like true grace.

By comparing these together, we may see how near an unregenerate, carnal man may come to true and saving grace.

### 1. *What grace is,*

I need not tell you, that I speak not now of an objective grace, inherent in God; but terminated on us, whereby a

change is wrought in our relation to him : and this objective grace is nothing else, but the divine love, favour, and good will of God expressed in us. But I speak of a subjective grace, inherent in us ; whereby a real change is made in our lives and natures. And, in brief, you may take this description of subjective or inherent grace : It is a supernatural habit, immediately infused into the soul by the Holy Ghost, residing in every power and faculty of the soul as a principle of holy and spiritual operation. And there is a five-fold change wrought by it ;—upon the judgment, or the direct understanding, by informing and enlightening it ;—upon the conscience, in the reflex understanding, by awakening and pacifying it ;—upon the affections, by spiritualizing them ;—upon the will, by converting it ;—upon the life and conversation, by reforming it.

This five-fold change is wrought upon the whole soul by the true and sanctifying grace.

2. Now, in the next place, I shall show *how far a natural man may attain to these, so as to be almost a Christian.*

(1.) As for his mind or understanding, he may be irradiated with a clear and sparkling knowledge of divine and spiritual objects, when yet the soul is not truly converted to God.

It is true, as, in the creation of the world, the light is numbered and reckoned amongst the first of God's works : so likewise, in this new creation, the first work of the Spirit of God is to shed abroad his heavenly light in the understanding : and, therefore, we have this first in order, in that commission, which our Saviour Jesus Christ gives to St. Paul, Acts xxvi. 18. He sent him to the Gentiles, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light ;" and then it follows, "from the power of Satan unto God." But, yet, notwithstanding, there is an illumination about spiritual things, which may gild and beautify the understanding of a natural man ; who, like a toad, may be full of poison, though he hath a precious stone in his head. The apostle lays down this as one of those attainments that an unregenerate man may have, and yet be an apostate ; Heb. vi. 4. He may not only have a deep knowledge of gospel mysteries, so as to see the whole

compages and concatenation of the doctrine of Christ, and to unfold them to others ; but may have also particular discoveries of the glory and beauty that there is in these things. We may see it clearly by Balaam's ecstasy, Numb. xxiv. 5. Such discoveries carnal hearts may have made to them, and see their lustre and beauty. Nay, further, a carnal man may be convinced, that there is no other way of recovery but by the grace of God through the merits of Christ, of the suitableness of Christ to his soul, of the freeness of God's love, of the riches of his grace, of the readiness of his heart to receive him, of the desirableness of happiness, and of the beauty of holiness ; and yet, for all this, remain in a natural state.

But now, not to leave you under doubts and perplexities, such an illumination of a carnal man falls far short of true grace in these two particulars.

[1.] In that it is but "lumen sterile," a barren light.

Illumination, that is saving, is not only light, but influence too. As the light of the sun doth not serve only to paint the world, and varnish over the beauty and variety of the several creatures that are in it; but carries in it a grateful heat and cherishing influence, which operates into them and refreshes them ; and, as the light discovers their beauty, so these influences increase it : so, saving illumination not only illustrates the soul by its light ; but, likewise, by the congenialness of its influences, nourishes the soul, draws sap into it and fruit from it. Such is not the illumination of an unregenerate man : it is but a barren light, and only serves to paint his understanding ; and hath no influence on it, to make the soul grow in grace, and bring forth the fruits of holiness, to the praise of God.

[2.] It is an ineffectual, idle light.

That illumination, that is saving, is transforming : 2 Cor. iii. 18. "We all, as in a glass, behold the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image," &c. If a beam of the sun fall upon a looking-glass, it not only makes it glitter with a glorious light, but it represents the very image of the sun in the glass ; but, let it beat never so clearly and strongly upon a mud wall, though it enlighten it, yet it doth not thereby leave its image upon it : so, truly, illumination, that is saving, doth not only irradiate, but

transform. If you look upon the sun when shining in its strength, the light whereof will imprint the very shape and image of the sun upon your eye; and, look where you will, still you retain the appearance of the sun before you: so, every sight, that a true Christian hath of the Sun of righteousness, will make as it were another sun in his soul. But the illumination of wicked men doth only enlighten, not change them: their understandings may be irradiated with glorious discoveries of God, and of Christ, and the things of heaven; but this doth not transform them into the image and likeness of those things. The illumination of godly men and true Christians is like the light, which breaks through the air, and turns every vast body throughout the world all into light. It is with wicked, unregenerate men, as with those that lie long in the sun-shine; which, though it enlightens them, yet doth but afterwards make them more black and swarthy: so, thou mayest have as much notional knowledge of God, and Christ, and the mysteries of the gospel, as any child of God hath, and possibly much more: yet this is no true sign of grace; for this knowledge is not therefore saving because it is clear and comprehensive, but because it is influential and transforming. And, usually, we perceive, that where the light of knowledge shines into a wicked heart, it doth but tan and make the person more black and swarthy; more sinful, than before.

Thus, as to the direct understanding of the judgment, a natural man may have a bright, clear, and glittering light concerning heavenly and spiritual objects.

(2.) As for the reflex understanding of the conscience: neither yet the peace nor the trouble of conscience, is such an attainment as a natural man cannot reach.

[1.] A natural man may have a quiet and peaceable conscience.

Indeed, when this peace is true, it is always an effect of grace; and therefore we thus find them coupled together, Rom. i. 7. 1 Cor. i. 3; yet there is that, which looks very like peace of conscience, though it be not such; and that is a supine presumption and a carnal stupidity and osseitancy: their consciences are never troubled at the sight of sin or the sense of wrath; but they are like

those presumptuous sinners spoken of Deut. xxix. 19. " And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart," &c. Now this peace is founded only upon bold and confident persuasions of God's infinite mercy and gracious disposition: and, because God will exalt his mercy above his name, therefore they conclude, that, as God hath exalted his power in creating and sustaining them, so he will much more exalt his mercy in saving them. Thus, as madmen often fancy themselves kings or some great personages, when indeed they are but wretched and miserable spectacles; so do these spiritual madmen: and, as the devil appropriates to himself all the glory of the earth, so these look upon heaven, and all the glory of it, and boldly call it all their own; yea, and, through their wretched security, are bold to cry out with Thomas, " My Lord, and my God." To such I may say, with our Saviour in another case, " God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living :" God is not the God of such, as love and live in their sins and lusts; and that call him Father, whom yet they dishonour by a lewd and dissolute life. This is but to father one of the devil's offspring upon the holy God. Indeed men, by enormous and flagitious crimes, have so wounded and wasted their consciences, that now they retain not strength enough to accuse, molest, and trouble them; and this they call peace of conscience: such a peace, as Gallicus (in Tacitus) exprobates the Romans with: when they have laid all waste, this they call peace: but this peace is rather deadness of conscience; and is far from that, which ariseth from the true grace of God. The Holy Ghost, in conviction, destroys this ill-grounded peace; and works in the soul horrors and terrors, and affrights the secure soul, when it shows it how it slept upon the top of the mast, and lay on the very brink of the infernal pit. As, therefore, we must not discourage a broken spirit, but embolden it to appropriate Christ and all the promises of the gospel to itself in particular: so we must let wicked men know, that, when they presume to call God their God and their Father, and yet continue in their sins and wickedness,

they will find, that instead of being their Father, he will only be their Judge. Now it will appear that this peace of a carnal man is only from deep security, and the spirit of alumber that hath seized upon them: because, when we come to examine the grounds of it, they plead only the goodness of their hearts, and there is nothing more familiar and frequent than this they boast of; and, though they live in a constant neglect of holy duties, and wallow in the filth of customary sins, yet still they boast of this, that they have very good hearts, upright intentions. This is a mere delusion; for it is as utterly impossible, that the heart should be good when the life is wicked and profane, as for a good root to bring forth evil and corrupt fruit.

[2.] As peace of conscience may be attained by natural men; so, many times, such may lie under the regrets and troubles of conscience.

It is not trouble of conscience, that is the attainment wherein true grace doth consist. A dull and lethargic conscience, that hath long lain under the customary commission of gross sins, may at length by strong convictions be startled and awakened to a sense of sin, and be afraid at the sight of it; but yet may remain an impure and defiled conscience. God may, even in this life, kindle in their breasts some sparks of the unquenchable fire, and may give them some foretastes of that cup of trembling that they must for ever drink of: as he hath made himself a devil incarnate by his sin, so God may make his conscience a hell incarnate. By his conscience, you hear Cain, that primitive reprobate, crying out, "My punishment is greater than I can bear:" nor could Judas find any other way to check his conscience, but with a halter. These regrets of conscience may proceed from a preparatory work of conviction, which, because of men's wilful deserting them, often vanish away without any saving effect; and fall as far short of true grace, as the region of the air, where storms, tempests, thunderings, and lightnings are engendered, falls short of the heaven of the blessed, and that eternal calmness and serenity. And, as worms usually are the offspring of corruption and putrefaction; so this never dying worm, that must ever sting

them, oftentimes in this life, is bred out of a rotten and corrupted conscience. The conscience, therefore, may be defiled, when it is not seared : it may be awakened, when it is not sanctified : a filthy puddle may be stirred, as well as a clear running stream : the conscience may work terrors and horrors, where the Spirit of God never wrought true saving grace.

(3.) As to the affections : there may be affections and sweet motions of the heart, which are oftentimes relied on as certain evidences of true grace, yet also may be in a carnal and natural man.

Matt. xiii. 20. Some received "the word with joy," &c. so, John v. 35. Christ tells the Jews, that they did for a season rejoice in the doctrine and preaching of John the Baptist : thus Herod is said to hear John gladly. So that you see the affections in holy duties and ordinances may be with joy, even in those, that have no true grace at all in them. As there may be these affections of joy and delight, so likewise of sorrow for sin : so we have it, Matt. xxvii. 3. it is said of Judas, "he repented himself;" and Ahab's humiliation was so great, that God took special notice of him, 1 Kings xxi. 29. "Behold, how Ahab humbleth himself," &c.

Now all these affections are but temporary and vanishing ; and may be excited, even in carnal men, from several advantages, that things have to commend themselves, to their judgments and to their hearts.

[1.] Sometimes, the very novelty and strangeness of them may affect us.

Novelty usually breeds delight, which longer custom and acquaintance doth abate. And this may be given as a reason, why, soon after conversion, the new converts' affections are drawn forth more strongly in the ways of God, than, afterwards, when they grow settled and stable Christians : the reason is, because of the very novelty of that course and way into which they have now entered, which affects them with delight : besides the real desirableness, which is in those ways themselves, the very novelty doth affect them. And this too may satisfy us, that, though many are turned aside from the truth as it is in Jesus Christ and from the way of worship which God

hath appointed us, who have boasted, that they have found more comfort and more sweet affections than ever, in those new ways after which they have gone; yet it is not because those ways have any thing in them that might yield them more comfort and delight, but only because they are new ways, and all new things will for the present stir up the affections: but, after some continuance in those ways, they find their joy and delight to flag: then they seek out other new ways, and commend them as much: and no wonder; for new ways will stir up new affections. That may be one reason, why affections may be stirred up, even in unregenerate and mere carnal men, as to the things of God, even from the mere novelty of them.

[2.] Good affections may be stirred up in men, from the very affecting nature of spiritual objects themselves. For spiritual objects may affect us in this natural way. Who can read the history of Christ's passion, without being affected with sorrow for all the sorrow that he underwent? He hath a heart harder than rocks, that can hear of the agonies, and scourges, and cruel indignities offered to so innocent and excellent a person as Christ was, that suffered even for sinners, and not be moved thereby to grief and compassion. And yet, possibly, these affections may be no other than such as would be excited from us, at the reading of some tragedy in a romance or feigned story.

[3.] Affections may be moved by the artificial rhetoric of others: by the great abilities of the ministers, whom we hear.

God tells the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xxxiii. 32. "Thou art unto them as a very lovely song." They may sometimes have their judgments pleased with the learning shown in a sermon; and their affections excited by the oratory and powerful utterance of it: but these, though they are very good helps to excite our affections, yet are not true tests of spiritual affections in us.

[4.] Pride and self-seeking may, in the performance of duties, excite our affections.

Men may be much deceived in this particular. For instance, in prayer, they may think they are affected with the things they pray for: when possibly, their affections may be

moved only with the words themselves spoken; with the copious, free, and admirable inventive way that they pray in: whereas the contrite broken spirit, who is only moved with truly spiritual affections, may not be so large and so copious in his expressions of them: a true Christian may groan out a prayer, who cannot compose and make a prayer, that hath a sententious coherence one part with another. As the ground, that is fullest of precious mines, hath less grass growing upon it; so, sometimes, in holy duties, when the heart is most full of grace, there may be least flourishing of expressions.

You cannot gather the truth of saving grace from strong workings of the affections: which may, sometimes, upon these accounts, be deceitful. And wicked and unregenerate men may have affections stirred up in them, upon these grounds: but, then, they are always vanishing and fleeting: and are only permanent, while the violence of some external cause doth excite them. And they are always unfruitful: though their affections may stir within them, yet they are not efficacious to put them upon a holy life and conversation.

(4.) Every change, that is wrought upon the will, is no certain evidence of the truth of grace.

A man may fall short of true saving grace, when there is yet a great change wrought upon the will. It is true, it is the thorough change of the will, wherein grace doth principally consist. This is the first principal act from the Spirit of life; without which whatsoever other change is wrought upon us, is no more than to set the hand of the watch to the right hour when the spring is broken. The philosophers call the will, the commanding, swaying faculty of the soul: that controls all the inferior faculties, and makes them obey its inclinations: so that, such as the will is, such is the whole man. And, therefore, the scripture, in setting forth the twofold state of men, doth it by showing the temper of their wills. Unregenerate men are described by their wilfulness: "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life:" John v. 40. The people of God are described by their willingness: Ps. cx. 3. "They shall be a willing people in the day of thy power."

And here I shall endeavour two things:—to show you  
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after what manner the Spirit of God doth work this renewing change upon the will ;—to show you what other change is wrought upon it, which falls short of true grace, though oftentimes it is taken for it.

[1.] For the first, we must know that there are two ways, whereby God doth effectually change the heart and will of a sinner : and these are moral suasions ; and physical determinations, which are nothing else but God's all-powerful grace, whereby he doth immediately turn the bent and inclination of the will towards himself.

And both these do always concur and agree to this great change. He doth first convince a sinner and persuade him of the rationality of the ways of God ; and of the vileness and emptiness of those vain things, which his desires so eagerly pursue : and, on the other hand, he clearly represents the glory and excellency of himself and his ways ; that he is the greatest good that we can enjoy ; and yet there is no other way to enjoy him, but by loving and serving him. To do this, he makes use of moral suasions ; and works upon our reason, by cogent and prevailing arguments : which, at last, diffuseth such heavenly sweetness through the heart of a Christian, as makes him disrelish those fulsome delights of sin, that separate from that infinite good, with which it holds comparison : so that he finds more true delight in God and his ways, and more alluring and charming joy in them, than ever he did before in sensual pleasure :—we are thereby carried forth unto them by an infallible, yet altogether free, voluntary, and amorous motion. And this is done by the real efficiency likewise of the Spirit of God upon the will : and this efficiency is so sweetly attempered to the native liberty of the will, that it would be a pain and torment to the soul to be separated from that God, whom now his understanding doth apprehend, and whom his will doth clasp about, as the real and chief good. Here, you see, are both moral suasions and physical determinations of the will to the work of grace. God doth really determine it, by the efficacious touch of his grace : whereby he powerfully turns the bent and inclination of it to himself, which before stood towards sin and vanity. And, that this might not infringe the will's prerogative of acting freely, he doth

at the same time morally persuade it, by representing himself as the best and most satisfying object of it. Notwithstanding, then, the irresistibleness of God's working upon the will ; yet, still, man's will is free in God's working of grace, which some have thought to be an irreconcilable difference. For the freedom of the will doth not consist in redoubled pure acts ; for, otherwise, the saints and angels themselves, who are under that blessed necessity that they cannot but love and serve God, would not love him and serve him freely. The liberty of the will consists in an acting upon rational grounds and motives ; which, by how much stronger they are, by so much more they turn the necessity of the will to him, and yet by so much the more the will is free in acting : so that here, that the liberty of the will may not violate the causality of God's purpose, he changeth it by the power of his irresistible grace ; and, yet, that this irresistible grace may not violate the liberty of the will, which is its natural privilege, he persuades it by such natural arguments that it could not act freely if it should dissent from them. Though God useth infinite power, yet he useth no violence : he subdues the will, but doth not compel it. This is that victorious grace, that doth not more overcome a sinner's resistance, than it doth his prejudice ; it overcomes all oppositions, by its own irresistible power ; and it overcomes all prejudices, by its attractive sweetness : and, whenever it brings him to submit to God, it makes him to apprehend that his chief happiness and joy is to do so. And it is the same, that doth afterwards preserve Christians from total apostacy : for, though there be such a constant supply of grace to keep them, that they shall never draw back to perdition ; yet, withal, their own freedom is such, that they may if they will : but, when the will ceaseth its freedom, it never inclines but to that, which is most pleasing ; and nothing is pleasing to a renewed and sanctified will, so much as that sovereign good, which comprehends in it all other good.

Thus you see how God disposeth of the will of man ; changing it, without constraining it ; turning it, not forcibly, but infallibly to himself ; when he draws it by the sweet and efficacious operation of his grace.

Thus I have dispatched the first thing, and showed how God works the renewing change upon the will of a sinner.

[2.] The second particular is to show you, what other change may be wrought upon the will ; which yet falls short of true grace ; and may bring a man almost to Christianity, and yet leave him in a natural state and condition.

1st. An unregenerate man may have many faint velleities, and wishings, and woudlings after grace.

When he hears so much spoken of the beauty and excellency of holiness, he is convinced, in his judgment, that those things are true : that without holiness no man shall see the Lord : that though, while he is carnal, spiritual duties are tedious and a burden to him ; yet, were he spiritual, they would become more delightful to him, than those very pleasures of sin, which keep him from closing with grace : and that, were he renewed, those very pleasures of sin would become unsavoury to him ; and that, which now he is afraid to lose if he would turn to conscience, he would not value the loss of. When an unregenerate man, I say, is thus convinced of this, it will make him to break out into pangs of affectionate wishing for grace. ‘ O that I were holy and gracious ! I wish my heart were changed and renewed. I wish I were better, and could do better.’ I appeal to every man’s conscience, when he hath been convinced of the excellency and desirableness of holiness, whether he hath not breathed forth such wishes as these. When you have seen a Christian, that is eminent and exemplary for piety, have you not wished yourself in his condition ; not only in respect of his future reward and glory, but also in respect of his present grace ? have you not wished, that such had been your comeliness and beauty ? have you not wished, not only with Balaam, “ to die the death of the righteous,” and that your “ last end might be like his ; ” but also your life by living righteously ? And yet still you continue in the same course and sinful state as formerly ! Now such empty velleities and idle wishes, an unregenerate man may possibly have : he may wish he were a saint ; even as a fond foolish man, according to his idle fancy, may wish that he were an angel. But such wishes do not put him

upon a constant attempt and use of the means, whereby he might become such. His wishes and his sighs vanish away together: the one retaining no longer an impression upon his heart, than the other in the air: he runs into the commission of that sin, which with his mouth he wishes he might not commit; and lives in the neglect of holy duties; and yet can wish that he had performed them. Such contradictory wishes have unregenerate men! they wish themselves holy; and yet are wilfully sinful: they wish that they were better; and yet will not endeavour their own amendment.

2dly. An unregenerate man may not rest in these wishes, but he may rise to a resolution.

I say, to some degree of resolution: they resolve many things; that their lusts shall no longer enslave them, that the pleasures of the world shall no longer bewitch them, that the difficulties of religion shall no longer affright them; but that they will break through all, and act like men. And with such generous and ingenuous resolutions as these, men, in their natural estate, may fortify themselves. Grace they know they must have, else they are eternally undone: they know that God hath not been wanting to their endeavours; and they peremptorily resolve, that they will not be wanting to themselves. We may see the same strong resolutions, of those, that came to inquire of Jeremiah, chap. xlii. 5, 6. "They said, The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us:" and, yet, none more rebellious and disobedient against God, than these men, that make this remonstrance.

3dly. And, now, notwithstanding these wishes and these resolutions, the will of a natural man falls short of a saving change; and that, usually, in these particulars.

(1st.) In that it is a fickle and unconstant will.

Their desires may be sometimes violent and passionate, as if they would take heaven by force, and wrest mercy out of the hands of God: their prayers may be importunate and earnest, as if they would take no denial: but this violent spirit is soon spent, and this full bent of their souls soon flags, and returns again, as formerly, ever and

anon into the commission of some foul and gross sins. Such a will as this, though at first it hurries them apace, yet is soon tired, and leaves them short of grace and heaven. The Christian race is not to be run by so many fits, but by a constant course and progress; still getting ground upon our lusts; still approaching nearer to the kingdom of heaven. But it is with such men, as it is with the sea, when a spring-tide covers all the shore: when it ebbs, it discovers nothing but sands, where before was nothing but deep water. So, these affected and flowing Christians discover, that there is nothing but barren sands at the bottom; and that they are as unstable as water. A Christian is not made in a fit: neither is the work of grace wrought in a passion; but it is a settled, solemn, and constant frame of heart, that brings a man to Christ and salvation.

(2dly.) The will of an unregenerate man is never universally changed: still he reserves to himself some lust or other, that he will not part withal.

Their resolutions, concerning their sins, are such as the resolution of Naaman the Assyrian: 2 Kings v. 18. "In this thing, the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, &c. the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." So, men may be peremptory in their resolutions to forsake their sins; yet still there may be some one dear lust or other, that makes them cry, with Naaman, "Lord, pardon thy servant in this thing:" they will be willing to receive Christ, if they may be allowed in one darling sin. Now the partition, that any one sin makes between Christ and the soul, must needs hinder the soul from closing with Christ: as, if you throw but any little thing between the branch and the stock that it is engrafted into, the sap will never be communicated to it, and so it will never grow up to be a plant.

(3dly.) The will of an unregenerate man is usually irrational.

It would obtain the end; and yet not use the means. Grace, possibly, they would have; but they cannot bring their averse wills to close with the performance of those

unpleasing and irksome duties, wherein God usually bestows grace, and by which he conveys grace to the soul. Could they be holy with a wish, and a sudden fancy that enflames them, then none should be better Christians than themselves: could they enter into heaven by being willing, none then should shine above them in glory: but, when there is so much hard and unpleasing work, first that they must be born of God; and, after they are true Christians, that they must exercise every grace and perform every duty that may fit and prepare them for glory; they look upon these things as too difficult, which makes them sit down with idle wishes short both of grace and glory. Their wills are very irrational: they would have heaven; but they slight grace, the way to it: and, possibly, they would have grace; but they cannot bring themselves to the performance of those irksome and unpleasing duties, in and by which grace is usually bestowed and conveyed.

(4thly.) The will of an unregenerate man is usually a general, not a particular will.

If God should ask them, ‘ Sinners, what would you do to be saved?’ They would answer, ‘ Any thing, every thing.’ But, let God bid them leave such and such a sin, perform such and such a duty, they answer with Naaman, ‘ Any sin, but that; any duty, but that.’ So it is with these men: ‘ O any thing,’ in the general: but, when God brings them down to particulars, to do this or that, then they are willing to do just nothing.

I have showed you how far the will itself may be changed in unregenerate persons: they may wish after grace, and resolve to be better, and to do better, and yet fall short of saving grace. And, also, what it is that hinders this change from being a thorough work of grace; what it is that obstructs them, when they are almost, that they are not altogether Christians.

(5.) As for the life and conversation.

There may be a great change wrought in the lives of unregenerate persons, who yet fall short of Christianity.

The apostle, 2 Pet. ii. 20. speaks of such who having “ escaped the pollutions of the world, through lust were again entangled therein and overcome,” &c. It seems, to escape the pollutions of the world is no argument of

true grace, unless they be also cleansed from the pollutions of the heart : for sin may be left merely from external and forced principles ; such as terrors of conscience, for the heavy judgments of God ; when God sets up a flaming sword, between a sinner and those sins, which he accounts his paradise here. Now to leave sin upon such a strait as this, is to leave it with a great deal of reluctance : as when a mariner, in a storm, casts his goods overboard into the sea : it is with his will, indeed ; but it is with an unwilling willingness : he is frightened and terrified to it. So, when the soul is tossed with the tempest of divine wrath ; and when ready to be split upon the rock of ages, and be sunk and swallowed up in a sea of fire and brimstone ; he is forced to light himself, and to cast this and that dear lust overboard ; this he doth from his will : but it is such a forced will, as that of mariners, who throw their treasure overboard ; and, as soon as the tempest is over, the one gathers up his floating wrecks, and the other his sins. These men leave their sin, as Lot's wife left Sodom : they dare no longer continue in it, lest fire and brimstone rain upon them ; and, yet, when they do leave it, they give many a wishly look back again, and have strong and vehement desires after it. That reformation of life, that only frees us from debauchedness, falls far short of true Christianity, and of making us altogether Christians : this is that, with which many soothe up themselves, when they reflect back upon the wild extravagances of their former time : how outrageously wicked they have been, riotous, drunkards, unclean, blasphemers ; and, now that they find themselves deadened to these sins, and grown men of staid and sober lives, they straightway conclude, that, certainly, this great change could never be made on them otherwise than by the renewing work of the Holy Ghost : and, yet, in this amendment there may be no work of regeneration ; for men may gather up their loose and dissolute lives within some compass of civility and morality, and yet be utterly strangers to this work. Much of this may be ascribed, partly to convictions of God's Spirit, awakening natural conscience to see the horror and danger of such daring and outrageous sins ; and, partly too, to prudence, gotten from frequent experience of manifold

inconveniences that they brought upon themselves by such sins ; and both these convictions and moral prudence are principles, that fall very short of true Christianity. Usually, all the specious reformation and amendment of these men's lives, is, in effect, either a changing of the sin, or a tiring out of the sinner.

[1.] The life may seem to be reformed, when men exchange their rude and boisterous sins, for such as are more demure and sober.

From riotous, they grow worldly : from profane and irreligious, they grow superstitious and hypocritical : from atheists, they grow heretics : from sins of practice, to sins of contemplation. They are, then, apt to think, that certainly, this change must needs be the change of their nature, when indeed it is but the change of their sins ; and usually it is such a change too, that though it render the life more inoffensive, yet it makes the soul more incurable. St Austin, in his twenty-ninth epistle, tells us, that vices may give place, when virtue or grace does not take it.

[2.] The life may seem to be reformed, when men are only tired out ; when they have outgrown their sins.

There are sins, which are proper and peculiar to such a state and season of a man's life, upon the alteration of which they vanish and disappear. Sins of youth drop off from declining age, as misbecoming them. Now this deceives men : when they look back to the vanities which they have forsaken, how deadened they are to those sinful ways which before they much delighted in, they conclude, certainly, this great change must needs proceed from true grace ; when they do not leave their sins, so much as their sins leave them, and drop off from them as rotten fruit from a tree : the faculties of their minds and the members of their bodies, which before were instruments of sin and unrighteousness, are now become instruments of morality and seeming virtues : this sets them not free from the service of sin ; but only restrains them from breaking out into notorious and scandalous vices.

[3.] A civil and harmless demeanour doth not render a man altogether a Christian.

There be many ingenuous spirits, who live blamelessly in the world; their good natures nearly resembling grace. And such was St. Paul's, before his conversion: for he tells us, as "touching the law, he was blameless." So, the young man, that came to Christ to know what lesson he had further to take out. This only argues a sweet disposition, but not a gracious heart. Thus you see how dissolute men may mistake themselves in this work, upon which their eternal happiness depends. It is to be feared, that many may rest upon these; and think the great discriminating change to be wrought, only because they are morally honest, or gained over to a profession of truth, or to such a party or sect of professors; when, indeed, true Christianity consists not in these things.

This shall suffice for the first general propounded—what change may be wrought upon a man, so as to bring him almost to Christianity, and yet leave him short of being a Christian.

iv. I shall close up this branch with some *practical considerations.*

1. What then shall become of such, as fall short of those that fall short of grace, that are not so much as almost Christians? What will become of carnal, loose, and profane sinners?

If those, that have been gazed at and admired for burning and shining lights, yet have fallen into the blackness of darkness, even into the dungeon of eternal darkness, were we but serious in this reflection, it would make all our faces gather blackness, and fill all our hearts with astonishment, to consider that we are not gone so far in Christianity as those may go, who yet fall short of heaven. Have we all been "enlightened?" Have we all "tasted of the heavenly gift, and of the powers of the world to come?" Have we all been made partakers of the Holy Ghost?" Are there not many among us, possibly, whose hearts have never yet been touched with the sense of sin, never affected with any of the ways of God? that give themselves up to all wickedness with greediness? who never have given so much as one serious wish towards holiness? When those, that seemed to shine as stars in

heaven, shall be at last burning in hell, O, in what a dismal case shall these firebrands be !

2. Hence, likewise, *see what a difficult thing it is to be a true Christian.*

May a natural man attain to all this, that I have spoken of before? We may then take up that same question, which the disciples asked Christ, (when he had told them, that it was as easy " for a camel to go through a needle's eye, as for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven") " Lord, who then shall be saved?" " What! may those, whose profession hath been eminent, who have been sainted in every man's calendar, may they at last miscarry and perish ? Who then shall be saved ? If such be not Christians, Christianity seems to be rather some fancied notion, than any thing real and attainable." To this we may make the same answer, that Christ gave to the disciples : " With men, indeed, these things are impossible, but with God all things are possible :" it is impossible for men, by their own strength and natural ability, to become Christians; but it is possible for God to make them Christians : it is possible, as miracles themselves are possible, only possible to the almighty power of God. Not any soul can be persuaded to be a Christian; but he hath a miracle wrought upon him: and he himself must do that, which is little less than a miracle ; he must act beyond the power of nature, and do more than a mere man can do : therefore, well may you suspect your Christianity, who find it so easy a matter to be a Christian. Even natural men find it a difficult task to attain to that height and pitch, where they shine in moral virtue, though far short of heaven ; and is it easy for you to mount far higher than they, far beyond them ? Indeed it is an easy matter for any to make a slight formal profession, to run in a round of hypocritical duties, and live a moral civil life : this is easy : there is nothing miraculous in this. But is it easy to pluck out the right-eye, and to cut off the right-hand ? It is not easy, to crucify a darling lust ; to cut off the right-hand, when it lifts up itself to plead for mercy, and to be spared a little longer ; to pluck out the right-eye, when it drops tears to beg compassion, and a little favour to be granted to it. Is it easy, to combat

with principalities and powers, to baffle devils, and despise the scorns and affronts of the whole world? Is it easy, to live like an angel? nay, to live like Christ, to live like God himself? Is it easy, when we see so many tottering professors aspiring towards Christianity, some mounting till they are giddy and brain-sick with their most damnable errors, others tumbling down from the precipices of great and dangerous sins? We may well wonder that any are saved, when such as these miscarry. To consider, then, what it is that is wrought upon you, even that which the omnipotent God hath wrought; and what it is that is wrought by you, that which is beyond the power of nature: we may well conclude, what a difficult matter it is to become a true and serious Christian altogether.

3. May natural men go thus far in Christianity? O be you then persuaded to go much further.

Do not rest in any attainment, short of heaven and glory. Rest not in any present attainment. And this, indeed, is the most natural use, that can be made of this subject, when you hear how great a progress wicked men may make. I know that the hearts of the best Christians are ready to suggest to them, and they will be apt to conclude against themselves, that all, that is wrought upon them, is but the common work of the Spirit: therefore, their graces are but counterfeit, and themselves yet short of Christianity: I know that this subject may cause such jealousies and suspicions to arise in the hearts of some: but the genuine use of this doctrine, is, not so much to pore upon our present condition, as to stir you up to make a future progress. May a natural man make so great a progress, as to be almost a Christian? Then, certainly, I must never rest anywhere short of heaven. Well, therefore, the apostle, in Heb. vi. 11, 12. after he had shown them at large what a height a natural man may arrive to, presseth them to be earnest in their endeavours after perfection. This will be the best evidence to you, that you are indeed Christians; that you have the truth of Christianity. Though natural men may possibly glister in a glorious profession, and shine like the sun in its radiant splendour: yet, like it, they have their zenith, their highest degree; which when they have climbed to, they fall

down again. But a true Christian's course hath not any declension: he may proceed infinitely, from one degree of grace to another: he may ascend and reach higher and higher, till he hath reached heaven; where all his infirmities shall be swallowed up, and abolished in consummated glory. And, indeed, this is the greatest evidence of the truth of grace. A natural man's motion to heaven is violent and unnatural: it is forced from him by some external impressions upon the conscience, illumination, and common works of the Holy Ghost; and, as soon as this external force is spent, he falls naturally back again to his former course of sin: as a stone may be carried a great height towards heaven, by an outward violent impression upon it; but, when that force is worn off, it falls naturally back again to the earth. Now a Christian mounts naturally to heaven; while, by reason of that dull mixture of earth that is in him, his course tends to the earth again: but the true Christian still mounts upward, from the principle that carries him up, which indeed never totally spends itself. Therefore, if thou wouldest prove thyself to be not almost, but altogether a Christian, continue thy progress: still gain ground towards heaven: rest not satisfied with any present attainments; but be still rising and soaring, until thou hast gotten the world and them too under thy feet.

*4. When you see any, who have been forward in a profession and gone far in Christianity, to forsake their station, and fall back to their former course of profaneness, take heed that you do not reproach, that you do not scandalize religion with their apostacy.*

This is that, which opens the mouths and hardens the hearts of wicked men; when they see such glorious, but yet temporary professors, to return with the dog to the vomit. They, indeed, first, bless themselves in their own ways, as being better than the ways of God, as being better than the profession of religion: otherwise why should those, that so long have forsaken them, and, with a great deal of pomp, made such a glorious show and ostentation of religion and of conscientiousness; why should such return back again to their old ways? Secondly,

it makes them think, that all professors are but hypocrites, that it is but a solemn cheat put upon the world, since such forward professors of it are found forsakers of it: ‘ Some men please themselves with a few idle conceits of grace, and the new birth communion with God, and the like unintelligible notions, when there is no other difference between them and others, but what only their fancies make.’ Oh, take heed, therefore, that you do not blaspheme the ways of God, when you see the apostacy of professors. No, these men were never in those ways. Had they been Christians indeed, they would never have deserted those holy ways: their natures were never changed; and, it is no wonder, that they are relapsed and fallen back again into their old customs: to see the swine that is cleansed return back again to the mire, is nothing strange: had Christ changed the nature of these swine, and made them his sheep; then, as they had first “ escaped the pollutions of the world,” so they would have kept themselves from ever being entangled by them. But this makes highly for the honour of Christianity; and proves it to be a thing so excellent, that it cannot be long counterfeited: hypocrisy shall certainly betray itself by its apostacy, that it had never any thing of true and saving grace, although it carried fair in a show and pretence of it.

Thus much for the first thing propounded, how far a man may attain towards Christianity, and yet be in a natural sinful state.

II. The next thing is to show you, whence it is that natural men are enabled to make so great a progress towards christianity.

I shall give you a brief resolution to this question: and that shall be drawn, from the consideration of the subject; and that is a natural man himself;—from the consideration of the object; and that is holiness or christianity, to which it tends.

i. If you look into the *subject*, the natural man himself, so you shall find that man, and that which is wrought upon him; which may carry him out possibly to a very great progress in religion, and that may be twofold;—the power of nature;—the elevation and recruit, which that

power may receive from a common work of the Holy Ghost, much helping nature, quickening conscience, and reforming the life.

1. The carnal man may be carried very far towards Christianity, *from the mere strength and power of nature.*

For the mere power of corrupt nature is, of itself, sufficient to raise a man to any attainment, that is short of true saving grace. A natural man may so prepare and dispose his heart, as that the very next thing to be wrought upon him should be grace: it may carry him out to the externals of Christianity; and, it may be, with more pomp and grandeur, than sometimes the power of grace doth carry out a child of God: when the power of nature takes on it the form of godliness, it will make bright and glittering professors. Now these externals of Christianity lie in two things, the performance of duties, and the avoiding of sin.

As for duties, they may so far outstrip and outshine a child of God, in the pomp and gaudiness of them, as to be their emulation and example: and, for sin, there is not any one particular sin, setting aside those common and unavoidable infirmities which are inseparable from the frailty of human nature, but a carnal man may keep himself from the commission of it, by the mere power of nature; and there is scarce any sin, that is branded remarkably in the world, but some wicked man or other doth abstain from it, and that merely from the power of nature: one, by this power, abstains from this sin; another, from that; and a third, from another sin: and each of these has power to abstain likewise from all these sins; because what power the one hath may, possibly, be found in the other, since, in nature, there is nothing partial, for a man naturally is not so. Again, the devil, when he tempts, doth not force and constrain them: he doth not forcibly move the black tongue of the swearer to curse and blaspheme; nor doth he screw open the drunkard's mouth by force, to pour down intemperate cups; nor force the murderer's hand to sheath his sword in his brother's bowels, whether he will or no: but he solicits the wills, and insinuates into the affections by his temptations, and makes these freely move the engine to that to which his design

tends ; and therefore all his triumphs are but for beggarly victories : he could not prevail over us, did not we prove traitors to our own souls ; did not we surrender up ourselves, by the consent of our own wills ; else, we could never be distressed, much less taken by the violence of the tempter.

2. As men may proceed far toward Christianity by the power of nature, so *they may have common and ordinary works of the Holy Ghost upon them, that may carry them out to a very great progress.*

They may be made, saith the apostle, “partakers of the Holy Ghost :” Heb. vi. 4. and that is, of its common gifts and operations. It is the Spirit of God, that enlightens their understandings, that awakens their consciences, that excites their affections. It is the Spirit, that works conviction, that works reformation : yea, and sanctification in wicked and unregenerate men : for we have that expression concerning them.

There is a two-fold sanctification.

(1.) Of the flesh, consisting in the removal of all carnal and external filthiness ; called by the apostle an escaping of “the pollutions of the world” through lust : 2 Pet. ii. 20. and that consists in a separation from all those gross and vile sins, wherein the flagitious and debauched world do wallow.

(2.) There is likewise a sanctification of the Spirit, consisting in a separation from a state of nature to a state of grace.

The one is external, by reformation : the other is internal, by renovation.

The former sanctification a natural man may be made partaker of by the Holy Ghost ; so as to have his life and actions stand at a greater distance from and a greater opposition to those carnal gross sins, which the world is generally defiled with : but this is no more than a common and ordinary work of the Holy Ghost : they may account the blood, whereby they are sanctified, an unholy thing. There is a far different force and energy, that the Holy Spirit puts forth, when it works conversion, and when it works only outward sanctification : in both it may work upon the heart ; but in conversion it works upon

the heart so as to change it and renew it, while in the reformation of a natural man he works upon the heart indeed, but it is only to change and amend the life: the Spirit may persuade the one to change his heart, but then he changeth the heart of the other: he may persuade the will of the one to submit to Christ, but then he subdues the will of the other: he persuades the one to become a Christian, but he makes the other a Christian. Now there is a very wide difference between these two ways of working: by the one he only excites men to use somewhat of the power they have, but by the other he gives them the power they want.

And thus you see, what there is in man, considered both in nature and with the help of the common work of the Holy Ghost, that may carry him so far towards Christianity.

ii. There is also something considerable in the *object*, viz. religion and Christianity itself, whence it is natural men may make so great a progress towards it: and that is two-fold,—the attractiveness of religion;—the subserviency of religion to itself.

### 1. *The attractiveness of religion.*

And this consists not only in the inward and spiritual beauty of holiness, which these men have not eyes to discern; but also in that happiness, which is annexed to religion and Christianity. This is that, which draws out natural men to all their attainments. Happiness is the great bait of men's desires; and that, which sweetens the means tending to it: though they be in themselves very difficult and burdensome, yet, leading to happiness, they close with it: and, therefore, as the apprehensions of heaven and hell work upon a natural man more or less forcibly than the thoughts of the difficulty or tediousness of holy duties; so is his progress more or less strong and vigorous towards Christianity.

### 2. Another thing in Christianity or religion, that advanceth some to so great a progress, is the *subserviency of religion to itself.*

Religion doth mightily promote and advance itself, in that the performance of one part and of one duty of religion, obligeth and engageth to the performance of ano-

ther. As one sin draws on another, by consequence likewise doth one duty draw on another. There is a connexion and dependence between them : hearing engageth to meditation, and meditation to prayer, and prayer for grace to endeavour after it : a glorious profession obligeth to something, at least that may be answerable to that profession. Thus, one duty of religion hands a man over to another: and, when he is passed through one, another stands ready to receive him.—A little progress in religion doth facilitate. It is harder, at first, to begin; than, having begun, to continue: because use and custom in any thing make it easy.

Now it is this subservency of religion to itself, that may carry men very far in it. When they have begun a profession, and entered upon one duty, that duty delivers them over to another, and makes it more facile and easy to them; because the precedent duty, as it doth engage them to, so it prepares them for, the subsequent duty, as well as engage them to the present duty. One duty doth, as it were, perform half the task and bear half the burden of the other.

Thus then you see, whence it is that natural men may make so great a progress towards Christianity, so as to be almost Christians, from the power of nature, and from the attractiveness of religion.

Now, here, if you ask me, ‘ How shall I know, whether it be the power of nature helped by the common workings of the Spirit, or the power of supernatural grace, that carries men out to all their profession ? ’ I shall give you but this one discriminating character of it; —see whether your abilities be greater in the things that belong to grace and holiness, than they are to natural things. A child of God, who is but of weak parts as to the things of the world, that can scarce give you a rational account of such affairs when propounded to him, bring him but to the things of God, and how admirably will he be able to unfold, even the very mysteries that are hid from the wise and prudent of the world ! Put him upon any common discourse, how broken and incoherent is he ! but engage him in prayer, how doth he expatiate and enlarge, and what a torrent of divine rhetoric will he then pour into the bosom of God ! Is this from nature,

that he is able to exceed and go beyond himself? No, certainly. It is very observable concerning the ways of God, what the prophet speaks, Isa. xxxv. 8. "A highway shall be there, and it shall be called, The way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it:" Though they wander and err in every other way; though they do not take the right way to be rich, and great, and honourable in the world; yet these, that are fools in every thing else, shall not err from the way of holiness: and, therein, lies the only wisdom. But, take a mere carnal man, that hath eminent abilities in earthly things; usually, he is never weaker than when he is engaged in that which is holy and spiritual: at least his chief excellency doth not lie there: though he doth perform the duty well, yet he doth not do it beyond what he doth in ordinary and natural things. Now how is it with you? do you find yourselves carried much beyond the rate and size of your natural abilities? that you never so much exceed yourselves, nor do so well, as when you are about some holy and spiritual employment? that you are not so artificial in any thing, as in holy performances? This is a good sign, that it is the power of grace, and not only the power of nature, that carries you forth to the profession of religion which you make. I take the extraordinary gifts, bestowed upon unregenerate men in a vast disproportion from their natural abilities, to be long ago ceased.

Thus you see what enables a natural man to go so far towards Christianity.

III. The third general propounded, was to show *what it is that hinders these proficients from making further progress: that, when they are almost, what keeps them from being altogether Christians.*

I answer to this, in general;—it is only through a wilful and wretched neglect of what they might do, that any of them do fall short of grace here and glory hereafter. It is not our want of power, but our want of will, or rather indeed our willingness, that makes us miscarry to our eternal perdition.

I shall illustrate this by a plain and obvious similitude. Suppose that God should promise to bestow heaven upon

us, if we would but reach forth and touch it with our hands. Now, although we can never reach so high : yet if we do not stretch forth our hands and reach as high as we are able to do, the fault of losing heaven will not lie upon the inability and impossibility, that were in us to touch it; but upon our wilful neglect of striving to our utmost to do what we are able to do: the reason why we fall short, would not be because our arm is not long enough; but because we do not stretch it forth to the utmost length.

The instance is somewhat plain and familiar ; but yet it holds an exact proportion to the case in hand. God promiseth heaven to us, if we will but touch it; that is, if we will lay hold on Christ by faith : which faith we can no more work in ourselves by our own proper efficiency, than touch heaven with our finger ; yet, howsoever, if we do not do our utmost, our falling short of heaven and faith cannot be imputed to the impossibility that we lie under, but to our wilful sloth and neglect. It is not men's 'cannot' but their 'will nots,' not their impotency but their obstinacy, that destroys them : " Ye will not come to me, that ye may have life :" John v. 40. " Ye will not ! " Doth not Christ himself tell us, that no man can come to him, except the Father draw him ? True, but the fault lies in the stubbornness of your wills. Though you could come, you would not: therefore, it is not your weakness, but your wilfulness, that keeps you from coming to Christ.

Let me here appeal to yourselves. Doth not he deserve eternal death, who had a power in his hand to make himself a Christian, and yet would not ? Certainly you will all conclude, this man is very equally and justly dealt with, if sentenced to eternal misery ; since he had a power to avoid that misery, and to lay hold on eternal life and happiness : his condemnation lies on his own head for his wilful contempt of salvation, which he had a power to work out ; and, by a diligent improvement of the means tendered to him, to make sure of. Every carnal man, if he had power to convert himself, yet, through his wilful neglect and obstinacy, would not do it : and this appears, because there is not one of us, that doth as much as he

might do. There is not one natural man, that doth as much as he might do: will he not now do what he can, to prepare and dispose his heart for grace? then much less would he work grace in his heart, though he had a power to do it; and therefore the whole default of men's falling short of grace, lies in their wilful neglects. Men indulge themselves in carnal sloth: and, if they can but maintain the pace and rate of common ordinary professors in a formal course of duty, or abstain from gross sins, then they are contented, and will be drawn on no further. Cannot they command their thoughts to dwell more fixedly and more abidingly upon spiritual objects? Cannot they be oftener in meditation; and meditate more fervently, and with more affection? In both, have they not power to refuse temptations and sinful motions? doth the devil use any force or violence upon them? Did they ever find, when they threw themselves upon their knees in prayer, that he stiffened them that they could not bend? or that he stopped their mouths from speaking, or their hearts from thinking? Had he a power to strike men lame, when they should come to the ordinances; or deaf, when they should hear; or dumb, when they should speak; then there were some show and colour of reason, why men attended no more frequently, why they heard no more attentively, why they did not ponder more considerately, why they prayed so seldom and heartlessly. Did but the devil compel them to this, the sinner might have some excuse; but, when he must woo their consent and allowance, and wait their pleasure and leisure, it is merely a wretched neglect or wilfulness, that they yield to the commission of any sin. Can you do all this, and more; and yet will you not? know, that, if you perish, it is only your own fault: you your yourselves are the bloody murderers of your own souls. It will be in vain for you to plead, that you had no power to make yourselves Christians: you never went so far as to make a trial, whether you had a power or no: for a man not to do the utmost that he might do towards Christianity, though he hath no power to make himself a Christian, is the same as if he had a power, and yet will not make use of it. O, let this that I have said prevail with you, to be

not only almost, but altogether [Christians; and to put forth all the power and might and ability, that you have, in the working out of your own salvation. Is there not infinite reason, why you should speedily set about this important work, while you have time and opportunity for the doing of it? Is it not a matter of the greatest moment in the world, and not to be delayed one moment? Be persuaded, then, to the speedy practice of it.

*Objection I.* Some desperate wretches may think, indeed, that ' arguments to persuade men to work out their salvation, may be of weighty import to enforce the duty, upon those that do expect salvation; but, for my part, I pretend not so high: let me but enjoy now the sins which I serve and the pleasures which I pursue; and, for the state of my soul hereafter, I commend that to the mercy of God: and if I must perish, I will perish with as much ease and content as I may. It is hard to alter an irreversible doom; and, if it be to perdition, it is but folly to hang down the head, and blubber the eyes, and break the heart for that which cannot be altered. If I must go to hell, I may as soon be carried down thither in a flood of tears, as in doing ungodly actions. Why should I conspire with God's decree to make myself miserable. If he hath sentenced me to hell hereafter, I may as well sentence myself to a heaven here. My future torments are in his hands, but my present delights are in my own. Therefore, if salvation and happiness be such nice points, I forego them; and will embrace more easy and more obvious pleasures.'

I know that there is no pious heart here, but shivers with horror at such language, though it be but personated. Methinks rather it represents the speech of a devil, who is without all possibility of happiness, than of men who are in the way to it. Indeed, it is the speech of the devil; but it is likewise in the hearts of men: when they storm and bluster at the difficulties of salvation, and narrowness of the way, and straitness of the gate, the devil interposeth this suggestion, ' It is as good to perish with ease, as to be saved with so much labour and pains.' But, what! shall we leave men to such desperate resolutions, and suffer them to go dreaming to hell and destruction? Cer-

tainly, religion hath arguments enough to prevail, even with these ; if they would but show themselves to be men, and but ponder how much reason can speak.

For, consider thou, that wilt rather perish, than make thy life a trouble to thee by obedience ; God may, under thy disobedience, make thy life a trouble, yea a hell to thee, by his terrors. Thou thinkest that thy garments of sin and pollution will sit more loose and easy about thee, than the garments of holiness, that are too straitlaced and troublesome : yea, but what if God should roll these thy filthy garments in brimstone, and fire them about thee ? How dreadfully wouldest thou be disappointed, when, instead of that ease which thou seekest in the service of sin, God should make thee thine own tormentor, and make thy conscience a hell incarnate ! Believe it, the wrath of God can fry the marrow in thy bones, and reduce thy soul to ashes. Read Psalm lxxxviii. and you will think it a doleful and sad description of the state of the damned. " While I suffer thy terrors I am distracted :" and, if the wrath of the Almighty lay thus sore upon a holy man, how fretting and corroding will it be upon the leprous soul, and upon an ulcerated conscience ! If it burns up the green tree, what will become of the dry tree, which is but as prepared fuel for it to prey upon ? No man hath his present delights and contentments in his own power, because no man hath his own conscience in his own power : it will speak, yea, and that terrible things ; even then, when a sinner hath done all he can to sear and stupify it.

Consider, again : how is it with you, after the rage of your sinning is over ? are you not haunted with fearful reflections and ghastly thoughts of despair and horror ? Could we but unbowel a sinner, we should find those conscience-worms, gnawing and knotting about him, and devouring his heart. And are these wont to dissolve into trouble, for fear religion and holiness should trouble them ? are they content to buy ease and quiet at such a rate, as the loss of heaven and eternal torments amount to ? and is this the ease and quiet, that they purchase with it ? The devil puts a gross cheat upon these men : he changeth not the trouble, but the time of it : they shun the work of God, only because it is troublesome in doing, though it

doth leave behind it the blessed fruits of peace, joy, and satisfaction; and they engage in the work of the devil, which, as soon as the heat and fury of it is a little over, leaves, in their sober thoughts, nothing but anguish, stings, and torments. And, therefore, be not deceived: suffer not the devil any longer to abuse you; and to impose his drudgery upon you, under the notion of ease and quiet. If your consciences were once awakened, I know the work of the devil must needs bring you more vexation, besides the shame, than ever you would have from the work of God: yea, the very omission and neglect of God's work is a far greater trouble, than the performance of it would be. Therefore, if you look no farther than your present content and satisfaction, if you would go to your final estate the easiest way, whatever it be, think not to attain this by giving up yourselves to a way of sin, nor by wounding your own consciences, which with trouble afterwards will be sure to be avenged upon you; but, in a way of duty and laborious working, you only can find present content, and shall certainly find future happiness.

*Objection 2.* ‘True,’ may some say, ‘possibly the work of God might be more pleasing and satisfactory to us than the work of the devil, if we could work it. But, to what end is it, that God requires from us to work? to what purpose doth he command us? Doth not he himself know, that we have no power? Doth not he himself say, that we are “dead in trespasses and sins?” Is it rational, is it just, to bid a dead man work? or, doth it become that God, who would be thought by us to be infinitely gracious and merciful, to mock and deride human misery, when he commands those things from us which he knows to be impossible? Had he bid us blend light and darkness together, or bend the axle-tree of the world till both poles met; had he bid us fling the stars out of their orbs, or with our hands stop the sun in the midst of his course; all these great impossibilities are as easily achieved, as by our own power to work any part of divine and acceptable obedience without gracious assistance from God. We can as soon glorify, as sanctify ourselves. What should we then do, but only sit still and expect, till efficacious grace should move and act us, and we not able to gainsay and

resist it? till God so draw us, as that we must run; and so call us, as that we must answer? Till then, our obedience is an impossibility, and all our attempts are vain and fruitless.'

This now is a slothful sinner's pretence, why he will not work: and no doubt but that too often it doth flash into the thoughts of most men; whereby their hearts are disengaged and their hands weakened, in the service of God.

In answering this, I shall not enter into that great debate of the power of nature to do what is good and acceptable to God: but proceed in a plain way, and accommodated to practice; and that, which will be most convictive to the conscience.

First. Men will not plead thus in matters of far less concernment, than the salvation of their souls. Would a master, when he commands his servant to work, take this, think you, for a sufficient excuse, that he hath no power to work till God act and move him? It may as well be objected by your servants to you, as by you to God. Tell me, what power have I to speak, or you to hear one word, unless God do concur to it? Nay, we are not sufficient to think one good thought: 2 Cor. iii. 5. And do we make this an excuse to forbear those actions, that are necessary and convenient? Do we therefore resolve to do nothing, because it is impossible for us to do any thing unless God concur with it? What stupid, dull folly were this! We put it daily and hourly to trial: and produce me that man, that can say God was wanting to him in his concurrence. What a miserable and ridiculous task would it be, if, in every action of our lives that we cannot do without God, yet we should sit still, and question God's concurrence! Do you sit down to try whether God will enable you to rise when you are down? or, do you question whether God will concur to another step, though it is impossible you should stir and move, unless God act and move you? Yet this hinders not men's endeavours: "In him we live, and move, and have our being." Why do not you do so in spiritual matters? We can do nothing without God. True: yet put it to the trial, whether or no God will concur with you. Certainly, that man must be nameless, that can say "I was truly willing, and endea-

voured to do some spiritual good, but God was wanting to me in his concurrence."

Secondly. Those men, who thus make impotence a pretence for their sloth, do not indeed believe what they themselves pretend. No: it is the inward and secret thought of them all, that they have a power to work out their own salvation: and, therefore, whether they have or no, still they are inexcusable: while they think they have this power, yet they sit still. Although a man be chained fast down that he cannot go; yet, if he thinks himself at liberty, and notwithstanding sits still, you may soon tell where the fault lies: it may be imputed to want of will, and not to want of power. So, here: wicked men think they have power to work, however they speak otherwise: therefore, they are utterly inexcusable if they do not work. It is as clear as the light, that their sloth proceeds not from their impotence, but from their wilfulness.

I shall endeavour, by a few arguments, to convince you, that you do indeed think that you have power to work out your own salvation: therefore, if you do it not, you are altogether inexcusable, whether you have that power or no.

*First.* Did you never, when God hath shaken his rod and whip over you, seriously promise and resolve to work; his rod, I mean, either of conviction or affliction?

Have not these made you enter into an engagement with God, that you would serve and obey him for the future? Did you not really thus resolve? There are few here, but sometimes, at least, in a fit and pang of conscience have so done. And why did you resolve all this, and yet at the same time think and believe you could do nothing? Did you only mock God, and play with your own consciences? Certainly, your consciences then were too much provoked, and too much awakened to be thus jested and dallied with. We find this temper in the Israelites, when they were frightened at the terrible glory from mount Sinai: Exod. xxiv. 3: see how confidently they promise and resolve: "And all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said, will we do." So the Jews, in their great distress, Jer. xlvi. 6. "Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, that it

may be well with us." Alas! how many pious purposes and holy resolutions have your dangers, your fears, and your sick-beds been witness to! Have they not heard you breathe out, " Spare, O Lord, spare a little longer: give some space: try us yet once more: and, O Lord, we will reform, we will amend our sinful lives, we will perform neglected duties, and never more again return to folly?" Are not these resolutions an evident conviction? Certainly, you thought you had a power so to do; and, therefore, if you do not endeavour to perform, you are altogether inexcusable.

*Secondly.* Did you never, in your whole lives, perform a duty unto God? Did you never pray?

Is there any here so desperately profane, so lost to all show of goodness, that hath not done this? And to what end have you prayed? For what did you perform your duty? Was it not for salvation? And did you work for salvation, and yet think you had no power to work for it? It is impossible: men's very works do plainly show, that they do think that they have a power: something still must be done, though it be but formally, slightly, and coldly: a mere "Lord, have mercy upon me," a customary "Lord, forgive me;" yet something conscience will require, which men reckon upon, and make account to be working out their salvation.

*Thirdly.* Wherefore is it that you trust unto and rely upon your good works, if you think you have no power to work out your salvation?

Would it be so hard and difficult a matter to take men off from leaning so much upon their works, if they did not think that they had power to work out their own salvation? Men do apprehend a worth and sufficiency in what themselves do, in order to eternity. Bid them forego their works, and renounce their own righteousness, and this is a hard saying: you may almost persuade them as soon to renounce all their hopes of heaven. This is an evident conviction, whatever notions men may entertain to stop the mouth of a clamorous conscience, when it calls on them for working and labouring, that yet they do not believe what they themselves speak concerning their impotence.

*Fourthly.* When the Spirit of God was dealing with your hearts, persuading you to enter upon a course of duty and obedience, did you never procrastinate and use delays? Did you never stifle the breathings, nor quench the motions of the Holy Spirit, by thinking it was time enough to do it hereafter?

'What need I begin so soon, or vex my flesh, or deny myself the joys and pleasures of this life, even as soon as I am come to relish them? When sickness or grey hairs admonish me, and tell me I am near unto eternity; when old age promiseth me, that the severities of religion shall be no long trouble; then, will I look after the concernments of my soul; then, it will be time enough; then, I will repent, believe, obey, and work out that salvation, that will be then hastening upon me.' Tell me truly, have not these been the foolish reasonings of your hearts? have you not thus often promised God and your own consciences? and doth not this plainly imply, that you thought you had power to do it? "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art." It is in vain to plead want of power, God will confute thee by thy very thoughts. Hadst thou no power? Although thou hadst not, yet thou thoughtest thou hadst, yet wouldest not endeavour to work: therefore, thy ruin is as wilful, and thy condemnation as just, as if thou hadst a power, and wouldest not work; for thou perishest merely through the default of thine own will.

Thirdly. Whether wicked men have this power of no to work out their own salvation, I shall not now stand to inquire: but, if they had it, yet they would not work with it; and, therefore, it is a most vain and insufficient plea, to pretend they wanted power.

Now this appears evidently, because there is no wicked man, that ever did so much as he was able to do by the mere strength of nature, without the assistance of supernatural grace: and, therefore, it is not their inability; but their wilful sloth, that doth destroy them. Do but answer your own consciences: was there not one duty more, which you could have performed; not one temptation, not one corruption more, which you could have resisted? Could not you have prayed, read, or meditated

upon heavenly things ; then, when your hearts and thoughts have been vain, worldly, and sinful, and devilish ? Might not that time have been spent in holy converse, which you trifled away in idle, impertinent discourse, or in doing nothing, or that which was much worse than nothing ? What force, what constraint is laid upon you ? Can you not think ? and, if you can, cannot you think of God as well as of the world ? as well concerning fulfilling God's will, and working out your salvation, as fulfilling your lusts ? Can you not speak ? and, if you can, can you not speak to God in holy prayer, and of the things of God in holy discourse, as well as of your trades and bargains ; those low and trivial matters, that are not worthy of men, much less of Christians ? What force is there upon you ? doth the devil skrew open the drunkard's mouth, and pour down his excessive and intemperate cups whether he will or no ? doth the devil violently move the tongue of the swearer and blasphemer, to revile the holy and reverend name of God ? doth he strike men dumb, when they should pray ; or deaf, when they should hear ; or senseless, when they should understand ? Is there any such force or constraint laid upon you ? May you not avoid the one, and do the other, if you yourselves please ? You can : but you will not : therefore, neither would you work out your own salvation, if you could. Is there any hope, that you, who will not do the less that God requires from you, should ever be induced to perform the greater ? Let your weakness and impotence be what it will, yet your condemnation will lie upon you, so long as your wilfulness is much greater than your weakness. No, sinners, your precious and immortal souls will eternally perish now for want of will to save them. Pity yourselves : will you lose yourselves for ever, only out of sloth ? Will you sleep yourselves into hell, and go drowsily into destruction ? Is it more painful to work the works of God, than it is to perish for ever under insupportable torments ? Therefore, do you what you possibly can : labour and sweat at salvation, rather than fail of it. Let this never grate nor fret your consciences in hell, that you lie there burning for ever, merely for your wilful neglects.

When a man is gone far towards Christianity, there are

several things, that make him neglect a further progress. As,

i. *His groundless fancying of difficulties and hard encounters in the ways of God.*

O were it but as easy to be holy as sinful, he were wretched that would refuse to be a Christian; or, were Christianity but one hard pull or difficult pang, that would soon be over, there were some encouragement for them: but, when they have already struggled, and wrestled, and waded against the stream, thus far: and yet see no end, duty to be performed upon duty, and temptation upon temptation to be resisted, still to be combating with devils, still to be crossing and vexing of themselves, no respite, no breathing-time allowed them: this takes off their wheels; and, though they are able to do this, yet they will rather sit down quite short of grace, than run through such hardships to attain it: and so they come up in the mid-way, neither holy, nor profane; but please themselves with a mediocrity, and middle rank of religion, and dare not go further for fear of difficulties, nor yet dare fall further back for fear of conscience; and so they lie hovering between heaven and hell. Now this is merely from wilful sloth: Prov. xxvi. 13. "The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way: a lion is in the streets. Here the wise man brings in a drowsy sluggard, dreaming of dangers and difficulties, to excuse his sloth: 'I dare not stir abroad, for there is a lion in the streets:' a likely matter, that there should be a lion in the streets! but yet see how this fancy works with him! any thing is an excuse for the sluggard, In ver. 14. "As the door turneth upon the hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed:" a door is often in motion, to and fro; but it gains no ground, makes no progress, still hangs where it did: so it is with slothful professors: that, which they have already attained to, is, that they move too and fro like a door upon the hinges, still the same motion over and over again, no new progress, no new attainment; and that, merely because they are sluggish and lazy, and fancy difficulties to themselves, and strange apparitions in the ways of God, that make them stand at a stay where they are, and not dare to take one step forward. As it was with the Israelites, who came to

the very borders of the land of Canaan, Numb. xiii. 27, 28, 33. when the searchers had brought reports to them, that the land indeed was good and fruitful, but the walls of the city were built up to heaven, and that there were many giants, and that they should be beaten and eaten ; they were not so much allured with the goodness of the land, as they were deterred by the thoughts of the difficulties ; and, though God himself bade them arise, and enter, and take possession, they would not venture upon so hazardous an exercise, and so difficult an enterprise : so, there are many forward professors, who are come to the very borders of the land of Canaan, to the very entrance into the kingdom of heaven, who, when they see what strong-holds of iniquity they must cast down, what principalities and powers they must fight with, and what lusts, gigantic as the sons of Anak, they must subdue and destroy, this frights them from attempting any further.

ii. *To be almost a Christian carries in it those advantages and accommodations, which, were they altogether such, they must lose :* and, therefore, this is one reason, why so many stick in the new birth.

Such an one is no saint ; and, therefore; the men of the world embrace him : such an one is no profane and scandalous person ; and, therefore, the children of God embrace him, and think well of him too : and thus he doth hold a correspondency with both of them, which, were he altogether either one or the other, he must break off ; and, therefore, finding the conveniency of this neutral estate, he stops where he is, short of true grace. Were he a profane wretch, then those, that are truly godly, would avoid his company : or, were he truly godly, then the world would reject and scorn him : the godly esteem and love him, and from their ready charity they look upon him to be truly gracious : ‘ Those, that are true Christians,’ thinks the almost christian, ‘ look upon me as such as themselves : and what need I begin, by a forward zeal, to disoblige the world ? And the wicked and profane respect me too, because I go a little before them ; though not quite cross and contrary to them : and so I enjoy the good opinion of both sorts ; which, were I fully one or the other, I should hardly attain.’ This man can, as it were, hold

heaven with one hand, and yet hold the world with the other ; not lose his interest in the one, and yet retain his interest in the other : he can enjoy the delights and pleasures of the one, and then hope for the rewards and happiness of the other. Were we lodged in a star, then the earth would appear very small, and almost nothing, as the stars do now to us : so, were we more above, the earth would appear either as very small, or as nothing : thus it is with a child of God : he soars up by the wings of faith and love to the heavenly Jerusalem, and the earth appears very inconsiderable to him ; but an unregenerate man, when he mounts highest, yet still will be sure to keep earth in his eye : he will not lose the sight of that ; and, therefore, when he hath got to such a pitch, that he is able to discover something of heaven and yet not lose the sight of earth, there he hangs in ‘æquilibrio,’ and will be drawn no further : he keeps something of the earth in his eye : and will not lose nor diminish his sight or share of it, for the hopes and joys of heaven.

*iii. False opinions and conceits that they are already Christians, hinder these foward professors from being true Christians.*

It may be, they would be Christians indeed, did they not think they were already such. When men are gone far, then they are apt to think they are got home ; and so they have taken up their rest, and will be driven on no further : they think that what they have already gotten, is enough to bear their charges to heaven ; and so they grow careless of getting more : they are persuaded that they are Christians ; and that keeps them from being persuaded to be such. I do not intend to forbid eminent professors to think they are indeed Christians ; but let them look how this persuasion works with them : doth it tend to make them more careless, negligent, and remiss ? when they have been under troubles of conscience for their sins, then they saw themselves in a lost and undone condition, and had hot and scalding apprehensions of the wrath of God ; then they were laborious to frequent duties, conscientious in their walking, and fearful lest they should sin : but, since their troubles have been worne off, they have entertained better hopes and better opinions of their

state : are they not grown more loose, and more regardless ? they do not take so much pains with their hearts : nor are they so strict, and holy, and severe in their lives : I must tell such, what the apostle tells the Galatians, ch. v. 7, 8. " Ye did run well : who hindered you ? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you :" this persuasion that you are Christians, cometh not of him that calleth you : possibly it would be well with them, if they did not think they were so. Sirs, if the thoughts of your being Christians and in a state of grace, do encourage you to walk worthy of that holy calling ; if the hopes of your good and holy estate, do engage you to purify yourselves as God is pure, as they will work if they be right and genuine ; then still entertain and cherish them : but, if they turn to looseness, remissness, or presumption, here suspect them to be the overweening conceits and elevations of a carnal heart ; and such, as will certainly hinder you of what you thus fondly imagine yourselves to be, hinder you from making further progress in the ways of Christianity, in regard you take up false conceits that you are Christians already.

iv. Another ground, whence it is that forward professors many times fall short of true Christianity, is, that, *when they are already gotten far, then especially the devil doth all he can to hinder them.* When they have gone far towards grace and Christianity, then he unites all his force and subtlety to stop them from proceeding further, lest they get from under his power and jurisdiction.

He knows that if they once become Christians, they are then almost out of his reach ; and, therefore, whatever lust be in the soul, he will then especially stir it up ; whatsoever reserve of temptations there be, he will then send them upon the soul : for none are more assaulted with horrors and multiplied temptations, than those, who make a great progress towards the ways of God, and are near to the borders of true Christianity ; because then the devil suspects that he shall lose them, and that they are even revolting from him. When they begin to move towards heaven, and labour after true grace and holiness, the devil sees that ordinary temptations are not then sufficient to secure them ; that those lusts, which before hampered and

captivated them at his pleasure, will not now so easily prevail : for he finds them too resolute, too rough, and untractable to deal with. He begins then to fear to what a rebellion this may grow ; and, therefore, he sets upon them with all his power, way-lays them with all ambushments, circumvents them with all his wiles and stratagems : and, though these be only armies and musters of shadows, which a man might break through without any danger, would he but arm himself with noble and undaunted resolutions ; yet, with these, the devil assaults and undermines them, and that incessantly, and doth at last stop them in their course towards grace, if not beat them back again to their former course of profaneness. Luke xi. 24, 25, 26. " When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest ; and, finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house, whence I came out : And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there : and the last state of that man is worse than the first :" that is, when men have cast out unclean, gross lusts by an external sanctification, so that the devil seems to be dislodged ; when he seeks to return again to his ancient seat and possession, he finds the heart swept and garnished : swept from the filth of common sins, and garnished with common graces, as its ornaments ; so that there seems no re-admission or re-entrance to this unclean spirit : and then he goes and takes to himself seven other spirits worse than himself ; that is, as I conceive, stronger temptations and more prevailing lusts ; and, by them, he enters, and dwells there, and defiles that clean swept house, and not only keeps the sinner from being better, but makes his latter end worse than his beginning.

v. When men have gone far towards Christianity, *natural conscience then leaves them, and ceases to excite and provoke them to a further proficiency.*

Conscience is the spur, that quickens wicked men to make that progress which they do make : now when it hath brought them past common sins to known and common duties, then it leaves them, and urges them no further ; and so they sit down far short of true grace and

Christianity, which they endeavoured after. Let me say to such men, as St. Paul to the Galatians, chap. v. 7. "Ye did run well: who hindered you?" Was it the difficulty of religion, or the strength of temptation, or the flatteries and allurements of the world, or the violence and rage of your own lusts? But might you not, nevertheless, have armed yourselves with peremptory resolutions? might you not undauntedly and victoriously have broke through all these? were you not able, when you stood still, or when you gave back as frighted and terrified at these things, to make one step, and another step still forwards? could you not proceed still further, and press onwards through all these? Yes: you might have gone much further, if you would: you might have made a further progress, though all hell had armed itself against you: therefore, if you perish, there will be cause and reason to blame yourselves: you can only charge your damnation on your own wilful sloth and negligence.

This may suffice for an answer to the third general— Whence it is, that professors, that have gone far towards Christianity, yet fall short of grace, and of being true Christians. They were too nice to encounter difficulties: they were apt and forward to think well of themselves: they were too faint-hearted to cope with temptations, loth to disoblige the world, and would not proceed further than spurred on by natural conscience; and, therefore, wilfully fell short, through their own sloth and negligence, of grace here, and of glory hereafter.

IV. The last general propounded, was to show you *the folly and extreme misery of those, who proceed thus far as to be almost Christians, and yet will not be persuaded to be such altogether.*

The apostle seems to be very passionate, Gal. iii. 1, 3. "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" What! are you mad? are you besotted? are you bewitched out of your common reason and understanding; that, having begun in the

Spirit, and made so far, progress in the ways and knowledge of Christ, after all this, you should fall back again to carnal, fleshly rudiments? Why, the same may I say to many; You, that are professors, who hath bewitched you? why are you so foolish, as, when you have not only begun, but proceeded far towards holiness and true grace, that yet you should give over, and sit down in a state of nature and unregeneracy short of it?

Consider but your folly and misery in these particulars.

i. Is it not extreme folly, madness, and misery, *wilfully to fall short of that, which you have already taken so much pains to attain?*

What! after all the labour, and hardships, and difficulties that you have already gone through to obtain grace, now to sit down short of it, and lose all! Will you wilfully lose all your prayers, and all your tears? all your convictions, and all your conflicts? Shall all these be so much labour in vain? Is not this much below the ingenuousness of your resolutions in inferior matters? Do you not use to quicken your endeavours by such arguments as these: ‘I have spent so much upon it, I have taken so much pains about it, therefore I will see the end of it, and go through with it?’ Do you think much to lose your labour in any thing but salvation; but in working out the salvation of your precious immortal souls? What though it be hard and difficult to go further: consider, was it not hard and difficult to arrive at that, which you have already attained unto? and are you so foolish, as to be willing to lose the fruit and benefit of the difficulties, which you have already passed, only for fear of difficulties that are yet to come? If Christianity be not worthy your pains, why did you ever engage in it? and if it be, why do you sit still? You will be guilty of extreme folly, either in this or that: for you enter upon Christianity, without sitting down, and reckoning what it will cost you. Christ himself brands you for fools: Luke xiv. 28—30. “For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? lest, haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not

able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish."

If it was not worth your pains, what a folly was it to attempt it! If you thought it worth all and more, what a folly then was it to flag! And could you, before you came so nigh to grace and so nigh to glory, could you see such beauty and such desirableness in it at so great a distance, as to persuade you to come thus far: and, now, when you are much nearer, and can see much more of its excellency and comeliness, dare you now despise and contemn it, when you have not only the promise of God to be your encouragement, but you have also given earnest too? for that profession, and those endeavours, and those duties, which you have already passed through, are all, as it were, the earnest of your further progress: this earnest you lose: profession, endeavours, and duty, all come to nothing, if, after all, you rest anywhere short of grace: you lose your earnest which you give, if you be but almost Christians, and rest anywhere short of true Christianity. What extreme folly is this, for men to disquiet themselves in vain, and take so much pains to pray and hear, and to keep themselves from many sins, and perform many duties; and, yet, because they will do no more, lose the benefit of all this! What is it, that you do all this for? is it not to obtain grace and glory? And will you do so much for such an excellent end, and yet wilfully fall short of it? You may remain graceless, without all this labour: if you are fully resolved for hell, why do you do any thing? to hell you may go, without praying or hearing; without striving, or conflicting, or performing one duty, or resisting one sin as you do: if you are resolved for heaven, why do you not do more? all your praying, hearing, striving, and wrestling will be lost and in vain, if you do not hold on, if you do not continue. What a folly is it, for you to have gone so far, and to have won every step of ground by clear force; to have toiled in the ways of religion, with sweat and anguish, and disquieting to your soul; and yet, at last, to lose and frustrate all this pains, through your

cursed and wilful sloth and negligence ! to give all away, and fall wilfully short of grace and salvation !

ii. Is it not gross and inexcusable folly *to desist after so far progress*; whereas, for ought we know, had we but proceeded a little further, we might have obtained that grace which we fall short of ?

And how know you, but that, upon your further endeavours, God might have bestowed that grace you strive for ? God is not wanting in this kind : to those, who improve the power of nature which they have, he gives the power of grace which they have not. Yet, when men arrive thus far, and come as it were to the very porch of heaven, what thick and dull folly is it, when there is as it were but a step or two between them and glory, to break off their progress and sit down short ! What ! is it more labour, to go those few steps more, than those which you have already gone ? Were you willing and contented, to do all that you have already done, for that, which is but like grace ; and will you not be persuaded to do a little more, for that, which is true grace ? It may be God may convert you, by the very next prayer you make : he may convert you, by the next sermon you hear : he may give you true grace, when you next of all oppose any temptation ; or when you next of all struggle against any lust : the very next step, which you take in his way, may carry you to heaven, for ought you know. Now the great probability of this, nay were it only a bare possibility, makes a man guilty of the greatest folly, who hath gone thus far towards holiness, if he neglect a further progress towards it.

iii. *What a dangerous and dreadful thing is it for men to climb so high, and yet to have no holdfast to depend upon, no foundation to support them !*

Yet thus it is with every elevated carnal professor, that falls short of grace. He is like a man, that stands upon the sharp top of a towering pinnacle, where he hath no other holdfast but a handful of air. But the standing of a child of God is firm : his feet are fixed upon an immovable rock, even the Rock of ages ; and God reacheth out his hand from heaven to support him. It is dis-

puted by some nice inquisitors, whether a man, if he were lifted up above the magnetic and attractive virtue of the earth, may not stand as safely and walk in the air as he doth now upon the earth. It is true of a child of God, when he hath got beyond the reach of earthly attractions, he may walk safely in that sublime way which leads to heaven ; but, for wicked men, that have not got beyond the malignity of the earth, it is exceeding dangerous : their earthly minds and affections, and their earthly conversations, will in the end bear them down headlong ; unless they climb still higher, until they have got beyond these terrene attractions. Now would it not make you tremble, to see a man borne up in the air, as the poets feign of Icarus, with waxen wings, that are subject to melt and fall off, and betray their charge to certain ruin and perdition ? thus it is with every carnal professor, that has gone far in Christianity. And is it not you, that fly only with waxen wings, I mean the power of nature and the common works of the Holy Ghost, which may fall off and leave you in eternal ruin ?

iv. And hence it follows, in the fourth place, that these mountainous professors, who have attained to a high pitch, yet fall short of grace, *because they want firm footing to assure their standing.*

They usually either desperately tumble headlong into the commission of some foul gross sins ; or else they grow brain-sick, and turn aside to the maintaining of some prodigious error. This is usually the issue of such lofty professors. As we see a cloud, that hath been sucked up by the sun, how it hovers a while in the air, but anon is wrapped and whirled about with every wind, and so is utterly lost and dissipated ; or else it falls down again to the earth in storms, and is turned only into mire and dirt : even so fares it with many a professor : he is drawn up out of the earth, and above the pollutions of the world, by a common influence of the Holy Spirit, and for a while he hangs and hovers in a lofty profession ; but, having no firm basis to sustain him, he is either blown up as an empty cloud, and driven away by every wind of doctrine, and lost amongst various sects and opinions ; or else, after a while, he falls back again into the

filthy conversation and worldly pollutions that he had escaped, and ends only in mire and dirt, and this because he hath not that incorruptible seed within him that shall never die. Indeed, true grace is of itself immortal; but it is from that engagement, that God hath laid upon himself to preserve it in those, who are diligent in the use of those means, by which it may be maintained. But an unregenerate man is left wholly to his own power, to preserve him in that station, in which he shines: and, if the angels themselves and Adam fell from their first estate, merely through the mutability of their own will, who had power to continue in it, how much more certainly then will these carnal professors fall from their high pitch, who have less power to enable them to stand, and greater power against them to cast them down!

To aggravate the exceeding great folly and apostacy of these elevated break-neck professors, see that most dreadful place, 2 Pet. ii. 21. "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." Is not the wrath of God certainly to be revealed against all those, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus? It is better never to have known the gospel, and never to have gone a step in the ways of God, than afterwards wilfully to desert them and apostatize from them.

1. *The fall and apostacy of those, who are great and eminent professors, carries much of malice and wilfulness in it, which is the highest rank that can be in any sin.*

If there be any in the world, that commit the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, it must be these men. There is, indeed, a great difference between sinning willingly and sinning wilfully: profane, carnal men sin willingly: but none, but those who have been forward professors in the ways of God, and have utterly deserted those ways, can sin maliciously, and merely because they will provoke and offend God by their sins. See what the apostle saith of such, Heb. x. 26, 27. "For if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins: but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indigna-

tion," Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." This is the first aggravation of their sin and misery.

2. But then, *when elevated and eminent professors fall away, they usually fall lower than they were before, when they took their first rise towards Christianity and true religion.*

Falling away from a profession, is like the falling down from a steep precipice; where they can have nothing to stop them till they come to the very bottom. And it is observed, that none prove more notoriously wicked, and more desperate haters and revilers of the ways of God, than apostate professors.

(1.) God doth judicially give them up to commit all manner of sin with greediness. See that black catalogue of the foulest sins that can be imagined, Rom. i. from 21- to 30. The apostle speaks there concerning the heathen; but the case is parallel with our carnal professors, who do not like to retain God in their knowledge: therefore "God gives them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."

(2.) The devil takes possession of such men, with stronger power and force than ever; (as the unclean spirit re-entered with seven spirits worse than himself, Luke xi. 26.) to secure that soul, that hath been so likely to revolt from him; and therefore no wonder Christ saith, "the last state of that man is worse than the first." So that these eminent professors, when they fall away, usually fall lower than they ever were, before their first rise and motion towards religion.

(3.) Unregenerate persons not only fall lower, but they seldom return to make a profession of their deserted religion: it is impossible to renew such a one to repentance again.

Now how should these sad and dreadful considerations make every one of us to do our utmost that we are able, to get true and saving grace, if we rest any where short

of it! When the winds of temptation tempestuously beat, and the floods of trial, affliction, or persecution rush in upon us, we shall fall, because we have no foundation, but have built merely upon the sands. If you stand not built upon the corner-stone, you will fall of yourselves; yea, that stone will fall upon you, and crush and grind you to powder. Nay, you fall off from a steep and slippery precipice, where there is nothing at all to stop, nothing to receive you but sin after sin; and thus you rebound from one wickedness to another, till at last you be plunged irrecoverably into that lake, which burns with fire and brimstone.

And this is the fourth consideration; discovering the folly and misery of those, that go far towards Christianity, and yet fall short.

v. *Though these professors may hover between heaven and earth in their lives, yet they shall not hover between heaven and hell in their deaths.*

No: the half Christian shall be as infallibly and as certainly cast into hell, as those who were altogether wicked. Here, it may be, thou art neither godly nor profane; but, hereafter, thou must be either saved or damned. There is none, as the papists picture Erasmus, that hangs between heaven and hell. Whoever thou art, thou must be either in a state of nature or of grace; and, accordingly, shall thy estate then be for ever, either a state of salvation among the saints, or else a state of damnation with the unregenerate. Though thou art never so lofty and sublime a professor, yet the same hell, that holds the profane, must eternally hereafter hold thee too, if, through thine own wilful negligence, thou stop any where short of true grace. If the almost Christians could, by their glittering profession, gain a cooler hell; if they could get, I say, but a cooler place in hell: if their profession could gain you this; if it could procure you purgatory for venial sins, or the moderate punishment which the papists call 'limbus patrum,' then you had some show of reason to rest where you are: but when the same hell and the same everlasting fire must be the portion of those, who have proceeded so far, and yet fall short; as well as the portion of the vilest wretch, whom they have now as far exceeded in goodness,

as the holiest saint alive exceeds them; it is the very height of folly and madness, to sit down anywhere short of true grace, unless they are fully resolved to sit down nowhere short of hell.

vi. It will be the insupportable aggravation of these men's just and everlasting condemnation, for them to lie grating upon this sad reflection in hell, *that once they were near to heaven, but lost it through their own wilful default.*

It will be the aggravation, I say, of these men's just and everlasting condemnation, to make this doleful and furious reflection upon themselves in hell, that once they were in a very hopeful state, that they were once near to heaven, but lost it through their own wilful default. When they shall lie in hell, and from thence give a sad and ghastly look up to the glory of the saints in heaven, O how will it pierce their souls to think, that they were once near to that blessed estate, though now there be an infinite and unpassable gulf between them and that blessed inheritance, which the saints enjoy in heaven! Thus will they reflect upon themselves: 'Though now there be an unpassable gulf between me and heaven; yet, once, there was but a step or two that parted us. Had I mortified but one lust more, had I opposed one temptation more, had I put up but one fervent prayer more; possibly, I might now have been in heaven. But, O my cursed, cursed folly, when I was at the very gate and threshold of heaven, that even then I should stop; and, after the relinquishment of my lusts, and after all my progress in the ways of holiness, to return again to the commission of those sins, in which I had formerly lived; when I had already gone through the hardest and most difficult part of religion, then to break off my course! what is this, but procuring for myself this damnation, which I now suffer, and must suffer for ever! O that light, that once I enjoyed, how it thickens this everlasting darkness! O those tastes that I once had of the powers of the world to come, and relished so much sweetness in, how do they now embitter this cup of fury and trembling, that I must for ever drink of! O those heavenly gifts, that once I had, do now but increase these hellish torments; and the sight of heaven, which I have had, now discovers to me what I have lost; nay, what I

have wilfully thrown away through mine own sloth and negligence. O how strange is mine apostacy ! after I had gone so great a way towards Christianity, rather than I would move one step further, I chose to lie here in this hell for ever burning and consuming !' O what sad and tormenting thoughts will these be ! how will they fret and gnaw the souls of those wretches, with eternal anguish and insupportable torments !

Thus you have seen, in these particulars, somewhat discovered to you of the desperate folly and madness, and misery also, that men are guilty of, that do proceed so far as to be almost, and yet will not be persuaded to be altogether Christians.

A  
**DISCOURSE**  
ON THE  
**NATURE, CORRUPTION, AND RENEWING,**  
OF THE  
**CONSCIENCE.**

A

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CONSCIENCE.

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ACTS XXIV. 16.

*“Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.”*

In this chapter, St. Paul gives an account to Felix of the general course and demeanour of his former life; being accused by Tertullian, a flattering orator, as one who was profane and seditious. After that he had purged himself in sundry particulars, he comes, in the text, to show, that he was far from those crimes that were laid to his charge; having made it his constant exercise, all his life-time, to keep a good conscience.

The words have little or no difficulty in them: and, therefore, instead of giving you an elaborate exposition, I shall only run them over with a brief paraphrase.

“Herein do I exercise myself:” that is, I make it my constant care and employment, “to have always a conscience void of offence:” that is, to keep my conscience clear, that it may not justly accuse me of any offence done

either against God or against men : that is, I labour conscientiously to practise, as well the duties of the second, as the duties of the first table ; to be just towards men, as well as to be religious towards God ; knowing, that the one without the other, to be without offence towards men only is but mere morality, and to be without offence only towards God is but vain hypocrisy.

Without farther explication, the words do, of their own accord, deliver to us this doctrine, that *it should be our continual care and employment, in all things, whether relating to God or man, to keep clear and inoffensive consciences.*

Conscience is nothing but a practical syllogism or argumentation ; and always infers a personal conclusion, either excusing or accusing : and it hath three offices.

First. It discovers to us what is sin, and what is duty ; and the reward, that is entailed upon both.

And thus it gives in its verdict according to that light that shines into it. If it bath only the twilight of nature to illustrate it, as the heathens had no other, then it can pass judgment only upon natural duties and unnatural sins : thus the consciences of heathens, through some remainders of original knowledge, informed them that worship was due to God and justice to men ; and that all impieties against God and all injuries against men, should, in the end, be severely punished. But, if conscience enjoys the superadded light of scripture, it judges then of those duties and those sins, that could only be known by divine revelation : hence it is, that conscience is enabled to form such a proposition as this : " He, that believeth, shall be saved : he, that believeth not, shall be damned :" this proposition it forms, not from natural light, but from the super-induced light of scripture. This is the first direct act of conscience, whereby it pronounceth of men's works, whether they be sinful or not, and what the reward or punishment is that shall follow them, according as it finds it written in the dark and imperfect law of nature, or in the superadded law of God.

Secondly. When conscience hath thus pronounced whether the action be good or bad, and what reward or punishment belongs to it, its next office is, to witness and depose, that we have done such or such actions.

This is a reflex act, whereby, when conscience hath discovered what is sin and what is duty, it testifies, that, either we have performed the one, or that we have committed the other. The scripture reveals, that faith shall be rewarded with eternal life, and unbelief punished with death eternal: hereupon conscience makes reflection upon itself, and applies the proposition: ‘ But I believe, or I do not believe:’ and that is its witnessing or deposing office.

Thirdly. It hath besides this, the office of a Judge, to acquit or condemn.

And this it doth, by inferring a comfortable or a terrifying conclusion from the former premises; applying the reward or punishment to ourselves, according as those actions have been ours to which they belong. If it hath proved us unbelievers, straight it pronounceth us condemned persons; or if it evidences our faith to us, presently it justifies and acquits us. Hence it is, that wicked men are haunted with pale fears and ghastly reflections; because they are always malefactors arraigned at a bar: a bar that they carry about with them in their own breasts; where they hear a thousand witnesses sworn and examined; where they hear their judge, ten thousand times a day, pronouncing them cursed and damned. And hence it is, also, that there is sometimes diffused into the hearts of God’s children such sweet joy, such solid peace, such calm stayedness, and some prelibations of heavenly bliss; because they carry in their breasts a court of judicature, where their earthly judge, conscience, acquits them, and assures them that their heavenly judge will do so also.

This is conscience: that faithful register in every man’s bosom, that writes down the actions, discourses, and cogitations of every hour and minute.

This being premised concerning the nature and offices of conscience, I shall come, in the next place, to inquire into these following particulars, into which I shall digest the method of this subject.

- I. What it is that doth corrupt and vitiate conscience.
- II. What it is, to have a clear conscience.
- III. Of what importance and consequence it is, that

our consciences be kept clear and void of offence : under which, I shall give you the reasons of the point.

IV. I shall lay down some rules and means, whereby we may attain unto and keep a pure and clean conscience.

I. *What is it, that doth corrupt and vitiate conscience, in executing its offices?*

This I shall couch under two particulars : and they are ignorance, and wilful sinning.

i. *Ignorance corrupts the conscience.*

Conscience is the guide of life, and knowledge is the eye of conscience ; and if this be darkened, the blind leads the blind till both fall into the ditch. Conscience is a guide, that leads apace ; and, therefore, had need see its way before it : which some not being well able to discern, have wound themselves into inextricable wanderings ; pursuing every glaring delusion ; and running after every skipping light, that dances before it, till at last they have lost both themselves and their consciences too. How many are there, that have thus bewildered themselves in their own fancies and opinions ; and so have fallen upon the precipice of damnable errors, and into bogs of mire and filthy lusts, only through an ignorant conscience and self-conceited pride that is always a companion of it ! This ignorance fills the conscience with false presumptions, and draws it to wrong determinations and conclusions ; which, though they seem to be but little mistakes in the notion, yet are most destructive and pernicious in a man's practice. As a small mistake in the levelling of an arrow at the hand, makes a wide distance at the mark ; so a small mistake, in the notion of truth, makes a wide error in the practice of godliness. A mis-persuaded conscience usually gives rise to misguided zeal : and zeal, without knowledge, is but a religious frenzy, that fashions out to itself strange shapes of sin and duty, of good and evil ; and, usually, takes the one for the other, until it falls under that woe denounced by the prophet, Isa. v. 20. " Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."

Ignorance vitiates and corrupts the conscience two ways : either it makes it unnecessarily scrupulous ; or, else, it makes it daringly presumptuous.

1. *Ignorance fetters and binds up the conscience, either to the doing of or abstaining from that, concerning which God hath laid no law and obligation at all upon it.*

This is an encroaching conscience, which makes that an enclosure, that God hath left common ; and rigorously exacts from us, what God hath permitted as indifferent. It is a very sad judgment to be given up to the domineering impositions of a scrupulous conscience. Such a conscience as this is will certainly make much more sin, than ever the law made : for, whatever we do against the commands of conscience is sin, though it be not immediately and directly against the commands of God : Rom. xiv. 23. Now some there are, who do so needlessly pin and coop up themselves, that they cannot stir, nor moderately use that lawful liberty which God hath indulged them, but presently they are entangled in sin, because of the imperious prohibitions of their own consciences.

2. *Sometimes ignoranœ makes conscience licentious ; indulging itself in those actions, that the law of God condemns ; making it daringly presumptuous.*

And this is a quite contrary extreme ; and yet, as opposite as these are, we oftentimes find them joined together in the same persons ; the same persons, that have a needlessly scrupulous conscience, have also a daringly presumptuous conscience : and this proceeds from an ignorance of their due bounds and limits. Who, ordinarily, so profane, as the superstitious ? Their ignorance makes them scrupulous observers of little circumstances, and yet bold adventurers upon notorious sins. What a strange wry conscience have such men ; who tie up themselves strictly where God gives them scope, and yet run riotously where God's commands and threatenings restrain ! dreading more the transgressing of one law of man, than they do the transgressing of the whole moral law of God ! This is from ignorance ; whereby men do not know the due bounds, either of that liberty which God indulgeth them, or that restraint which God lays upon them.

And this is the first thing, that corrupts conscience ; namely ignorance.

ii. *Wilful sinning* corrupts and vitiates the conscience, and that, two ways.

1. Sometimes such sins *stupify and deaden the conscience*, especially if they become frequent and customary ; and, therefore, we usually call them conscience-wasting sins.

Believe it, through a continued course of known and presumptuous sins, you will bring your consciences into very sad consumptions, that they will pine away under iniquities. And how many are there, who have their consciences already lying speechless, senseless, and gasping ; ready to give up the ghost ! The apostle, in Eph. iv. 19. speaks of them, that “ being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness.”

2. Sometimes such sins do *affright, terrify, and enrage the conscience* : filling it with dreadful thoughts of eternal, future vengeance.

Wilful and known sins sometimes terrify and enrage the conscience. And this is a corruption of the conscience, when the terrors of it are so overwhelming, as to sink men into despair : for, mark it, it is its office to accuse and to threaten for sin ; and, the greater the sin is, the more sharp and stinging ought to be its reproofs : but, be the sin never so great for which conscience reproves, if yet it denounceth wrath without making mention of repentance and hopes of mercy, it exceeds its commission that God hath given it, and becomes an evil and corrupt conscience. And, therefore, we have that expression. Heb. x. 22. “ Let us draw near, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” By an evil conscience, here, is meant a despairing conscience ; from which we are freed, only by the blood of sprinkling : to be convinced of sin, and not at all to be convinced of righteousness, is such a conviction, as constitutes one part of the torments of the damned in hell, whose worm never dies : and, certainly that conscience must needs be very evil and very corrupt, which breeds in it this hellish worm, while we are here upon earth.

And, so much, for the first thing,—what it is, that corrupts the conscience.

II. The next thing propounded, is, to show you *what it is to have a clear conscience.*

There are two things, that denominate a conscience to be clear; when it is pure, and when it is peaceable: when it is free from all known and wilful defilements, and when it is not justly burdened with the guilt of sin, then is it a clear conscience.

i. Then a man hath a clear conscience, *when it is free from all known and wilful sins.* I say, from all known and wilful sins; for it is impossible, while we are encompassed about with infirmities and oppressed with a heavy body of sin and death, to keep ourselves free and pure from all sin: “For in many things we offend all,” says St. James: iii. 2. But these sins of daily weakness and sudden surreption, as they are usually small sins and scarce discernible, so are they no obstructions to a clear conscience; no more than the moats of the sun-beams are obstructions to a clear day. As for those quotidian weaknesses and sins of daily infirmity, they neither leave guilt nor defilement upon the conscience of God’s children: but, as their more foul sins are done away, by particular acts of repentance; so these are done away, by a general state of repentance, which state the children of God are always in: and there is also a constant out-flowing of the blood of Christ and of the mercy of God upon the soul, to remove the guilt and filth of those sins as we fall into them. Then is the conscience clear, when, all former sins being pardoned to us, we daily labour to please God: though it be with manifold imperfections and weaknesses, this doth not hinder but that our consciences may be both pure and peaceable; while we thus sincerely strive to keep ourselves from all wilful and from all presumptuous sins, our consciences are clear, notwithstanding the sins of daily infirmity. So says the Psalmist, Psalm xix. 13. “Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.”

That is the first thing; conscience is clear, when it is free from all known and wilful sins.

ii. Then a man hath a clear conscience, *when it is not justly burdened with the guilt of sin.* I say, not justly burdened; because, sometimes, we may burden ourselves without cause, when God hath already forgiven us. Many times, through temptations and desertions, God's children reflect back upon their old sins with new troubles, and rip up their old wounds and make them bleed afresh. They remember against themselves, what God hath forgotten; and, with great terrors, accuse and condemn themselves, for what God hath already remitted to them.

Here I shall lay down two things—that every quiet conscience is not a clear conscience;—that every troubled conscience is not an evil conscience.

1. *Every quiet conscience is not a clear conscience.*

Some are lulled asleep in security; and their consciences are quiet, merely because they are insensible: it may be, they have so harrassed and wasted their consciences by dreadful sins, so often mortally wounded them, that now they have not strength enough to become quarrelsome and troublesome; and this they call peace. Indeed, it is such a peace as Galgathus reproaches the Romans with in Tacitus; when they had laid all waste, then they called it peace: so these sinners think they have good and peaceable consciences, because they do not menace, torment, and worry them; and, alas! how can they? their consciences are murdered: there is no sense nor life left in them. This is no peace, but a mere solitude and desolation of conscience: and, yet, believe it too, these quiet and peaceable consciences will not be long so: at the hour of death, or if not then the next moment after death, these peaceable consciences will be startled out of their sleep, and will roar so loud, that heaven and hell shall hear them. As, in still weather, many times, matter is gathering for a storm; so, while conscience seems so still and quiet, it is only gathering matter for a tempest, that will one day pour upon your heads. And, oh, how grievous will it be, when those consciences, that never gave them an ill word before, shall on a sudden drag them before the tribunal of God, and there bitterly accuse them of those horrid sins that once they seemed to take no notice of, and call for the severest execution of divine

wrath and vengeance upon them ! And, possibly, many, that speak of the peace of their consciences, do not find it so neither : they are as far from a peaceable conscience, as they are from a raving and a raging conscience. A raving conscience soon discovers itself in hellish despair : but there are many, whose consciences do not rave, and yet are never quiet : they give them many a secret twitch and gird at the very heart, not outwardly discernible by others : as thunder rumbles long in the entrails of a cloud, that never breaks forth into dreadful and terrible cracks ; so a man may have a rumbling and a grumbling conscience, a conscience that may murmur and scowl upon him, and yet he may carry it as if all were calm and serene within him : however, though all within may be quiet, yet a quiet conscience may be a polluted conscience ; as a standing puddle may be as foul as the raging sea, when it casts out its mire and filth.

2. As every quiet conscience is not a clear conscience, so *every troubled conscience is not an evil conscience.*

Hypocrites and wicked men may indeed, and do often, so judge. ‘ Would God ever suffer such strange terrors to seize upon men, were they not notorious sinners ? ’ As those barbarians at Malta, spoken of in the Acts, when they saw the viper fasten upon the apostle’s hand, presently concluded that he was some wicked person, whom divine vengeance would not suffer to live : so these men, when they see the worm of conscience fasten upon others, presently judge them guilty of notorious crimes ; crimes, for which the vengeance and wrath of God pursue them. But this is a wrong censure, and most unjust. For the most part it is seen, that those, that have the best consciences, are most troubled, at least for a time ; until the Holy Ghost persuade them of the love of God, and of the pardon of their sins. It is the greatest fault of a tender conscience, that it misinterprets every thing against itself : and, oftentimes, when God rejoices over it, it apprehends he frowns upon it ; mistaking the firing of a bonfire for the firing of a beacon, and giving an alarm when they should proclaim peace and joy : many times it is so with them, that have tender consciences. A man may be long troubled for those sins, that are already pardoned to him :

Nathan comes to David, and, upon his confession that he had sinned, 2 Sam. xii. 13. "I have sinned," says he: God by Nathan tells him, that he had put away his sin from him; and yet his conscience, though it were clear in respect of any guilt that God charged upon him, was not clear in respect of what he himself charged upon himself: he thought himself guilty in his own apprehension, as you may perceive by his penning of the 51st Psalm; yet he was not guilty in God's account, for he assures him, by his prophet, that he had pardoned him.

*Question.* 1. ' Now it being so, that both a quiet conscience may be impure, and that a troubled conscience may be a clear conscience, how shall we know whether when our consciences are troubled, it be from the guilt of sin remaining upon them; or whether, when they be clear and quiet, it be from the removal of that guilt ?'

For answer unto this;—it may be known when a man's conscience is troubled from the guilt of sin remaining upon it, by considering the effects of this trouble. Doth he find, that, when conscience is disquieted, he is apt to shift off the trouble by diverting it, and doing what he can to lull it asleep? doth he neglect prayer, reading the word, and other duties and means that God hath appointed to bring him to a true repentance for his sin? If it be so, this man hath great cause to fear, that the trouble of his conscience proceeds from the impurity and defilement of it. Where God will save the soul, this trouble of conscience works in another manner, and stirs up a man to pray, to hear, to meditate upon God's word, where his condition will be stated to his hand; to follow God in all his ways and ordinances, making him restless till he come to know that his sins are pardoned, and his wounds healed and closed up by the blood of Jesus Christ. Many there are, in whom the troubles of conscience never produce any good effects; but all their care is, how they may divert all troublesome and disquieting thoughts from themselves; and so they wear off convictions: now this trouble can never produce any saving effect; and is itself produced merely from that corroding and gnawing guilt, that lies upon conscience, which a true and genuine trouble is a means by God appointed to remove.

**Question 2.** ‘ How may a man know when conscience is quiet, whether it be quieted upon God’s grounds, because the guilt of sin is removed from it ? ’

To this I answer—it must be considered, whether quietness of conscience comes after trouble : and, if conscience be quiet after trouble, then you must consider how it came to be quieted. Did you wear it away with other businesses ? or, did you seek to God by prayer, and applying of the promises to yourselves ? Did you in the way of God, obtain peace ? Now if a man’s quietness, that he hath, be got after trouble, and if got in God’s way, that way which he hath appointed to still and quiet the conscience, you may then satisfy yourself in it. But, when as you never have been troubled, or having been troubled have worn it off, you may be assured such a peace of conscience is far worse and more dangerous, than the most horrid troubles and disquietments of conscience that can be.

III. I come now to the third general head propounded : and that was, to show you, *of what great importance, and of what beneficial consequence it is, to keep our consciences clear and inoffensive.*

And, in speaking unto this, I shall, at once, both give you the reasons of the point, why it should be our continual endeavour to keep clear consciences ; and, also, give you motives to persuade you to the duty.

I shall name only six.

i. *A clear conscience is the most comfortable relief under false reproaches and aspersions, that are cast upon us.*

A good conscience is in our own power alone ; but, it is in the power of every slanderous tongue, to blast a good name : and, indeed, it is a thing almost impossible, to keep at once both a good conscience and a good name. The world is shattered and fractured into so many parties, and each of them of such different relishes of good and bad, that unless our actions have as universal a gust, as, according to the rabbins’ tradition, the Israelites’ manna had, that it had the taste of that which they best fancied ; we must of necessity fall under mis-constructions, censures, and defamations. For, indeed, if we observe it, it is usually our similitude to others that makes them think

and speak well of us : whosoever commends another, commends him for somewhat, that he supposeth at least he hath in himself : and this is the reason of that woe, which our Saviour denounceth, Luke vi. 26. " Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you." When wicked men speak well of us, it is a sign that we are but too too like them : even a heathen could say, when he was highly applauded by the vulgar rout, ' What evil have I done, that these men praise me ? ' the very reproaches of ungodly men are the best testimonials that can be given of an excellent and singular Christian. In a strict and holy conversation, there is that contradiction to the loose profaneness of the world, as, at once, both convinces and offends them, reproves them and galls them : and if, as we ought, we thus reproach them by our lives, we must expect that they will again reproach us by their lying slanders. It is a sinful tenderness of our esteem among men, when we tack about to every popular breath that blows : such must needs prefer the praise of men, before the praise of God. And, let me tell you, this is as fruitless, as it is sinful ; since this wind will always blow from contrary points : while some extol us, others will as much vilify and scorn us. It is miserable to live upon the reports and opinions of others : let us not reckon what they say, but what reports our own consciences make : it is far better to offend the whole world, than God and conscience : and, if a storm of obloquy and reproaches, railings and curses, do at any time patter upon us ; how sweet then is it, to retire inward into the calm innocency of our own hearts ! there a thousand witnesses will tell us, we have not deserved them : how comfortable is it, to remit our cause to God ; and leave our vindication to him, for whose sake we suffer reproach ! Thus Jeremiah appeals to God, Jer. xx. 10, 12. " I have heard the defaming of many ; Report, say they, and we will report it :" that is, let us raise a disgraceful and reproachful report of him : " But," says he, " O Lord of hosts, thou that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, unto thee have I opened my cause." Thus, if, while wicked men are maliciously conspiring how to blot and sully our names, we can but keep our consciences clear ; what need we

much trouble ourselves how the wind blows abroad, since we are harboured under the retreat of a peaceful heart? They may, possibly, persuade others to believe their calumnies; but they can never persuade God to believe them. He, who searcheth the heart and conscience, knows that we are injured; and he is hastening forward a day, wherein he will clear up our righteousness: and, then, the testimony of a good conscience shall put ten thousand slanderers to silence.

ii. A clear conscience, as it enables a man to bear reproaches from others with patience, so *it gives him an advantage to reprove others with authority.*

It is a true rule, that he, who reproves another, ought himself to be free from the fault which he reproves: for, otherwise, the reproof neither comes with freedom from the reprobate, nor with efficacy to the reproved.

1. *A reproof, that comes from a guilty conscience, is but stammering and timorous.*

Such a man's own conscience must needs rise up in his throat, and choke his reproofs. Consciousness of the same miscarriages will retort whatsoever we can say against others, more forcibly against ourselves; and will suggest to us, that it is but a base piece of hypocrisy, to blame that which we ourselves practise. With what face canst thou press others to repent and reform? What arguments canst thou use, who, by continuing in the same sins, dost thyself judge that those arguments are of no force! Thus conscience suggests; and, thereby, tongue-ties reproof.

2. *This too makes reproofs ineffectual.*

It were a temper to be wished and prayed for, that we could only respect how righteous the reproof is, and not how righteous the person is that gives it; and be content to have the motes plucked out of our eyes, though it be by such as have beams in their own eyes. For, indeed, there is no more reason to reject sound admonition, because it comes from an unsound heart, than there is to stop our ears against good counsel, because it is delivered perhaps by an unsavoury breath. Yet so it is, that, when men of defiled consciences and conversations reprove others, they are apt to think, either that they are not in earnest, and do not personate what they speak; or, else,

that they envy them their sins, and would engross all to themselves ; and so the reproof takes no place upon them. But, when a man of a clear and unspotted conscience reproves wicked men, his reproof breaks in upon them with conviction and authority ; and, if it doth not reform, it must at least daunt and silence them. ‘ Here is one, that reproves me for sin, who doubtless believes it to be evil, by his own avoiding it. Here is one, that denounceth wrath if I repent not, who doubtless believes it to be as terrible as he represents it, by his own carefulness to escape it.’ And, thus, a clear conscience hath a great advantage to reprove sinners with success ; at least to work conviction, if not amendment in them.

iii. *A clear conscience gives us boldness of access unto God.*

Guilt abashes the soul, and makes it both ashamed and afraid to appear in the presence of God : and therefore Adam, as soon as he had sinned against his Maker, presently hides himself from him. We may observe in ourselves, what a slavish dejectedness seizeth us when we come to God in duty, after we have wronged him by any known sin : we come to him suspiciously ; and with such a misgiving fear, as if we would not have God take notice that we are before him ; and are still in pain, till the duty be over. But, when our consciences are clear, oh, ‘ with what delight do we haste to God, and with what content do we stay with him ! How doth the soul dilate and spread itself under the smiles of God, beating full upon it ! ‘ Lo, O Lord, here is a heart, that I labour to make and keep void of offence : do thou fill it with thy promised grace and spirit. It is not, indeed, a mansion pure enough for the pure and holy God ; yet is it such, as thou wilt accept of and dwell in. There are still many hidden corruptions in it, but do thou search them out ; and thou, who hast kept thy servant from presumptuous sins, do thou also cleanse me from secret faults.’ Thus a clear conscience, with a holy and reverend boldness, addresseth itself to God ; and sweetly closeth up every duty and every prayer, with full assurance of obtaining mercy from God. So the apostle, Heb. x. 22. “ Let us draw near, in full assurance of faith : ” how may we gain this full

assurance, when we draw near to God ? by " having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." Get but a pure and clear conscience, and that will enable you to draw near to God " in full assurance of faith." And so, in the like parallel place, 1 John iii. 21. " Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence towards God :" if conscience be not evil to accuse us, then have we confidence towards God. When the face of a man's conscience looks cheerful, and hath not a frown nor a wrinkle upon it, this makes us joyfully to apprehend that God's face towards us is serene also, and that we shall be welcome at all times into our Father's presence : this conscience suggests to us, and makes us come with a holy, yet with an awful boldness unto God.

*iv. A clear conscience is the sweetest bosom friend, with which we may at all times freely and intimately converse.*

Wicked men, indeed, of all company in the world, dread and hate themselves most ; they have a lowering, rumbling conscience within, that always threatens and disquiets them ; and, therefore, they love to keep them abroad : soliloquies and heart-discourses are a very torment to them ; and they wonder that the Psalmist should ever bid them " commune with their own heart, and be still ; " as it is in Psalm iv. 4 : they are never less still, than when they discourse awhile with their own consciences ; which, upon many high provocations given them, are grown so quarrelsome, and do so thunder out woes and curses against them, and so hurl about swords, firebrands, and death, that they dare not so much as once look within doors. But a Christian whose conscience is clean and clear, finds it the best companion in the world : in his solitudes and retirements, with what delight doth he call his own heart aside ! There he and his God, sweetly and peaceably confer together ; and there pass mutual endearments and embraces : the soul embraces and clasps about God, with the arms of faith and dependance ; and God embraces the soul, with the arms of his everlasting love. Here is mutual communication of secrets : the soul unlocks the secrets of its own conscience before God ; and God, agajin, reveals the secrets of his own love to the soul. Here are mutual rejoicings : the soul rejoiceth in God, its Saviour ;

and God rejoiceth over the soul, to do it good. And, under these intercourses of love and favour, the soul is ready to faint away, and to dissolve with sweetness and delight. This is that continual feast, which a good conscience entertains a Christian with, where all is transacted with a noiseless mirth.

v. *A clear conscience is the best comfort and support; when fears, and troubles, and dangers are on every side.*

It is a most blessed thing, when trouble is without, to have peace within, in our own bosom ; to be then at peace with God and ourselves. And therefore saith Christ, John xvi. 33. " These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation." A Christian is a man made up of paradoxes : he is " sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing :" poor himself, and yet enriching many : he hath " nothing, and yet possesseth all things :" 2 Cor. vi. 10. And so, here, he hath tribulation in the world, and yet is at peace. When once that great and bloody quarrel between God and the soul, is taken up and compounded ; when we are reconciled to God, and thereby our consciences become reconciled to us ; all the enmity and persecutions of the world are but little pelting differences, which cannot disturb the solid and inviolate peace of a Christian. This is a peace, which as the friendship of the world cannot give, so neither can the enmity of the world take away. " My peace I leave with you : my peace I give unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled." It is observable concerning Josiah, 2 Kings xxii. 20. that God promiseth him by the mouth of Huldah the prophetess, that he should be gathered into his grave in peace : and yet, in the very next chapter, v. 29. it is related, that he was slain in the wars that he undertook against Pharaoh-Nechoh, king of Egypt : he was slain in war, and yet he died in peace : and no wonder ; for whosoever dies in peace with God and his own conscience, dies peaceably, though he die in the midst of wars and tumults.

vi. *A clear conscience affords sweet and unspeakable comfort in a dying hour.*

When all things must take their last leave of us, and we of them ; when death sets all its terrors in array against

us : oh what a blessed support will it then be to the departing soul, to be able to make its appeal, as Hezekiah did ! Isa. xxxviii. 3. " Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight." Such a testimony at such a time, is as much worth as heaven itself. This is to have heaven let down into us one hour, and to be ourselves taken up into heaven the next. Now, possibly, men may frolic away their days in sin and vanity, and live as though they should never give an account : but that day and hour are coming, wherein conscience will begin to open its eyes, when their friends stand ready about them to close up theirs : and then it will see those horrid shapes of death and hell and wrath eternal, which, while they were secure sinners, they never believed, and, now that they are awakened sinners, (and, alas ! possibly too late awakened) they cannot escape. If, therefore, you would have peace and comfort in death, be sure you cherish a good conscience in your life. You may now, indeed, bribe it to give in a false and flattering testimony ; but, when eternity is in view, it will then speak truth. And O thrice happy they, to whom a true conscience becomes then an excusing conscience.

And, so much, for the third thing propounded, namely, of what concernment it is to labour, to keep consciences void of offence.

IV. The next thing propounded was, *to give you some rules and directions how you may get, and also how you may keep, clear and inoffensive consciences.*

But you will say, ' It is in vain to give rules for that, which is impossible to be done. Doth not the wise man challenge all the world upon this point, Prov. xx. 9 ? " Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin ? " Never did the raging sea cast up more mire and filth than the heart of man doth ; and, as soon may we empty the vast waters of the great deep, and scour the bottom of it from all its dirt and mud, as attempt to keep conscience clear, into which a sinful heart is continually emptying and pouring its filth and mire.'

To this I answer ;—were it impossible, yet there is no

release to our obligation. We are commanded to be holy even as God is holy, whose infinite purity is such, as stains the heavens themselves, and puts the glorious angels out of countenance. This perfection is much more impossible for us, who are but lumps of dirt mingled and kneaded together with sin, than for a thick clod of earth to be as transparent as the sun that shines : but yet these excessive commands have a use in them, even to raise up our endeavours to a higher pitch and strain, than if we were commanded only somewhat that were within our own power ; as he, that aims at a star, is like to shoot higher, than he, that aims only at a turf. Thus, though it were impossible to keep clean consciences, " void of offence both toward God and toward men," according to the exactness of God's command ; yet he, that is careful to avoid all pollutions, both of flesh and spirit, shall certainly have a much cleaner conscience by far, than he, that wallows in those sins. In a foul way it is perhaps impossible to keep ourselves from being bespattered with dirt ; yet he, that walks warily and carefully, comes cleaner home, than he, that tumbles and rolls himself in it.

But yet this duty is not impossible. It is, indeed, difficult to keep a clear conscience ; but, yet, it is a thing that is feasible.

i. And, *in general*, there are two ways to keep our consciences clear : either, by preserving them from being defiled ; or, else, by cleansing them when they are defiled.

1. We may keep our consciences clear, *by preserving them from being defiled*.

You will say, ' How can this be ? Is there any man living, says the wise man, " that doeth good, and sinneth not ? " And doth not every sin leave behind it a spot and stain upon the face of conscience ? How then can we keep them clear ? '

I answer :—sins are of two sorts : there are sins, that are crimes ; and there are sins, that are but faults. Crimes, I call those sins, that are branded for infamous both by God and man ; as murder, adultery, blasphemy, and the like, at which even natural conscience recoils ; such carnal sins, as affright conscience, and make it look pale and ghastly : a crime, I also call any sin, that is consub-

stantiated by an access of guilt, by the dreadful aggravations of being committed knowingly and wilfully. By faults, I mean sins of daily infirmity and surreption; such, as do frequently surprise the best and holiest Christians; from which no man's piety nor watchfulness can secure him. Now, though we be overtaken with faults, and every day and hour contract new and fresh guilt upon our consciences; yet we may have clear and good consciences, while we are careful to keep ourselves from crimes; from all sins, that are so in their own nature by the horridness of the fact, and from all sins that are made so by greatening circumstances of being deliberate and wilful: while we keep ourselves from these we have good consciences, notwithstanding sins of ordinary weakness: that man hath a good conscience, who preserves himself from all infamous and gross sins, and from all other wilful and deliberate sins. Now this clearness of conscience is a thing possible to be attained: men may, with care and caution, keep themselves from all self-condemning crimes; and may live so evenly, that, when their consciences are most peevish and touchy, yet they shall have nothing to accuse them of, but what is common to all men. Of such men as these, this we may affirm, that they have been able with joy to reflect back upon their past lives in a dying hour; who, possibly, never knew any other guilt by themselves, than what the sins of common and daily infirmity have exposed them unto. This it is, to keep good consciences. 'We live well,' says St. Austin, 'if we live without crimes: to live without fault is impossible; and he, that thinks he doth it, keeps himself not from sin, but from pardon.'

2. Another way to keep our consciences clear, is, *by cleansing them when they are defiled.*

He keeps his garments clean, who keeps himself from falling; and, in the next degree, he, who, being fallen, hastens to cleanse himself from his contracted filth. And thus, at least, we may keep our consciences clear, both from crimes and from faults also, while we labour to cleanse them from their defilements, and to rub out and wash away those spots with which at any time we are occasionally bespattered. There is a two-fold blot, which sin

leaves behind it : there is a blot of discredit, and a blot of defilement. The former is indelible : as the scar remains, when the wound is healed ; so this blot remains upon the soul, when the guilt of sin is removed : it is a discredit to a malefactor, though pardoned, that ever he should do that which deserved death : and, so, it is a kind of blot upon a Christian's name for ever, to have committed those sins that have deserved eternal death, though, through the free mercy and unspeakable grace of God, he hath obtained the pardon of them. But, then, there is another blot, a blot of defilement, that renders men loathsome and deformed in the eyes of God; and, thus, every sin that we commit leaves a blot and a stain upon the soul; a stain, that defaceth God's image, and that defiles our own consciences ; and, when this stain and blot is cleansed, then we are said to have clear consciences, when we have taken off that blot and defilement that sin hath left, whereby we are rendered deformed in the sight of God, and whereby the image of God is defaced upon the soul.

Thus you see, in general, that there are two ways to keep a clear conscience ; the one, by preventing its defilement, and the other, by cleansing it, when it is defiled.

ii. Now to help you, in both these cases, I shall lay down *several particulars.*

1. If you would have your consciences clear, *get them rightly informed.*

How can conscience be clear, so long as the fogs and thick mists of ignorance and error possess it ? Labour, therefore, to let spiritual light into it, that you may see how to cleanse it. It is as much vanity to go about to cleanse an ignorant conscience, as it is in vain to sweep a dark room. An ignorant, conscientious man, that knows not the limits of sin and duty, may, after a great deal of pother with his conscience, leave it much worse than he found it ; and cast out jewels, instead of rubbish. Indeed, it is impossible for an ignorant man to have a good conscience, whether we respect duty or comfort. In point of duty, I have showed you formerly, that ignorance will make conscience unnecessarily scrupulous, or daringly presumptuous. Neither can an ignorant conscience be good in respect of comfort ; because, through ignorance, con-

science oftentimes quarrels at that, which is a true ground of rejoicing. Conscience is that glass, whereby we may view both ourselves and our actions. Now as a glass, when falsely framed, represents a beautiful face monstrous and frightful; so conscience, when falsely informed, makes even lovely actions appear misshapen and terrifying, by distorted representations of those things that are lawful, and perhaps our duty also. Therefore, in the first place, get an enlightened conscience, if you would get a good conscience: for, what says the wise man, Prov. xix. 2? "That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good;" or, as some translations have it, "a soul without knowledge is not good:" it is, indeed, good for nothing, unless it be to make men sin conscientiously; and to embolden them to commit the greatest wickedness in the world, with peace and comfort. Thus, says our Saviour, John xvi. 2. "Whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God" good "service," through the error and mistake of their conscience. So, in 1 Cor. ii. 8. "Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

Knowledge betters the conscience two ways.—It gives it *direction*, what to choose and what to avoid: it instructs it to discern betwixt good and evil. Ignorant persons often mistake the one for the other; and eschew, what they should follow: or, if they chance to do that, which is good, as it is not of great worth to do good only by chance and hazard; so they sin also in doing good: while the judgment is in suspense, the conscience must needs be under guilt. If I know not whether I ought to do an action or to forbear, which way soever I take I am entangled in sin; "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin:" that is, whatsoever is done with a wavering conscience, that I know not whether it be sinful or not, that thereby becomes sin; and, whatever a man doth doubtlessly, he is damned if he doth it. He that eateth doubtlessly, says the apostle, "is damned if he eat:" Rom. xiv. 23.—Knowledge gives the conscience *strength*, to enforce us to the doing of that, which it discovers to be good; and to the flight of that, which it discovers to be evil. A knowing person cannot sin so easily as an ignorant man may; but he must struggle and wrestle harder, and offer more

violence by far to his own conscience. A man, that sees his danger before him, will hardly be dragged unto precipices; whereas one, that is blind, is easily led thither, suspecting nothing; so, here, a knowing person, that sees the danger of hell and damnation before him, if he sins it must be with a great deal of inward reluctance; an enlightened conscience struggles, and withholds him: and, if temptation be so violent as to wrest him out of the hand of conscience, how is he racked and torn in pieces betwixt conscience and temptations! And, when conscience hath lost its hold, still it pursues him; and follows him to his sin; and disturbs his pleasure; and embitters that sweetness, that he thought to have found in sin before; and never leaves its clamours, till it hath, at least by a hypocritical and formal repentance, and by engagements to be more observing of the commands of conscience for the future, satisfied and appeased it. This force conscience hath, when it is duly informed with knowledge. But, where ignorance hath blinded it, it suffers men quietly to rush upon God's neck, and "upon the thick bosses of his buckler." It sees not, neither respects any danger, when it is even on the very brink of hell. An ignorant conscience is like a benighted or bewildered traveller, which, because it cannot see its own way before it, what is to be chosen and what is to be refused, lays the reins upon the neck of men's lusts, and suffers them without control to take their own course. And, therefore, if you would have good consciences, get them rightly informed, with the knowledge of what is sin, and what is duty.

2. If you would have a clear conscience, then *cast out the filth of conscience by a daily and frequent confession.*

Confession, one of the fathers calls 'the vomit of the soul,' whereby it easeth itself when it is over-charged and glutted with sin and guilt: and so the scripture also speaks, when the apostle speaks of apostates relapsing back again into their old sins: in 2 Pet. ii. 22. he saith, they return with the dog to his vomit; that is, they return and do again lick up those sins, which before they disgorged and cast up by confession. This, indeed, is the way, when conscience is burdened with the guilt of any sin: when sin lies unconcocted and heavy within, go then

and pour out your heart before the Lord in the confession of your sin. See what sudden ease this will bring to conscience : David was sin-sick, and he resolves upon this course, Ps. xxxii. 5. " I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I would confess my transgressions," and suddenly there came ease to his conscience : " and thou, O Lord," says he, " forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Are our consciences oppressed with the burden and weight of great and numberless sins ? here we may, by an humble and penitent confession, unload them all before God. And this is the mystery of confession. The way to unload our sins from off us, is, to take them upon ourselves. When we charge ourselves with them and impute them to ourselves, God will not impute them to us, but charge them upon Christ ; for he hath promised, if we judge and condemn ourselves, that we shall not be judged and condemned. Thus, in 2 Sam. xii. 13. as soon as David had, by an humble confession, taken his sin to himself, saying, " I have sinned ; " God, by the prophet, tells him, that he had taken away his sin from him : " The Lord also," says the prophet to him, " hath put away thy sin." And, indeed, have we not found it thus by manifold experience, that, when conscience hath been bowed down by the unsupportable weight of the guilt of sins, a sorrowful and ingenuous confession of them unto God hath lightened the burden ? and whereas, before, conscience was heavy and gloomy ; now, it looks cheerfully upon us, under the apprehensions of God's pardoning grace, that God will pardon and forgive them to us ? Now this easing of our consciences by confession must be frequently reiterated : our consciences are always filling with sin and guilt, and therefore we must be always casting of it out by confession : as in the emptying of a pond, where there are many streams rising and bubbling up, if we stop and intermit the work, the pond grows presently full again ; truly our hearts and consciences are like such ponds, in which there are many corrupt streams still sprouting up : now confession is the laving of it out, which if we do but a while intermit, our consciences again grow as full of sin and guilt as ever ; and, therefore, there must be a frequent and daily confession of sin, yea, our

confession must be reiterated as often as we fall into and commit any sin. And that is another means to keep our consciences clear.

I might also add, that an effectual means to keep the conscience clear, is *frequently to wash it with repenting tears*: but, because unfeigned confession of sin doth also include and suppose a penitential frame of heart, I shall not, therefore, insist upon this as a particular head.

3. In the third place, therefore, if you would keep your consciences clear and inoffensive, then *labour to get a mean and low esteem of the world*.

The inordinate love of the present world is utterly inconsistent with a good conscience. What is it, that makes so many offer violence to their consciences, to stretch and rack them to any base compliance or sinful practice, but only that they may thereby gain some secular advantage, or that they may thereby avoid some worldly inconvenience? This is that, which fills the world with fraud and cozenage, with rapine and extortion, while all tug hard to get from one another, although they lose their consciences in the scuffle. This is that, which makes men so often shift their sails, that they may run before every wind that blows. If times grow rough and tempestuous, and they must throw overboard either their gain or their godliness, this inordinate love of the world persuades them to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, only that they may bear up in the world. Now they, who have but a low and mean esteem of the world, such as it deserves, escape this temptation; and they can, with a holy generousness, scorn to prostitute their consciences and to barter their precious souls for the gain of any of these fading and perishing riches here below; riches, that perish in the using. If, therefore, you would keep good consciences, learn to despise the threats and frowns, the flatterings and fawnings, of this world: look upon it as of no great concernment to you, whatever in adversity or prosperity can happen to you in this short and frail life: reflect upon those, who groan under the terrors of a wounded conscience: all the world cannot give them one moment's ease or comfort; yea, had they the whole world at their dispose they would give it all to procure peace, yea but a

truce for a while with their own consciences ; such a vain and contemptible thing is the world, in comparison of inward tranquillity and serenity of mind. Now thus to rate the world below the peace and quietness of our own consciences, is an excellent means to preserve them clear and peaceable.

4. If you would keep conscience clear, *labour, above all things, to strengthen your faith.*

Faith is a purifying grace. Acts xv. 9. " Purifying their hearts by faith."

Now faith hath a double influence to purify the heart or conscience ;—a dogmatical faith keeps the conscience clear and pure; and that morally :—a justifying and saving faith purifies the conscience ; and that mystically.

(1.) A dogmatical faith keeps the conscience clear and pure.

A dogmatical faith I call that, which hath for its object the whole revealed truth of God : and it is nothing but a firm, undoubting assent to the verity and certainty of whatever is contained in the holy scriptures, upon no other account and reason, than merely the authority and veracity of God, who is the author of it. This is a dogmatical or a historical faith : which, though it be not justifying, as the papists hold ; yet is it of a mighty influence to sanctify the heart, and to keep the conscience and conversation inoffensive. And this it doth in a moral way : for, did but men believe that heaven is so unconceivably glorious, sparkling with light, flowing with pleasure, resounding with praises, a place where joy and bliss ever dwell, and where we shall dwell too in an endless eternity in the smiles and love of God, if now but for a few short years we strive to live holily ; did we but as really believe these things to be true and certain, as we know those things to be true and certain that we see with our very eyes, what manner of Christians would this force us to be in all holiness and godliness of conversation, cleansing ourselves from all pollutions both of flesh and spirit ! Wherefore is it, that the promise of some temporal reward, the hope of some mean preferment from some great person, is of force sufficient to make men obsequious to them ; and yet the promises, that God him-

self hath made of heaven and glory (in comparison of which to promise crowns and sceptres, is but to promise pebbles and gewgaws) work so little effect upon the generality of men, to allure them from sin to a holy life? Whence is it, but that men believe not that heaven is so glorious as the scripture describes it to be? Nay, indeed, if they would speak their minds, they are not yet sure whether there be a heaven or not. It is from their unbelief. Did men but believe the insupportable wrath of God, those horrors and torments, that fire and sulphur, that stench and darkness, those burning chains and those fiery whips, the woe and anguish of the damned in hell, which are as far from being utterable as they are from being tolerable, did they as certainly believe these things, as if they believe them not they shall certainly feel them, would they dare still to venture on to treasure up wrath to themselves "against the day of wrath? would they still dare, by wounding their consciences now, to enrage them to their own wounding and smart for ever hereafter? would they dare to do it, did they believe these things? Did they but believe that conscience will be revenged seven fold on them for all the wrongs and violence that they have done it; that this worm, which they now carry in their breasts frozen and benumbed, shall be heated by the fire of hell, and fly upon them and sting their souls with a burning and flaming anguish; did they believe this, would they not be careful to give no offence to their consciences? would they not be as careful to avoid all sin, that arms the terrors of hell against them, as they have reason to think a damned wretch in hell, who hath had the experience of these things would be, if God would release him out of it, with a promise that he shall for ever escape it, upon the same terms that he hath promised us? Think with yourselves, what effect the sense and feeling of those dreadful things would have upon such a one, to make him rigorously conscientious, that in nothing he provoke so terrible a God, or offend and irritate a revenging conscience, that will be sure to repay him home seven fold into his own bosom; why the same carefulness and circumspection would it work in all of us, did we as firmly and

strongly believe those things to be true, as God hath evidently and clearly revealed them to be true in his word. It is true, these things we all know, and we persuade ourselves that we do believe them: do we not profess to believe that Jesus Christ shall judge both quick and dead? and that all shall receive rewards according to their works: those, that have done well, the reward of eternal life; and those, that have done ill, the reward of eternal death? These things we may, indeed, profess to believe; and these things we may frequently represent to our own thoughts: but the weak and small influence, that these things have to over-awe our consciences, evinceth clearly that this is not faith but fancy: it is a wavering, unevident opinion, that we have taken up, and that we call by the name of faith; for, did we live in the belief of these truths, we should no more dare to sin against our consciences, than if we saw hell flaming before these eyes of ours, and knew that upon the next sin we commit we were to be cast into it. And thus you see a dogmatical faith is a great help to purify the heart, and to keep the conscience clear and inoffensive.

(2.) A justifying faith also is of great use to purify the conscience.

And this it doth not morally, by any natural influence or efficacy of its own; but only mystically, as it applies to the soul the blood of Jesus Christ, that blood that alone takes away the defilement of our sins. A historical faith may keep the soul from contracting defilement; but this justifying, this saving faith washes out the stains and defilements that we have contracted, and makes us white and spotless in the blood of the Lamb. Faith is that conveyance, which God hath appointed to bring the blood of Christ to stream forth upon the defiled soul and conscience; and, upon every renewed act of sin, we ought, by a renewed act of faith, to lay our spotted and defiled souls under the fall of that fountain, that is set open to wash and cleanse us from our filth and pollution. Thus faith cleanseth the conscience, mystically; and, by the actings of faith, we may thus get and keep our consciences clear and inoffensive.

5. If you would keep your consciences clear, then set  
NO. LXVII.

*a strict watch and guard upon yourselves, both upon your inward and upon your outward man.*

Set a guard on your heart, and on all the approaches to your heart.

(1.) Keep a narrow guard upon your heart.

The heart is the great meeting place, where objects, thoughts, and affections do swarm and crowd together: and, as much concourse leaves dirt behind it upon the place, so this great heart-assembly usually leaves it foul and polluted. Our Saviour, Mark vii. tells the Jews, that it was that which was within them, that wickedness which lay latent in their hearts, that, which proceedeth from the heart, "that defileth the man." There is a defilement in the thoughts and in the desires, as well as in the more gross and bulky sins of the life. Hence the prophet Jeremiah says, Jer. iv. 14. "O Jerusalem, wash thy heart from wickedness!" Why, wherewith is it polluted? the next words show it: "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? Vain thoughts leave a stain and contagion upon the soul; and, certainly, if a vain thought, that is such a fleeting and voluntary thing, breathes a kind of contagion and taint upon the heart, they certainly then must have foul hearts indeed, and their spots in grain, who lie soaking and stewing themselves in unclean, malicious, and covetous thoughts and designs. Since, then, conscience is apt to receive taint, but with the breathing of a vain and sinful thought upon it, how doth it concern us to keep a watchful and circumspect eye over every motion of our hearts! It is the wise man's counsel, as you have heard; "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Look to it, therefore, that you suffer not your hearts to be defiled with sinful thoughts or sinful affections, by those inward and invisible corruptions that settle at the bottom of it: though the life be never so clear and crystal, yet, if that mud be but stirred and raised, conscience becomes thereby defiled and an evil conscience. And therefore the apostle, 1 Tim. i. 5. joins them together, speaking of "a pure heart and a good conscience." But, if the steams of lust rise up thick in the heart, they defile and pollute the conscience: hence the apostle, again, joins them to-

gether, Tit. i. 15. a defiled mind and a defiled conscience : “ the mind and conscience,” says he, “ is defiled.” How can the mind be defiled, unless it be with sins of the mind ? Evil thoughts and evil affections, as sprightly and aerial as they seem to be, yet leave a stain upon the conscience : as the breathing upon a glass sullies it, and dims the representation of the face that looks into it; so the breathing of evil cogitations upon conscience, the glass of the soul, leaves a mist and cloud upon it, that it can but dimly and darkly represent to us our true state.

(2.) Watch diligently, as the heart itself, so all the approaches unto the heart.

The approaches to the heart are like your roads to a great city, which are full of passengers, and usually full of dirt also. And these are the senses, by which and through which objects are continually travelling to the heart, and carry with them a world of wickedness. These are sluices, which, instead of letting in pleasant streams to refresh, commonly let in nothing but mud, which pollutes the soul. There is no actual filthiness in the hearts of any, but what enters in by these inlets. Through these the devil casts in abundance of filth ; stirs up and increases indwelling lust ; and, by sinful objects that the senses convey to the soul, dungs that ground, which is of itself but too fruitful. Thus, the devil makes use of the ear ; through it he blows up the bladder of pride, by the breath of popular applause and praise : and thus he makes use of the lascivious eye, as a burning glass to set the heart on fire : and so also he makes use of the other senses, as sinks of luxury and intemperance. Now if you would keep your consciences clear and undefiled, set a strict guard and narrow watch upon all these passages to your hearts : critically examine every thing that goes in, and every thing that comes out by these gates : arrest whatever cannot produce its pass and warrant from the word of God : keep the same watch upon these gates, that God would keep on the gate of the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem. It is said, Rev. xxi. 27. that “ that there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth.” Let us, who would keep our consciences clear, guard all the approaches to them, with the same

strictness ; and let nothing, that defileth, enter in by these approaches to our hearts.

6. Take this direction : *be sure to listen to the voice of conscience.*

Those, that stop their ears and will not hear conscience when it directs and reproves, shall be sure to hear it loud enough when it shall accuse and condemn them. Conscience is the voice of God in the soul : now if this voice be slighted, beware lest the next time it speak to you in thunder. Do nothing contrary to the dictates of your consciences ; for this will provoke God to give you up to a reprobate sense, and judicially to harden you in your sins : for, if sinning against your consciences doth not corrupt them by making them insensible and stupid, it will certainly corrupt them by making them enraged and despairing.

Now, for your encouragement, let me tell you, while you are careful, by following these directions, to keep your consciences clear, you shall also keep them peaceable. It is the foulness of a gun, that makes it recoil in discharging : and, so, it is the foulness of men's consciences, that makes them recoil back again upon them in discharging of their offices. But, while conscience is kept clear and void of offence, it will be also kept free from quarrelling with you, and from accusing and condemning you.

So much for this time and text.

## **DISCOURSES CONCERNING SIN**

## THE FOLLY OF SINNERS IN MAKING A MOCK AT SIN.

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PROV. XIV. 9.

*Fools make a mock at sin.*

We are not generally to expect any connexion, either of sense or sentences, in this Book of the Proverbs. Other parts of scripture are like a rich mine ; where the precious ore runs along in one continued vein : but this is like a heap of pearls ; which, though they are loose and unstrung, are not therefore the less excellent or valuable.

The text which I have now read, is one of them : an entire proposition in itself, without relation to, or dependence upon, any context.

In it, we have these things considerable.

I. The character or periphrasis of wicked and ungodly men : and they are said to be such, as "make a mock at sin."

II. Here is the censure passed upon them by the all-wise God, and the wisest of men : they are fools for so doing : "Fools make a mock at sin."

I. *Their character* : they "make a mock at sin."

The words are plain and obvious : only the phrase, of making a mock, may seem subject to some ambiguity and various acceptations ; and, indeed, the scripture useth it in divers senses.

Sometimes, it signifies an abusing of others, by violent and lewd actions : so we read that "the Hebrew servant,"

says Potiphar's wife, "came in unto me to mock me :" Gen. xxxix. 17. Sometimes, it signifies an exposing of men to shame and dishonour : so the wise man tells us, " Wine is a mocker :" Prov. xx. 1. Sometimes, it signifies an imposing upon the credulity of others, things that seem incredible and impossible : so we read in Genesis, when Lot had declared to his sons-in-law the destruction of Sodom, it is said, " he seemed with them as one that mocked :" Gen. xix. 14. Sometimes, it is taken for a failing in our promises; and, thereby, defeating and frustrating the expectations of others : and, thus, Herod is said to be " mocked by the wise men :" Matt. ii. 16.

But none of these are at all congruous to our present purpose, nor applicable to the words of the text.

There are, therefore, two other acceptations of this expression, frequently occurring in the Holy Scriptures.

i. This word "mock" is commonly taken for *scoffing, or bitter taunting at others.*

Thus our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ suffered the flouts and derisions of an insolent rabble, who " set him at nought, and mocked him," as St. Luke speaks : chap. xxiii. 11. Thus those blessed martyrs and confessors, that followed his steps are said to have endured the " trial of cruel mockings," as the apostle tells us : Heb. xi. 36. And, indeed, this is the difference, between a wise re-prover and a bitter mocker : that the words of the one are like ' balm,' both soft and sanative ; but the words of the other are like ' sharp swords,' which cut deep into the minds of men, and commonly make them rankle into hatred and malice. And, doubtless, there are very many spirits, which can sooner put up an injury done them, than a cutting, bitter scoff; because nothing expresseth so much contempt, nor shows so much how despicable we account them, as a fleering gibe.

ii. Mocking may be taken for *slighting, and making no account of; looking upon things or persons, as trivial and inconsiderable.*

And thus it is used in Job, where the horse is said to " mock at fear," when he rusheth into the battle, and is not terrified : but rather enraged by all the horrors of war, when " the quiver rattleth against him, the glitter-

ing spear and the shield : " Job. xxxix. 22, 23. And so it is said of the Leviathan, Job xli. 27, 29. " He laugheth at the shaking of a spear : for he esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood."

II. In either of these two senses, may the words of the text be taken : when they tell us, they are *fools* that " make a mock at sin."

For sin may be considered, either as committed by others, or as committed by ourselves : and it is egregious folly to make a mock of either : so as to sport at the one, or to slight the other.

They are fools, that make a mock at other men's sins ; so as to turn them into a matter of jest and raillery.

They are fools, that make a mock at their own sins ; so as to think the commission of them a slight and inconsiderable thing.

I shall very briefly speak of the first, and so pass on unto the second particular.

i. They are fools, *that make a mock at other men's sins, so as to make them a matter of mirth and pastime.*

This, indeed, is sport for devils ; all whose recreation and hellish solace, is the sin and wickedness of men. The damnation of souls is the sport of hell : and thou, who canst rejoice in their joy, deservest likewise to howl under their woes and torments.

We justly condemn it, as a most barbarous and inhuman custom amongst the ancient Romans, who brought many selected pairs of miserable men into their public theatres, only to delight the spectators with their blood and death. But this was an innocent recreation, in comparison of thine, who takest pleasure to see thy poor brother wounding and stabbing, yea damning his precious soul.

Go, laugh at a wretched man upon the rack, or upon the wheel : laugh at the odd, distorted postures of epileptics ; or the convulsive motions of dying and expiring men : sport thyself with their writhed looks, and antic shapes of misery. This is far more civil, more humane, more pious, than to make those sins thy mirth, which will be thy brother's eternal woe and anguish.

What thinkest thou ? Couldst thou look into hell, that place of torment : couldst thou see there all the engines

of God's justice and the devil's cruelty, set on work in the eternal torture of those who perhaps once made as light of their own sins, as thou dost of other men's; wouldest thou think this a pleasant spectacle? Wouldest thou sport and divert thyself, to see how they wallow in fire and brimstone, or how they circle and twist themselves in unquenchable flames? Certainly, such a sight as this would affect thee with a cold horror and a shivering dread. And how then canst thou sport thyself, to see thy brother damning himself, since it would fright thee to see him damned?

Believe it, sirs, the sins, that now abound in the world, challenge our tears and pity. We ought to mourn and repent for those, who do not, who will not repent for themselves. It is a sad and a doleful sight, to see so many every where dishonour God, disgrace their natures, and destroy their souls: to see some come reeling home, disguised in all the brutish shapes that drunkenness can put upon them, ready to discharge their vomit in the face of every one they meet: others, frantic with wrath and rage, and, like a company of madmen, flinging about "firebrands, arrows, and death:" Prov. xxvi. 18: to see such woeful transformations, and the dire effects that sin and wickedness have caused in the world. Certainly, he, that can entertain himself with mirth at these things, hath not only forsaken his religion, but his humanity; and may, with much more reason, make the miseries of poor distracted people, chained up in Bedlam, to become his sport and pastime.

I know it will be here pretended, that, surely it can be no such great crime to explode and hiss sin off the stage; nay, it were a proper means to keep men from being generally so wicked, could we but make wickedness more ridiculous in them.

But, alas! vice is now-a-days grown too impudent to be laughed out of countenance: and those methods of a scurrilous mockery, which some plead for, as rendering vice ridiculous, have, I doubt, only made it the more taking and spreading; and encouraged others to be more openly sinful, by teaching them to be the more wittily vile and wicked. Few will be deterred from sinning,

when they think they shall but gratify others, by making sport for them ; and stir up, not their indignation and abhorrence, but their mirth and laughter.

It is true, we read that Elijah mocked the idolatrous worshippers of Baal : and his scoffs and taunts at them were very biting and sarcastical ; and cut them much deeper, than they are said to cut themselves. But this he did in a serious and zealous reproofing of their sins ; not in a jocular and sportive merriment.

There are two things in sin, *inpiety* and *folly*. We may lawfully enough scorn the one, while we are sure to hate and detest the other : and a due mixture of both these together, scorn and detestation, are very fit to enkindle our zeal for God ; and may oftentimes be a requisite temper for him, who is to reprove confident and audacious sinners. But, to laugh and sport at others' wickedness, and to make the guilt and shame of others our mirth and recreation, is both unchristian and inhuman ; and we may as well laugh at their damnation, as at that which will lead them to it. Thus to make a mock at sin, is to make our very mocks to be our sins ; and argues us, not only profane, but foolish : for this is to laugh and rejoice at our own stain and dishonour, and to abuse our own nature ; that nature, which is common to us, as well as others ; that nature, which, were it not debased with sin, renders us but “ a little lower than the angels.”

What a fair and glorious creature was man, before sin debased and sullied him ! A friend to his God ; lord of the creation ; made “ a little lower than the angels,” being a-kin to them, though of a younger house and meaner extract ; adorned with all both natural and divine perfections, till sin despoiled him of his excellency, and made him, who was almost equal to the angels, worse than the very brutes that perish, scottish and miserable. And canst thou laugh and sport thyself at that, which hath ruined and undone thee, as well as others ? Thy nature is blemished and corrupted, as much as theirs. When we look abroad in the world, and observe the abominable wickednesses that are every where committed ; the murders, uncleanesses, blasphemies, drunkenness, and all those prodigies of impiety, that every where swarm amongst

men ; how “ by swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing and committing adultery, they break out, until blood toucheth blood : ” Hos. iv. 2. what else see we now in all this, but the woeful effects of our own corrupt nature ? Here we see ourselves unbowelled ; and discover what we ourselves are, at the price of other men’s sins : for, “ as in water, face answereth to face ; so doth the heart of man to man : ” Prov. xxvii. 19. We have, therefore, more reason to lament the sins and miscarriages of others, than to make a sport and mock at their wickedness : since we ourselves are the very same ; and prone enough, without the restraining grace of God, either to imitate or exceed them.

Hence, then,

1. Consider *what an accursed, horrid thing it is, to tempt others to sin, only that thou mayest afterwards make sport with them, and raise a scene of mirth out of the ruins of their souls.*

I wish this were not as common a practice, as it is damnable. See what dreadful woes God denounceth against such, by the prophet : Hab. ii. 15, 16 : “ Woe unto him, that giveth his neighbour drink ; that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on his nakedness ; ” his shame and dishonour. “ Thou art filled with shame, for glory : drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered : the cup of the Lord’s right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory.” Hence have these devils (for that name belongs to them, who do his work) invented all those artifices of excess and drunkenness, to draw on others to debauch themselves and their reason, that they may have matter to laugh at their sottish actions, and to boast how many they have made to fall under the puissance of their riots. But, certainly, if there be a hell, as it is certain there is ; or if that hell were not made in vain, as it was not ; these wretched sinners can expect nothing else, but to have their portion therein with those devils, whose industrious factors they have been : and, there, the cup of God’s right hand, a cup of pure wrath and unmixed fury, shall be given them ; and they shall be forced to drink it off, to the very dregs.

**2. Hence think how desperately impious, wicked wretches they are, who sin only to make others sport ; that buffoon themselves into hell, and purchase the pleasing of others with the dreadful damnation of their own souls.**

And yet how frequent is this in the world ! How many are there, that will neither spare God, nor heaven, nor scripture, nor religion, nor common modesty, if they come but in the way of a jest ! Nothing, how sacred, how venerable soever it be, can escape them, if they can but turn it into drollery. I need not mention what tropes and metaphors men have found out to talk lasciviously by : almost every one is perfect in that piece of rhetoric. Nor what strange, monstrous lies some will aver openly, to raise either mirth or wonder in company. And that, which is worst of all, is, that the holy Bible is become a mere jest book with them ; a common-place for wit and merry discourse ; and the devil again speaks scripture out of these men's mouths : they know no more of it, than what they abuse ; and all their meditations and comments upon it, are only how such and such passages may be ingeniously perverted and turned into burlesque, to heighten the mirth of the next profane company they meet. Impious wretches ! that dare to violate the most tremendous mysteries of religion ; and expose their God to scorn, his oracles to contempt, and their own souls to eternal perdition ; only for a little grinning and sneering of a company of vain, yea mad fools, who think they commence wits by applauding blasphemy ! But these wits, as they are profane and impious, so they prove themselves very fools, thus to sport themselves to death : their laughter is rather spasmodical and convulsive, than joyous : a "risus sardonicus," caused by venom and poison : they go down merrily to hell, and frolic themselves into perdition.

And, thus, I have done with the first sort of fools ; namely, those, that make a sport and mock at other men's sins.

**ii. The second particular is to show, that they are fools, who make a mock at their own sins : so as to think the commission of them but a slight, inconsiderable matter.**

And here I shall show you, that wicked men do generally account sin a small, slight matter ;—what it is, that

induceth and persuadeth them to account so slight of it ; —their gross and inexcusable folly, for so accounting of it.

1. *That wicked men do generally account sin a small, inconsiderable matter, may appear from these three things.*

(1.) *Slight provocations and easy temptations, are sufficient to make them rush boldly into the commission of sin.*

Any slight inconsiderable gain, and transitory, fading, washy pleasure ; yea, oftentimes, a mere gallantry and humour of sinning ; is enough to make them venture upon any crime, that the devil or their own wicked hearts shall suggest to them. Yea, those very things, for which they would scarce suffer a hair of their heads to be twitched off, are yet forcible enough, to persuade them to lie or swear : sins, that murder and destroy their precious souls for ever ! What is this, but a plain demonstration, that they account sin a mere trifle ; and look upon it as a small and slight thing, to offend the most high God ?

(2.) *It is very hard and difficult, to work these men to any true sorrow and compunction for their sins.*

Turn the mouth of all the terrible threatenings, that God hath denounced in his holy word against them ; and let them thunder out all the woes and curses, that are in the magazine of God's justice against them ; yet these wicked wretches are not startled at it ; but still hold fast their confidence and boldness, when they have lost their innocency and integrity, and cannot nor will not be persuaded that God should be so angry and incensed for such small matters.

(3.) *If they are at all moved with these things, yet they think that a slight and formal repentance will suffice to make amends for all.*

They pacify their consciences, and think they appease God also, by crying him mercy ; and find it as easy a matter to repent of their sins, as it is to commit them. And therefore, certainly, these men must needs have very slight thoughts of sin, who can be so easily tempted to commit it, and are so hard to be brought to repent of it : or, if they do, yet is it so slightly and superficially, as if they feared the amends would be greater than the injury.

2. I come now to the second thing : and that is, to

show what it is, that induceth and persuadeth wicked men, to make so light of their sins.

Now there are these two things, that make sinners to account their sins slight and trivial matters.

(1.) *Because they see so few instances of God's dread wrath and vengeance executed on sinners in this life:* and those rare ones, that are extant and visible, they impute rather to chance, than to the retribution of divine justice.

And, therefore, upon their own impunity and the impunity of others, they conclude, that certainly sin is no such heinous thing as some sour, tetical people would fain persuade the world to believe: and so they cry Peace, Peace, to themselves, though they go on in the frowardness of their hearts, adding iniquity to sin: Deut. xxix. 19. Because God so long winks at them, they conclude him blind; or, at least, that he doth not much disallow those sins, which he doth not presently punish. Indeed, it would be somewhat difficult to answer this argument, were this present life the appointed time of recompence: no; but God reserveth his wrath and vengeance to a more public and more dreadful execution of it, than any can be in this life. Though now thou feelest no effects of God's wrath; yet, believe it, the storm is but all this while gathering: but, when thou launchest forth into the boundless ocean of eternity, then, and perhaps never before then, will it break upon thee in a tempest of fury, and drown thy soul in perdition and destruction.

(2.) Another thing, that makes wicked men think so slight of sin, is, that *it cannot affect God with any real injury:* for, as he is not benefited by our services, so he is not wronged by our iniquities.

It is true, could our sins reach God, could they dethrone him or rend off any of his glorious attributes from his immutable essence, there might then be great reason why God should so severely revenge them, and we for ever detest and abhor them: but since his glory is free from any stain, and his being from any wrong and prejudice, our sins are nothing to him; nor is there any reason we should judge them heinous and provoking.

It is true, O sinner, thy sins can never invade God's

essence : that is infinitely above the attempts of men or devils. But, yet, every wicked wretch would, if he could, dethrone God. Sinners would not have him be so holy, nor so just, as he is ; not so holy in hating of their sins, nor so just in punishing of them : that is, they would not have him to be God ; for it is necessary that God should be as he is. Sinners do really contradict God's purity, rebel against his sovereignty, violate his commands, defy his justice, provoke his mercy, despise his threatenings, and hinder the manifestations of his glory to the world. And is all this nothing ? Every sinner hath so much poison and venom in him, that he would even spit it in the face of God himself, if he could reach him : but, because God is in himself secure from their impotent assaults, sin shows its spite against him in what it can ; defaceth his image wherever it comes ; abolisheth all structures and lineaments of God in the soul ; and would banish his name, his fear, his worship from off the face of the whole earth. And, therefore, thou, who art guilty of this rebellion against the great Majesty of heaven, canst thou yet think thy sins to be slight and inconsiderable ; and not worth, either the cognizance or the vengeance of the Almighty ? Believe it, the day is coming, and will not tarry, when that guilt, which thou now carriest so peaceably in thy bosom ; and which, like a frozen and benumbed serpent, stirs not, nor stings not ; shall, when heated with the flames of hell, fly in thy face, and appear in all its native and genuine deformities and horror, and overwhelm thy soul with everlasting anguish and torment : and, then, but too late, then wilt thou exclaim against thyself, as being worse than a fool or madman, for thinking so slightly of and making a mock at that, which hath eternally ruined and destroyed thee.

3. And, having thus showed you briefly, that wicked men do make light of sin, and the inducements that tempt them to it, I shall now show you *their great and inexcusable folly in so doing.*

And, certainly, never was any insensate man, never any that was wholly abandoned by his reason and understanding, guilty of a greater folly than this is ; for

(1.) *Is it not most egregious folly and madness, for any to do that, which yet they hope they shall live to repent that ever they did?*

This is such a folly, as all the extravagancies of fools could never match: and yet this, most wicked men are guilty of. They boldly rush into sin, only upon this presumptuous confidence, that they may hereafter be sorry that now they did it. In which, their folly is doubly notorious; —in that they venture upon a certain guilt, in hope of an uncertain repentance; —and in that they take up their unprofitable sins, upon so great and burdensome an interest.

[1.] *In that they venture upon a certain guilt, in hopes of an uncertain repentance.*

For, either God may cut thee off, O sinner, in the very act of that sin, which thou intendest to repent of hereafter: or, if he afford thee time for repentance, he may withhold his grace; and, in his just and righteous, but yet fearful judgment, seal thee up under hardness and impenitency, that thou shalt go on, treasuring “up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath:” Rom. ii. 5. And if either of these, through the righteous judgment of God, should happen unto thee, what a deplorable fool wilt thou prove thyself to be, that sinnest out of hopes of repentance, and of a repentance which perhaps will never be granted! Alas! how many hath God, in his signal vengeance, cut off, by some remarkable stroke; with an oath, or curse, or blasphemy in their mouths, scarce fully pronounced! How many, with their drunken vomits in their very throats! How many, while their souls have been burning with their lustful embraces, have even then been cast into hell, and burnt up with everlasting fire! Or, if vengeance should spare thee for a while, O sinner, yet thou knowest not how soon it will strike thee. It is great folly to expect the warning of a sick bed: death often surprises by sudden casualties, or by some diseases as sudden as casualties; and there are many ways of dying, besides consumptions, agues, and dropsies, the lingering forerunners of an approaching dissolution. But, if God should cast thee down upon a sick bed, he may justly visit thee, who hast neglected thy soul in thy health, with such distempers as may make thee not only unfit, but

such as may render thee incapable of doing thy last kind office for it. It is folly to expect the admonition of old age. Alas ! the almond-tree doth not every where flourish : Eccl. xii. 5. and it is not one, to many thousands, that lays down a hoary head in the bed of the grave : Prov. xvi. 31. But, grant thou couldst be assured of the continuance of thy life; yet, is it not egregious folly, to sin in hope of repenting ; when every act of sin will make thy repentance the more difficult, if not impossible ? the older thou growest, still the more desperate is thy case : for thy sins will be the more rooted and habituated in thee, and thy heart the more hardened to resist the grace of God : so that, upon all accounts, thy repentance is most uncertain ; and, the longer thou continuest in sin, still the more unlikely and improbable. And then judge, thou thyself, whether it be not extreme madness and folly, to make so light, or no account of sinning, because thou makest account of repenting.

[2.] But, suppose it were most infallibly certain, that thou shalt repent ; yet *none but fools, will take up the pleasures of sin upon the sorrow, anguish, and bitterness of a true and hearty repentance.*

Dost thou seriously consider what repentance is ? It is not a transitory wish ; a warm sign ; or a languishing “ Lord, have mercy,” in a distress, or on a sick bed : and yet even these cannot be without judging and condemning themselves for fools, when they sinned. No : but repentance is the breaking of the heart : a rending of the very soul in pieces. The usual preparatives to it are ghastly fears and terrors, sharp and dreadful convictions, that will even search thy very bowels, break thy bones, and burn up thy very marrow within thee. More especially doth God deal thus terribly with veteran, old, confirmed sinners ; making repentance more bitter to them than to others, that they may see and confess themselves fools, in indulging themselves in their sins, in hopes of repenting for them. Say, then, when the devil and thine own lusts tempt thee to any sin ; say, ‘ If I commit this sin, either I shall repent of it, or I shall not : if I never repent of it, as it is a hazard whether I shall or no, what is there in sin, that can recompense the everlasting pain of dam-

nation ? if I shall repent, what is there in the sin, that can recompense the anguish and bitterness of repentance ?' This is such an unanswerable dilemma, that all the craft and subtlety of hell can never solve. And, if we could but always keep this fixed in our minds, it were impossible that ever we should make light of sin. While thou thus arguest, thou arguest solidly and wisely : but, to say ' I will sin, because perhaps I may repent,' is quite below the meanest capacity, that ever owned the least glimpse of sense and reason.

(2.) *Is it not folly to make a mock at that, which will be sure to pay thee home, and to make a public mock and scorn of thee to the whole world?*

How many have their sins and vices made infamous among men ! They are a shame and a reproach to all, that are but of a civil and sober converse ; and as much lost to reputation, as they are to virtue. But however, certainly all wicked and ungodly men shall be made a public scorn and derision to all the world, both God, angels, and men. God will mock at them : he tells them so expressly : for so the wise man speaks : Prov. i. 25, 26. " Because ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof ; I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh : when you fear cometh as a desolation, and your destruction cometh like a whirlwind." All their sins and deeds of wickedness shall then be exposed to the open view and contempt of saints and angels, who shall subscribe to the righteous doom of their condemnation. Devils will then upbraid their folly ; and triumph, that they have outwitted them into the same most miserable and deplorable state with themselves. Think now, O sinner, how wilt thou be able to hold up thy guilty head, and thy amazed and confounded face ? Whither, oh whither canst thou cause thy shame to go, when men and angels shall point and hiss at thee ; and thy folly shall be proclaimed as loud as the last trumpet, which heaven and earth and all the world shall hear ?

(3.) *Is it not the foolishness of folly itself, to make light of that which will for ever damn thee ?*

Art thou such an idiot, as to account hell a trifle, and damnation itself a slight matter ? What is it then, that

makes thee think sin so small and trifling a thing? For hell, and death, and eternal wrath are certainly entailed upon it. Consider what a most cutting reflection it will be to thee in hell, when thou shalt for ever cry out upon and curse thyself for a wretched fool, that ever thou shouldst make light of those sins which would damn thee. What was there in them, for which thou hast forfeited heaven and everlasting happiness; but only a little impure, brutish pleasure? And, now that it is passed and gone, what remains of them; but only the bitter remembrances? Certainly, thou wilt, ten thousand times, and for ever, call thyself an accursed fool for so doing, when it is too late to help it. Be persuaded therefore now, to be wise betimes for your souls: else you also will, when there is no redress, curse your own folly, that hath brought upon you all those extremities of woe and anguish.

## THE GREAT EVIL AND DANGER OF LITTLE SINS.

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MATT. V. 19.

*“ Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.”*

AMONGST those many points, that our Saviour handles in this his sermon on the mount, one is the stability and permanency of the moral law; the obligation of which he affirms to be as perpetual as heaven and earth: v. 18. “ Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”

This assertion Christ lays down, in opposition to the common and corrupt doctrine of the scribes and pharisees, the Jewish teachers; who, by their traditions sought to make void the Law of God. Now, says Christ, unless they can remove the earth, and roll up the heavens, and carry the world without the world, it is but a vain attempt; for it is decreed in heaven, that “ till heaven and earth pass, not a tittle of the law shall fail; but all shall be fulfilled.”

As it is in this lower world; notwithstanding it is maintained by a continual flux and vicissitude, by the perpetual change of one being into another; one corrupting, and another rising up in a new form and shape out of its ruins; and yet not the least dust of matter is or can be consumed, but the same matter and the same quantity still

continue which were at first created : so is it with the law of God : let scribes and pharisees corrupt it by their erroneous glosses and false interpretations, putting what forms and shapes they please upon it ; yet, as it is in the corruption of earthly bodies, not the least piece of matter can perish or be annihilated, so neither in their corrupting of the law, shall one jot or tittle of it fail. Not but that the law did fail of its observation : never yet was it exactly and punctually fulfilled by any, except by our Lord Jesus Christ ; but, yet, the obligation and binding power of it is everlasting, and shall continue while there is an earth and men upon it, yea while there is a heaven and glorified saints in it. For the moral law is of an eternal validity : on earth, it is a perfect rule, set down in the word ; in heaven, it is a perfect nature, implanted in the blessed ; from which all their actions shall flow, and by which they shall all be guided to eternity.

This assertion being laid down, our Saviour proceeds to draw an inference from it. And that he doth in the words of the text. If every jot and tittle of the law be of such a permanent and everlasting obligation ; then “whoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called,” that is, he shall be, or he deserves to be, “the least in the kingdom of heaven.”

I. And, here, before we can arrive at the full and practical sense of the words, we must *enquire into two things* ; —what is here meant by the “least commandment ;” —what is meant by being “least in the kingdom of heaven.”

i. For the first of these.

1. When Christ speaks here of the least commandment, *it must not be so understood, as if one commandment were less necessary to be observed than another.*

God’s commands are all alike necessary : and that, with a two-fold necessity ; ‘necessitate præcepti,’ and ‘necessitate medii.’ The one ariseth from the authority of the Lawgiver : the other, from the requisiteness of obedience to eternal life.

One command, therefore, is not less than another :

(1.). In respect of the authority enjoining them.

The same holy and just God, who hath commanded us

to love and fear him with all our souls and with all our might, hath also commanded us to abstain from every vain thought, and from every idle and superfluous word. The least command hath power to bind the conscience to obedience, as well as the greatest; because the least is enacted by that sovereign God, to whom all souls and consciences are subject, as well as the greatest. It is not the greatness or smallness of the coin, but the image of the king stamped upon it, that authorizes it, and makes it current: so, truly, the holiness and purity of God's nature once imprinted upon the least command, make it fully as authoritative and obligatory, as if it were the highest and the chief.

(2.) Nor is one command less than another, as if it were less necessary to be performed in order to eternal life.

The breach of the least commandment doth as certainly shut the soul out of heaven, and shut it up under wrath and condemnation, as the breach of the greatest.

In neither of these senses, therefore, must the words be understood; as if our obedience were required more remissly, or left more arbitrary, to the one than to the other; or as if the observation of them all were not equally conducive unto happiness, or the transgression of them equally liable unto punishment.

2. When therefore Christ speaks of the least commandment, the expression may admit of a two-fold signification.

(1.) *That herein he alludes to the common and corrupt doctrine of the scribes and Pharisees, distinguishing God's commands into great and small.*

The great commandments they held to be those only, which concerned the external acts of religious worship; such as fastings, and washings, and sacrifices, and scrupulous tithings, with various gifts and offerings: these were their great commandments. But, for inward concupiscence, for unmortified lusts, for vain thoughts and sinful desires, these, they, as a generation, corrupt in themselves and corrupters of others, taught, as the papists now do, either to be no sins at all; or, at most, but venial, so long as they did not break forth into act. And, truly, the greater part of this chapter is spent in setting forth the evil

of those sins, that the Jews accounted to be light and small: as, to be angry with our brother, to call him ‘Raca,’ or ‘Thou Fool:’ v. 22. to harbour inward motions of concupiscence: v. 28. to use divorce: v. 32. common swearing: v. 34. private revenge: v. 39. ‘Now,’ says our Saviour, ‘I am so far from destroying the law and the prophets, either by my doctrine or by my practice, as these men falsely accuse and calumniate me; that, contrariwise, I teach that the violation of those commands, which your doctors, the scribes and pharisees, account small and little, will bring with them a heavy guilt and sore condemnation: for, whosoever breaks those commandments, that are commonly vilified and called least, “shall be the least in the kingdom of heaven.”’

(2.) *Those commandments, which are great, in respect of the Lawgiver,* may yet be the least, in comparison with other commands of the same law, which are indeed thought greatest.

Now this comparative inequality in the commandments is taken from the inequality of the objects, about which they are conversant. Some of them concern our duty to God: others concern our duty to man. Now because man is infinitely less than God, therefore those commands, that relate to our duty towards man, may be called less than those commands, that relate to our duty towards God. Hence, when the lawyer put a case to our Saviour, Matt. xxii. 36. “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” our Lord answers him, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This,” says he, “is the first and great commandment.”

Sometimes, this inequality ariseth from the latitude, that every command hath in it. This latitude relateth to our thoughts, to our words, and to our actions. Now because a thought may be said to be less than a word, and a word may be said to be less than an action; therefore, that part of the commandment, that requires holiness in our thoughts, may be said to be less than that which requires holiness in our speech: and that part of the commandment, which requires holiness in our speech, than that, which requires holiness in our lives and actions.

"Now," says our Saviour, "he, that sins against man, as well as he, that sins against God ; he, that sins in a thought, in a word, as well as he, that sins in his actions and conversation ; he, that breaks these least commandments, shall be the least in the kingdom of heaven." And, in this sense, I take the words.

And thus you see what is meant by the least commandment.

ii. The second thing we are to inquire into, is, *what we are to understand by being the least in the kingdom of heaven.*

By the kingdom of heaven may be meant, either the kingdom of grace set up in the church on earth ; and thus the word is so frequently made use of in scripture, that I need not turn you to any places : or, else, by the kingdom of heaven may be meant the kingdom of glory, established in the highest heavens.

If we take the kingdom of heaven here in the text for the kingdom of grace, that is, for the church and people of God here on earth, then the sense runs thus ; he, that breaketh the least commandment, and teacheth men so, shall be no true member of the church of Christ.

But, if we take the kingdom of heaven here spoken of to be the kingdom of glory, then the meaning is ;—he that breaketh the least commandment, shall be the least in the kingdom of heaven ; that is, he shall not enter into heaven at all. 'Minimus vocabitur in regno cœlorum ; et fortasse ideo non erit in regno cœlorum, ubi nisi magni esse non possunt :' as St. Augustin speaks. 'He shall be the least in heaven ; that is, he shall not be there at all, because in heaven there are none but great and glorious ones.'

You see, then, what a heavy and most dreadful doom Christ hath passed upon those things, that the world call little and trivial sins : they exclude out of heaven ; and will, without repentance and a pardon interpose, sink the soul down to the lowest hell irrecoverably.

Now, because the generality of the world, yea and of professors also, do too commonly allow and indulge themselves in little sins, I have therefore made choice of this subject, on purpose to convince you, if it may be, of the

great evil that lurks under them, and that great wrath that will follow upon them: that, as you would, out of your great care for your precious and immortal soul's eternal welfare, abstain from the commission of notorious and self-condemning sins; so you would labour to keep yourselves free from these little sins, which, though less scandalous, yet are not less pernicious and destructive.

And this I shall endeavour to do, in the prosecution of this one proposition. That *little sins carry in them great guilt, and will bring after them a sore and heavy condemnation.*

He, that breaketh the least commandment, shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

II. In treating upon this subject, because I intend not to insist long upon it, I shall only lay down some *demonstrations of the truth of the doctrine*, and then make some use and application of it.

i. The great evil and danger that there is in little sins appears in this, that *the least sin is a most high affront and provocation of the great God.* And infinite holiness is opposed, and an infinite justice is incensed, by them.

Though I am not of the opinion of the stoic philosophers, that all vices are equally heinous: yet this I account certain; that there is, in the least sin, as flat a repugnancy and contradiction to the holy will of God, as in the greatest.

Hath not God forbidden vain thoughts and idle words, as strictly as he hath forbidden murder, adultery, blasphemy, and hatred of himself, with all those abominable sins that defile the mouths of those that name them? And is it not as much his will, that he should be obeyed in those commands, as in these? Have you any more dispensation in the scripture to speak an idle word, than you have to blaspheme the name of God? have you any more liberty allowed you to swear little oaths, than you have to swear and ban by whatsoever is sacred and holy in heaven or dreadful in hell? or to take the reverend name of God in vain, more than to curse him to his very face? are you more permitted to think evil against your neighbour, than you are to murder him? No, certainly: no such dispensations can ever be found in the word of God:

and, I assure you, God will never dispense with any sin, farther than he hath revealed ; and why then will you dare to dispense with yourselves more in little sins, than in great sins ?

‘ Oh, our consciences will never bear with any patience those great and crying sins.’

Will they not ? and do you think that God’s holiness will bear with your little sins ? Believe it, these little sins do arm God’s terrible power and vengeance against you. And, as a page may carry the sword of a great warrior after him, so your little sins do, as it were, bear the sword of God’s justice, and put it into his hands against you. And woe unto us, if the holy and jealous God deal in fury with us, for our small provocations.

ii. *Every little sin is a heinous violation of a holy and strict law, that God hath given us to be the rule of our lives.*

The least sin takes the two tables, and, in a worse sense than Moses did, dashes and breaks them in pieces.

iii. Nay, that you may see what a complicate evil every sin is, take this too ; which, though it be a paradox, yet is a most sad truth ; that *the commission of the least sin makes you guilty of the greatest sin ; yea, guilty of all sin imaginable.*

Hear this, therefore, and tremble, all you that allow yourselves in vain thoughts or idle words ; and think with yourselves, ‘ Pish ! this is but a thought : this is but a word.’ No : it is not only a vain thought, or an idle word : it is blasphemy : it is hatred of God : it is murder : it is adultery : it is idolatry. You will say, ‘ This is strange doctrine.’ If it be, it is the apostle’s doctrine : James ii. 10. “ Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”

As, therefore, thou wouldest not be found guilty, in the great day of the Lord, of all that even hell itself was ever impeached for, see that you abhor the commission of the least sin ; for the least sin will involve thy soul in the greatest guilt. And the apostle gives an evident reason of this : ver, 11. “ For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no

adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

The worst thing, that can be found in all the sins that ever were committed, is the contempt of God's authority. Now there is as much wretched contempt of the authority of the great God, in the commission of little sins, as there is in the commission of great sins. It is the same God, that saith, "Do not take my name in vain," who saith, "Do not blaspheme me :" the same God that saith, "Do not murder," hath said also, "Be not angry with thy brother causelessly." Now what is it that makes blasphemy and murder such heinous sins? Truly, the venom and rancour of them lie in this, That the authority of that great God, who hath forbidden them, is slighted and trampled under foot ; and is it not so by small sins ?

iv. Nay, let me add, *the authority of the great God seems to be more despised by the commission of small sins, than by the commission of great sins.*

Doth it not argue great contempt of God, when you will not obey him in a matter, that you yourselves count small and inconsiderable ? You think, it may be, it is not of much moment or concernment what your thoughts be, nor what your words are : but, when you hear and are convinced that all your thoughts should be holy, and that all your discourse should be savoury, and such as should minister profit and edification unto others ; if, after this, you still think it of no great moment, whether they be vain and frothy, or whether they be holy and spiritual ; believe it, this shows you to be despisers of God's dominion and authority over you, when his commands cannot prevail against the least sin. 'What a small matter was it,' may some say, 'for Adam to eat an apple in Paradise ?' But, was it not as small a matter for him to forbear and let it alone ? And, therefore, this small sin showed no small contempt of God's authority, who had strictly forbidden it.

When we sin, we flatter ourselves straight with this ; "Is it not a little one ?" Truly, if it be but a little one to commit, it is but a little one to refrain from. It is an aggravation of sin, rather than an excuse, to say, our

sins are but little ones. It shows a heart hardened against God, and bewrays a desperate contempt of all that he can say to us or do against us, when we shall choose rather to thwart and break his commands, to venture on or rather to despise his power, wrath and justice, than to forego our little sins.

v. *Little sins do greatly deface the image of God in the soul.*

Adam was at first created according to the similitude and likeness of God : he had the divine portraiture drawn upon his soul, by the creating finger of the Almighty : and yet we see how a little sin defaced it, and spoiled him of all his glory. In curious pictures, a small scratch is a great deformity ; certainly, the image of God is such a curious piece of workmanship, that the least scratch or flaw in it by the least sin deforms and turns that, which before was the image of God, into the image of the devil.

vi. *Little sins have in them, ordinarily, less of temptation than other sins have ; and, therefore, they have more of wilfulness in them.*

If it be no excuse of sin, yet certainly it is a ground of pity and commiseration, when those fall into the commission of sin, who are assaulted and haunted with most violent and eager temptations : when the devil will not let them alone for a moment's time, but pursues them from place to place : and, though they once and again reject and resist him, yet still he forceth his temptations upon them. If such as these are at length overcome by those impudent importunities of that evil one, this their yielding requires our pity ; and, it may be, shall more easily obtain God's pardoning grace and mercy.

But thou, that ordinarily committest those that thou callest little sins, hast no such alleviation for them. What temptation canst thou plead ? Doth the devil continually dogg thee with such solicitations and persuasions, that, though thou wouldest, yet thou canst not resist. No, certainly : when the powers of hell arm themselves against a soul, it is to more advantage, than the commission of a little sin. Little sins have scarce any other temptation to enforce them, besides the commonness and customariness of committing them.

The two great arguments, by which the devil prevails in all his temptations, are pleasure and profit. Now both of these do usually attend the big and more bulky sins : but little sins have usually this aggravation left upon them, that, if men will commit them, they shall become sinners for nothing.

Tell me, what profit hath the profane spirit to be continually stewing and soaking a lust in his own thoughts ? What profit or pleasure hath the common swearer, for to think himself to be but a little sinner, in rapping out his oaths against God and heaven ? ‘ Were I an epicure,’ says one both piously and ingeniously, ‘ I would hate swearing.’ Were men such, as sold themselves unto all manner of sensual delights; yet so little can be strained from this common sin, that it can hardly bear the countenance or pretence of a temptation. •

Now if it be not the violence of temptation, that makes you to sin, it can be nothing else, but your own wilfulness, that makes you thus to sin. Wilfulness is the measure of all guilt: according as your sins are more or less wilful, so are you the more or less sinful. Now it is not the devil’s temptations, but your own wilfulness, that runs you upon the commission of little sins; and this is it, that aggravates and heightens them: you sin voluntarily, without compulsion; and so, by mystery of iniquity, you make yourselves great sinners by committing little sins.

vii. *Little sins do maintain the trade and course of sinning.*

The devil cannot expect always to receive such returns of great and crying impieties: but yet, when he keeps the stock of corruption going, and drives on the trade of sinning by lesser sins; believe it, corruption will be on the thriving hand, and you may grow rich in guilt, and treasure up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath, by adding those that you call little sins unto the heap.

It is not possible, that any sinner in the world should be always raging against God, by daring and staring sins: for though the principle of corruption aims still to exert its utmost strength; yet the faculties, in which it dwells and by which it acts, cannot bear so constant an intentness. There must be, therefore, in the vilest sinners,

some intermission. But, yet, in this intermission there is the continued practice and course of small sins, that tack and unite them together ; betwixt the commission of one gross sin and another, intervene a constant neglect and forgetfulness of God, a constant hardness of heart, a constant vanity and unfruitfulness of life ; and by these, though sinners look upon them as small sins, yet they still plod on in the way of hell and destruction without any stop or interruption. In sharp diseases, the violence of the fit doth not last so long as the disease lasts ; at times, there is an intermission ; but still there is a constant distemper in the body : so when the pang of a violent sin is well over ; yet still there remains a constant distemper in the soul, which, though it be not outrageous, yet still continues the soul's disease, and will bring it to its death at last. In the fortification of a city or town, all the ramparts are not castles and strong-holds ; but, between fort and fort, there is a line drawn, that doth, as it were, join all together and make the place impregnable : so is it in the fortification of the soul by sin : all sins are not strong-holds of Satan : they are greater and grosser sins ; but, between these, is drawn a line of smaller sins, so close, that you cannot find a breach in it ; and, by these, the heart is fenced against God.

Now, is it nothing, that your little sins fill up all the void spaces of your lives ? Is it nothing, that you nowhere lie open to the force and impression of the Holy Spirit ? He, by his convictions, batters the greater and more heinous sins of your lives ; but these strong-holds of Satan are impregnable, and give him the repulse. He seeks to enter in by the thoughts ; but these are so fortified by vanity and earthly-mindedness, and a thousand other follies, that, though they are but little sins, yet swarms of them stop up the passage ; and the soul is so full already, that there is no room for the Holy Spirit to enter.

There is not a sinner here, if he will make an impartial search within himself, but will find the experience of this in his own breast. When, at any time, you have flown out into the commission of any boisterous and notorious wickedness, have you not afterwards found, that you lived

in a more constant liking and allowance of little sins ? When once a man is stunned by some heavy blow, a small nip or pinch is not then felt by him : and, when once conscience is deadened by the stroke of some great and scandalous sin, afterwards it grows less sensible of the guilt and evil that there is in smaller sins : and thus you live in them without pain and regret, till you fall into some notorious wickedness, that more hardens the heart and more sears the conscience ; and what is this, but to run round from sin to sin, from a small sin to a great sin, and from a great sin to a small sin again, till hell put a period to this circle ? What is this now, but for the devil to get ground upon you by great sins, and to keep it by little sins, whereby he drives on and keeps up the trade of sin ? And, when God hath cast up your accounts for you at the last day, you will find that the trade hath gained you no small loss, even the loss of your immortal souls.

III. Now, although the evil and danger of committing little sins hath been made very apparent in the forementioned particulars, yet, because men are very prone to indulge and excuse themselves herein, I shall add *some farther demonstrations of their aggravated guilt* in these following particulars ; which will serve greatly for the confirmation of the truth of the doctrine.

i. Consider, *little sins usually are the damning and destroying sins.*

There are more, beyond comparison, that perish and go down to hell by the commission of little sins, than by those that are more notorious and infamous.

Here perisheth the hypocrite ; and, here, the formal professor. Here, perisheth your honest, civil, neighbourly man ; that is so fair and upright in his dealing, that you can see nothing that is gross and scandalous by him : oh ! but yet the blood of their precious and immortal souls runs out and is spilt for ever, through those insensible wounds, that little sins do make. Yea hereby commonly perisheth the profane sinner also : for it is usually but the commission of one small sin more, that fills up the measure of his iniquities, and makes him fully ripe for damnation.

Sometimes, indeed, God doth, by some signal stroke

of his vengeance, strike the sinner through and through in the commission of some bold and daring sin; but usually, the last sin of the worst of men is but of the lesser size; and, though God hath formerly borne many great impieties from such persons; yet is he, at last, so provoked by some little sin, that he will wait no longer, but snatches the sinner away in his wrath and throws him down into hell.

This is an argument how dreadfully provoking small sins are, that, usually, upon the commission of one of them, God puts an end to his patience and forbearance. It is not all the great and crying sins of a man's life, that bring so much misery upon him, as a little sin, that sinks him down into eternal torments, doth. Usually, the last sin, that a sinner enters into hell by, is but a little sin.

Take it, therefore, as a warning from God: henceforth, never more despise any sin as slight, because it is small. We have a known proverb among us, that when a beast hath his full load, one straw more will break his back. Believe it, sirs, it is most certainly true in the present case. Many, Christians, have been a long time sinners against God and their own souls, adding iniquity to iniquity; and some of you may already have your full load: oh, beware how you ever venture upon the commission of another sin: though it be but a little and a slight sin; yet this slight and small sin, added to the rest, may sink you for ever into hell: this little sin may fill up the ephah of your iniquities; and, after this small sin, you may neither have time to sin again, nor to repent of your sin.

ii. Consider this:—*small sins, what they want in weight, usually they do more than make up in number:* and, therefore, are as pernicious to the soul, as the greatest sins can be.

Hence David prays, Ps. xix. 12. “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret sins.” Secret sins must needs be the least and smallest sins; seeing they are so small, that he, that commits them, cannot discern them: but yet, as they are small, so are they numerous. Who knows how often he thus transgresseth?

" Who can understand his errors ? " Therefore, " Cleanse thou me, O Lord, from these secret sins."

A ship may have a heavy burden of sands, as well as of millstones ; and may be as soon sunk with them. And, truly, small sins, though they should be as small as sands ; yet, commonly, are as numerous as the sands too : and what odds then is there, between them and the greatest sins ? Every thought thou thinkest, and every word thou speakest, in an unregenerate state and condition, there is sin in it : and, though most of them, possibly, are but little sins ; yet a multitude of them, alone, are able to sink you down into the lowest hell.

Your consciences start back and are affrighted, as indeed they ought, at a temptation to murder, incest, blasphemy ; or any of those more horrid sins, that are the prodigies of corrupt nature. These sins you dare not so much as commit once : and yet thousands of thousands of lesser sins, such as sinful thoughts, idle words, petty oaths, commodious lies ; these proceed from you, without either striving against them, or mourning for them.

Sirs, do you more fear intolerable and everlasting wrath, for the single commission of a great sin, than you do for the frequent and repeated commission of less sins ? Truly, I cannot precisely tell you, whether you had not as good blaspheme God once, as take his name in vain often ; whether it be not as good to murder once, as to hate always.

The frequency of little sins makes their guilt so great and their punishment so intolerable, that the vilest sins you can imagine shall have nothing to exceed them in, unless it be the horror of the name of that sin. And yet it fares with us, as it did with the Israelites : we tremble more at one Goliath, than we do at the whole army of the Philistines. One gross scandalous sin makes conscience recoil and go back ; when yet we venture upon the numberless guilt of smaller sins, that have less terror in their name, though, united in their guilt, they bring far sorcer condemnation on the soul, than the single commission of a great sin. What great difference is there, whether your eternal burning be kindled by many sparks, or by one

fire-brand? whether you die by many smaller wounds, or by one great one? Many little items may make a debt desperate and the payment impossible. And, truly, when God shall reckon up against us at the great day, many thousand vain thoughts, and as many superfluous idle words, with as many petty oaths and lies that we have been guilty of, the account will be as dreadful, and the wrath that will follow as insupportable, as if murder, blasphemy, or the greatest outrage that ever was committed in the world were singly charged upon us.

iii. Consider, *it is very difficult, to convince men of the great evil and danger, that there is in little sins:* and, therefore, it is very difficult, to bring them to repentance for them.

Indeed, this is the great and desperate evil that there is in small sins, that men will not be persuaded that they are evil. Flagitious wickednesses are usually self-condemning: they carry that brand upon them, that makes it evident to every man's conscience, that they come from hell, and will certainly lead to hell; and, therefore, the apostle, Rom. i. 32. after he had reckoned up a black catalogue of sins, tells them, in the last verse, that though they were heathens, yet they knew "the judgment of God, that they, which committed such things were worthy of death." But the guilt of little sins is not so apparent: the eye of a mere natural conscience looks usually outward, to the life and conversation; and, if that be plain and smooth, it sees not or dispenseth with the lesser sins of the heart: hence is it, that we so seldom confess or mourn for those, that we call lesser sins. When is it, that we are deeply humbled for the omission of duties, or for the slight and perfunctory performance of them? these we look not upon, as deserving damnation; and, therefore, we think they need no repentance.

Nay, are we not so far from judging and condemning ourselves for them, that we seek out pretences to excuse and lessen them, calling them slips, failings, and unavoidable infirmities; and, as Lot said of Zoar, "Is it not a little one, and our souls shall live?" Gen. xix. 20. 'What! can I think there is so much danger, in a foolish thought, in a vain and inconsiderate word? Can I

think that the great God will torment his poor creatures for ever, for a thought, for a word, for a glance ? Yes, believe it, unless these sins be done away in the blood of Christ, there is not the least of them but hath an infinite evil in it, and an infinite wrath following of it. If you will not now be convinced of it, you shall be then, when, with dread and astonishment, you shall hear God calling your little sins by other names than you now do : you call them failings and infirmities, but God will call them presumptions and rebellions. What you say is but a vain thought, shall be arraigned as treason against God, as atheism and soul-murder. Then, every formal heartless duty, that here you performed, shall be accused of mocking and scoffing of God : they are so interpretatively, and in God's esteem ; and unless the guilt of them be done away by the blood of sprinkling, you will find them no less at "the great and terrible day of the Lord."

Indeed, the generality of men have gotten a dangerous method of doing away the guilt of their sins. Great sins they make to be little, and little sins they make to be none at all; and, thus, they do away with their sins : and, so, they live in them customarily, and die in them impenitently, and perish under them irrecoverably.

iv. Consider, that *the allowance and cordial approbation but of the least sin, is a certain sign of a most rotten and hypocritical heart.*

Be thy conversation never so blameless, be thy profession never so glorious, be thy duties and services never so pompous ; yet, if there be the secret reservation and allowance but of the least sin, all this is no more than so much vain show and pageantry.

What says the apostle ? James i. 26. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, that man deceiveth himself, his religion is vain." Why, is it not strange, that, after so many prayers daily put up to God, after an eminent profession and a considerable progress made in the ways of God, that yet both the sincerity and success of all this should depend upon so small a thing as the tip of a man's tongue ? If that be allowed to run at random into impertinencies, not to say into debaucheries and profaneness, all your duties, all

your prayers, all your profession, are blown away by the same tongue that uttered them, and all your religion will be in vain.

And, let me add, this seeming religion will end only in shame and confusion, at the last: when the soul and conscience of a sinner shall be ripped open at the great day, before men and angels; and that little sin, that kept God and Christ and eternal salvation out, shall openly be showed to all the world, and laughed at by all the world; that such a sin should keep a man from heaven and eternal happiness. And, therefore, says David, Psalm cxix. 6. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments." To have respect to some of God's commandments, and not to all, is now hypocrisy, and will at last be shame and confusion.

It is a most certain truth, that though the commission of the greatest sin be consistent with the truth of grace; yet so is not the approbation of the least sin. O what a severe and critical thing is true holiness, that will no more allow the least transgression than the greatest; nor more tolerate the defilement of dust in our hearts, than a dung-hill. We have all of us need therefore, to pray with David, Psalm cxxxix. 23. "Search me, O Lord, and try my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any evil way in me." Because our sins may be so little, as to escape our own search; and because the least sin, if let alone in the heart, will, like a small speck in fruit, spread to a total rottenness: therefore, O Lord, do thou search and try us, and if there be any way of wickedness in us, cast thou out our corruptions, that so thou mayest not cast us out as corrupt and rotten at the last.

v. Consider, *little sins do usually make way and open a passage into the heart, for the greatest and vilest sins.*

Thus, a little thief, that creeps in at the window, may unlock the door for others, that stand without. And thus it fared with David: while sensual delight crept in by the eye at the sight of Bathsheba, it opened his heart to the temptation, and in rushed those two outrageous sins of adultery and murder. Believe it, there is no sin so small, but it tends to the utmost wickedness, that can possibly

be committed : an irreverent thought of God, tends to no less than blasphemy and atheism : a slight grudge at another, tends to no less than murder : a lascivious thought, tends to no less than impudent and common prostitution : and though, at first, they seem to play only singly about the heart ; yet, within a while, they will mortally wound it.

There are two things, which give little sins their growth and increase.

1. *The devil, by his temptations, is continually nursing up youngling sins, till they arrive to a full strength and stature of wickedness.*

He is continually suiting occasions and temptations to the propensions of our lusts. Hath he wrought any sinful desire, or any evil purpose in you ? he will take care you shall not long want an occasion to fulfil it. Were it not for his vigilancy, many a sin must needs die in the womb, that conceived it ; but, as it was conceived by his temptations, so is it brought forth by his industry and diligence.

2. *Natural corruption itself is of a thriving, growing nature.*

If any lust has seized strongly on the thoughts, and boils there, it will vent itself in discourse. A bad heart, as well as a bad liver, will break out at the lips ; and, if the discourse be poisonous, the venom will spread itself into the life and conversation : for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh ;” and “evil words corrupt good manners.” Sinful thoughts form themselves into words, and words will consolidate themselves into actions ; and then sin is perfected, and hath attained its full growth : and if you would know what the next degree or step is that sin takes, the apostle St. James tells you, Jam. i. 15. “When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin : and sin, when it is perfected, bringeth forth death.” You can no more set bounds to your corruptions, than to the raging sea ; nor than you can say to it, “Hitherto shall thy proud waves go, and no further.” It were folly, when you have set fire to a train of powder, to expect it should stop any where short of the utmost of it : so, truly, when the thoughts are set on fire of hell, this will inflame

the tongue, and that will inflame the life; and, unless God's infinite mercy prevent, this burning will stop no where short of everlasting burning.

Ask but your own experiences this. Have you not often found it so? Hath not the devil drilled you on from little sins to great sins; and, from these, to far greater abominations? Believe it, there is a bottomless deceit in every sin; and this is the desperate issue of it, that, if once you come to account any sin small, you will soon reckon the greatest sin to be no more.

We commonly reckon the greatness of sin, by the abruptness of our advance to it. Possibly, it would seem a horrid thing, at the first rising of a temptation in our hearts, if we should presently perpetrate the utmost of it into act: therefore, the method of sin is more smooth and deceitful: it counts a sinful thought a little transgression, and sinful discourse to have but a little more guilt in it than a sinful thought, and sinful actions to have but a little more guilt in them than sinful words: a great sin but in a little degree exceeds a less; and so, comparing sin with sin, and not with the law, we at length come, by invisible advances, to look upon the greatest impieties in the world to be but little sins, and so to commit them. If Satan prevails with us to go with him one step out of our way, we are in danger to stop no where, till we come to the height of all profaneness: he will make us take a second, and a third, and so to travel on to destruction; for each of these is but one step: the last step of sin is but one step, as well as the first; and, if the devil prevail with us to take one step, why should he not prevail with us to take the last step as well as the first step, seeing it is but one? Your second sin no more exceeds your first, than your first doth your duty; and so of the rest.

We should not, therefore, account any sins small; but look upon them as the spawn of all the vilest abominations. And, as you would abhor death and hell, so abhor the least sin; because it hath a plot upon us, in subserviency to greater sins, that, without infinite mercy, will certainly bring to and terminate in death and hell.

vi. Consider, that those sins, that we commonly call the least, are indeed the greatest and vilest provocations.

Some sins are sins of greater infamy and scandal: other sins are sins of greater guilt and sinfulness; rude and blustering sins. Those sins, that are of greater infamy, are such as make him, that commits them, a scandalous person: and these are commonly reputed great and crying sins by the world: if a man be a swearer, or a drunkard, a whoremonger, or an adulterer, or a murderer; these sins make a man a scorn and a reproach to all that pretend to civility. But there are other sins, that are inward and spiritual sins; that are indeed more sinful, though less scandalous: such as unbelief, hypocrisy, hardness of heart, slighting and rejecting of Christ, resisting the Holy Ghost, and the like.

Now herein lies the great mistake of the world, in estimating of sin. At the naming of the former, we are ready to tremble: and so, indeed, we ought; and, not only so, but we ought to shun and avoid those, that are guilty of them, as monsters of men. But we have no such abhorrency against the latter: if the life be free from gross enormities, we look upon unbelief and impenitency but as small and trivial sins.

Now those sins, that we thus slight, are incomparably the greatest and the vilest sins. Murder, adultery, blasphemy, and the rest of those crying impieties, could not damn the soul, were it not for unbelief and impenitency. It is not the swearer, or the drunkard, that perishes; but it is the unbeliever: "He, that believeth not, is condemned already:" John iii. 18. And, so, hating of God, and a secret scorning and despising of holiness and the ways of God; these are sins, that do not defile and pollute the outward man; and many, doubtless, are guilty of them, that are of a fair and civil life and conversation: and, yet, these are sins, that may outvie the most horrid sins, for the hottest and lowest place in hell.

We see then what small heed is to be given to the judgment of the world concerning small sins. Those, that the world counts little sins, may be great and heinous in the sight of God; for God judgeth not as man

judgeth : he is a spirit ; and, therefore, spiritual sins and provocations, such as inordinacy in the thoughts, desires, and affections, are sins, possibly, that are more heinous in God's sight, than more carnal and gross sins are.

vii. Consider this :—*damnation for little sins will be most aggravated and most intolerable damnation.*

O will it not be a most cutting consideration to the soul in hell, when it shall think, ‘ Here I lie for ever in unquenchable flames, for the gratifying of myself in that, which I called little sins ! Fool that ever I was, that I should account any sin little, that would bring to this place of torment ! There is another of my fellow-wretched sinners, between whom and me there was as much difference as there was between me and a true saint : he profane and daringly wicked, I honest and civil ; and yet, for allowing myself in those sins to which the world encouraged me and called little sins, the same hell, that holds him, shall hold me for ever. O the dreadful severity of God ! O wretched folly and madness of mine ! O insufferable torments and anguish ! ’

Believe it, thus will those, that are damned for small and little sins, reflect upon their former lives. Such will be their dismal reflections ; and such will be yours also : expect no other, if being warned of the great evil that there is in little sins, you will yet persist in them without repentance.

And thus I have done with the doctrinal part of the text.

#### IV. I now come to make some *application* of it.

i. And the first use shall be by way of corollary. If so be that little sins have in them so much danger and guilt as hath been demonstrated to you, *what shall we then think of great and notorious impieties ?* If sands will sink a man so deep into the lake of fire and brimstone, how deep then will their hell be, that are plunged into it with talents of lead bound upon their souls ?

Whilst I have been setting forth the aggravations of the great evil that there is in little sins, possibly some profane spirit or other may thus argue :—‘ If little sins be so dangerous and damning, then, since it is utterly impossible to keep ourselves free from all sins whatever, what

need I scruple the greatest sin more than the least ? I am stated down under a necessity of sinning ; and I am told, that the rate, that every sin will stand me in, is eternal death : the least is not less, and the greatest is no more. It is but ridiculous folly, for a malefactor nicely to shun the dirt, and pick out the cleaner path, when he is going to execution : and so it is but a folly, for me to go the straiter and severer way to hell. And, therefore, since there is no difference between sins in the end, but all alike lead down to the same destruction, I will put no difference between them in my practice.'

1. But let such presumptuous sinners know, that, *as all men's sins are not equal here, so neither shall all men's torments be equal hereafter.*

Some shall be beaten with fewer, others with more stripes. Some shall be chastised with whips, others with scorpions. The eternal furnace shall be heated seven times hotter for some, than for others. And for whom is the greater wrath prepared, but for the greatest sinners ? In the blackest and hottest place in hell, is chained the great devil, that arch rebel against God : and, after him, are ranked whole clusters of damned spirits ; each, according to his several degrees, both of sin and torment. He, that suffers the least, suffers no less than a hell ; but, yet, he is in a condition to be envied by those, whose daring and desperate wickednesses have brought upon them far heavier and sorcer vengeance. These shall have cause to envy the state of little sinners, even as they do envy the state of glorified saints in heaven. Do not therefore conclude, that, because "the wages of the least sin is death, therefore the wages of the greatest sin is no more, nor no worse : for, though, in a natural death, there is no being dead a little ; yet, in the spiritual and eternal death, there are degrees. As the civil man was a saint here on earth, in comparison of the lewd and debauched sinner ; so shall he be happy hereafter, in comparison of his torments. Let such, therefore, seriously consider, how sad and infinitely wretched their condition must needs be, since no less than damnation itself shall be judged a happiness, compared with what they shall suffer, and what wrath they shall lie under to eternity.

2. Consider, *in the commission of great sins, you do not avoid the commission of less sins: but only add to the guilt of them, and to that damnation, that will follow upon them.*

It is true, if a mere civil man, whose highest attainments are but some commendable external virtues; if he could change the guilt of all the little sins that he hath committed in his whole life, for the single guilt of some great and heinous sin, (though I pretend not to know the size or quantity of wrath that every sin deserves) yet possibly his eternal punishment might be hereby somewhat diminished. But this is the misery of great and presumptuous sinners, that they stand guilty of as many little sins as they do, that perish under the guilt of no other but little sins.

Where do you see a person that is given up to vile abominations, but he lives also in a constant course and practice of lesser sins? The drunkard, the unclean person, and the rest of them, are they not always sinful in their thoughts, frothy and vain in their discourses? And is it nothing to you, that you incur damnation by little sins, unless you can advance your own destruction? unless you can promote yourselves to be next of all in torments to the devil himself, by your greater provocations and impieties?

As you see in rivers, the natural course of them tends to the sea; but the tide, joining with them, makes the current run the swifter and the more forcibly: so is it with sin. Little sins are the natural stream of a man's life; that do of themselves tend hell-ward, and are of themselves enough to carry the soul down silently and calmly to destruction: but when greater and grosser sins join with them, they make a violent tide, that hurries the soul away with a more swift and rampant motion down to hell, than little sins would or could do of themselves. Therefore, when you hear how much evil there is in little sins, presume not to think there is nothing more in great sins. Yes, certainly: God is more provoked by them: your own consciences are more wounded by them: hell is more inflamed by them: and your own souls are more widened and capacitated by these great sins to receive fuller and larger

vials of God's wrath, than they would be by the commission of lesser sins only.

We may take an estimate, in what proportion God's dealings with sinners will be, when he comes to punish them; by observing how he deals with them, when he comes to convince and humble them. The sober sinner feels no such pangs and throes, usually, in the new birth; but God deals with him in a more mitigated and gentle manner; but when, at any time, he humbles a notorious blustering sinner, usually his method is, even to break his bones and scorch up his marrow; and, that he may save him from a hell hereafter, he creates a very hell in his conscience here. Now, as it is usually thus in conviction, so is it always thus in condemnation: of which convictions are but, as it were, the type and resemblance. When God comes to execute his wrath and vengeance upon sinners for their sins, his hand shall be very heavy and sore upon civilized sinners: oh, but the bold, daring, presumptuous sinner, him he will press down, and break in pieces with all his might. He, that suffers the least, shall yet lie under intolerable wrath; but where, then, unless in the flaming depth of the bottom of hell, will the infamous and profane sinner appear?

ii. Another use we may make of this doctrine is this. Is there so great evil and danger in little sins? then *here behold a woeful shipwreck of all the hopes and of all the confidences of formalists and self-justiciaries, that hope to appear before God, upon the account of their own innocency and harmlessness,*

Hence learn, that a quiet, civil, honest life, free from gross and scandalous impieties, is no good plea or title for heaven.

Yet, truly, this is that alone, that the generality, especially of the ignorant, rely upon. Their lives are harmless, their dealings upright: none can justly challenge them, that they have done them any wrong: were they presently to appear before God's judgment-seat, they know nothing by themselves, that deserves eternal death: therefore, if God save any persons in the world, sure they are in the number of them.

But is it so, indeed? What! do you know nothing

by yourselves? Had you never so much as a thought in you, that stept awry? Did you never lodge a thought in you, that had in it the least vanity, impertinency, or frivolousness? Have you never uttered a word, that did so much as lisp against the holy law of God? Will you dare to tell God you never yet did an action, that innocence itself would be ashamed to own? Have your lives, in every part, been as strict and holy, as the law of God commands them to be? If not, it is in vain to plead, for heaven, that your conversations have been honest, civil, and harmless; or that you have been religious, and maintained a constant course of holy duties and good works.

I would not here be mistaken by any, as if I were preaching against morality, or condemning civility and common honesty. No, by no means: they are excellent things, and the practice of them very commendable; and I heartily wish there were more of them to be found in the lives of those, that call themselves Christians. But, if this be all you can say for yourselves, believe it, the guilt but of one of your least sins will outweigh all these; and you, and all this your righteousness, must sink down together into hell. If this be all men have to plead for happiness, a civil, fair, and honest conversation: this may be; and yet men may indulge themselves in little sins, which will most certainly ruin and destroy them.

iii. If there be so great evil and danger in little sins, hence learn *what absolute need we stand in of Christ*: not only those among us, whose lives are openly gross and scandalous; but even those, who are most circumspect and most careful in their walkings.

Though you do not wallow and roll yourselves in the common filth and pollutions of the world; yet is it not possible, but that our garments should be sometimes spotted. An absolute and perfect state is rather to be wished for, than enjoyed, in this life. The utmost, that we can attain to here, is, not to commit great sins, nor to allow ourselves in little sins when through daily infirmity we do commit them.

Now these little sins, that the best of God's servants

daily and hourly slip into, cannot be pardoned without the blood of a great and mighty Saviour. It is the same precious blood of Jesus Christ, that satisfied divine justice, for the incest of Lot, for the drunkenness of Noah, for the adultery and murder of David, and for the perjury of Peter, that must satisfy it also for thy vain thoughts, and for thy foolish and idle words, if ever thou art saved : for without blood, there is no remission : Heb. ix. 22. and, without remission, there is no salvation : Acts xxvi. 18. The same blood, that is a propitiation and atonement for the greatest sins of the saints now in heaven, many whereof possibly have been as great as ever were committed on earth ; the same blood of atonement must take from thee the guilt of thy vain thoughts and of thy idle words, or thou must for ever perish under them.

iv. If there be so great evil and danger in little sins, hence see, then, *what cause we have to bemoan and humble ourselves before God, with tears in our eyes and sorrow in our hearts, even for our little sins.*

We should never approach before the throne of grace in prayer, but, before the close thereof, we should, in confession, mourn over and beg strength against those, that the world calls, and we account, small sins.

Indeed, it is impossible to confess them all, particularly. Who can reckon up the vain thoughts and idle words of one day, without a whole day's time to recount them ? for, indeed, we do little else in the day. And who, then, can reckon up the vain thoughts and idle words, that he is guilty of in his whole life, without living over his whole life to recount them ?

When we have, therefore, confessed the more observable failings of every day, we ought to wrap up the rest in a general, but yet in a serious and sorrowful, acknowledgment. Thus you find David did : Psalm li. where you have him confessing his two foul sins of adultery and murder. It is true, one would think he should have been so intent upon the begging of pardon for those sins, as that he could not spare a petition to ask pardon for any other sins : but, yet, though these were his great sins, yet he knew himself guilty of other transgressions

besides, though of a less nature ; and, therefore, he sums up all together, and heartily begs pardon for them in the heap : v. 9. " Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." And so, truly, we ought, in our daily prayers to God, after particular confession of those sins that do more nearly touch and grate upon our consciences, to bind up the rest in one general petition ; and so present them to God for pardon, in some such like manner as this : " Lord, my own conscience condemns me ; and thou art greater than my conscience, and knowest all things : I have observed much sin and guilt by myself this day ; and thou, who searchest the heart and triest the reins, knowest far more by me than I do by myself : but, whatever I know by myself, or whatever thou knowest by me, Lord, do thou freely pardon and forgive it all unto me."

Only, here take heed, that, when you thus make your confessions of your small sins in general, you do not also make them overly, slightly, and superficially ; which is the common fault of those, that confess sin by the heap. As many little sins of an ordinary infirmity do equal the guilt of one great sin ; so, truly, when we thus every day confess many of them together, we ought to be deeply affected with true godly sorrow ; and as earnestly pray for the pardon of them, and as importunately beg power and strength against them, with the same tears, groans, and holy shame, as if that day we had committed some more gross and heinous sin.

When, therefore, in your prayers, you come to this request, 'Lord, pardon me the sins and failings of this day,' think with yourself, 'Now I ought to be as fervent, as affectionate and penitent, as if I were confessing drunkenness or murder ; for, possibly, the little sins and failings that I have committed this day, if they were all of them put together, the guilt of them may amount to be as great as one of those gross sins.' Now, upon such a general confession and humiliation as this is, God issues-out a pardon, in course, for our common and ordinary infirmities ; and, by one act of oblivion, blots out many acts of provocation.

There are two considerations, that may be very useful to us, in order to the humbling of ourselves before God for little sins.

1. Consider, *these little sins are those sins, whereby we continually, without intermission, offend against God, and provoke him against our own souls.*

Still, either the matter of our actions is contrary to the holy will and law of God ; or the manner, in which we perform them. If the substance of our actions be not evil, yet the circumstances are : there is not a word in prayer, not a thought in meditation, but hath the guilt of some sin cleaving to it. And, if it be so with us in our holy performances, how do you think then it is with us in our common and ordinary conversation ? And should it not deeply humble us, to consider, that there is not one hour, no nor one moment of our lives, free from sin ? that our pulses beat too slow to keep an account of our sins by ? Our thoughts are continually in motion, without intermission or cessation ; and yet, every one of the imaginations of the thoughts of our hearts is "only evil," and that "continually :" Gen. vi. 5. Certainly, did we seriously consider what it is we say, when we confess to God that our whole lives are nothing but one continued course of sin, those moments, every one of which brings fresh guilt upon us, would not slide away so pleasantly with us as they do : but, because our sins seem small to us, we regard them not ; and so our time wastes, and our guilt increases, till eternity puts a period and full end to those sins, to which we could never put any stop or intermission.

2. Consider *what a corrupt and depraved nature these little sins do flow from.*

When, at any time, we are sensible of a vain and sinful thought rising up in our hearts, we should trace it along to the fountain of it ; even original corruption, from whence it bubbles up. If we would but do so, we should see great cause to be deeply humbled for that fruitful seed-plot of all manner of sins, that is in our hearts. Many thousands of lusts lie crawling and knotting together there, that never yet saw the light. The damned in hell have not worse natures in them, than we have. There is no sin, how horrid soever, that they committed on earth, or can be

supposed to commit now in hell, but we also should run into it, did not God's powerful restraints withhold us. Now do little sins proceed from such a corrupt and cursed fountain? and have we not then great cause to be humbled before the Lord for them; and to say, "Lord, here is sin, a little sin it is, but yet it proceeds from a heart that hath in it the spawn of all the greatest and vilest sins that ever were or can be committed: and, that it is but a vain thought, and not blasphemy, murder, or adultery, or any of the greatest and most crying sins that ever were committed in the world, is to be acknowledged and attributed only to the powerful restraint of thy free grace; for the same corrupt fountain, that sends forth this vain thought and that idle word, would have sent forth blasphemy, adultery, atheism, or any of the vilest abominations; but it is thy free grace only, that hath restrained us?"

v. If there be so great evil and danger in little sins, this then should teach us, *not to make light of any sin.*

Load every sin with its due weight: give every sin its proper aggravations; and then, certainly, you will see no reason to account any of them to be small or little.

To help you in this, take briefly these directions.

1. *Pray earnestly for a wise and an understanding heart, and for a soft and a tender conscience.*

Some sins so counterfeit a harmless appearance, and look so innocently, that a man had need of much spiritual wisdom, to know how to distinguish between good and evil; and to put a difference between those things, that differ as much as heaven and hell do. Now this ariseth from that great blindness and ignorance, that is in men's minds: whereby they cannot discern that great evil and mischief, that lurks under small sins; but are apt to account every thing, that is not scandalous and grossly wicked, to be but an indifferent matter. And, as their minds are thus blinded, so their hearts are hardened; that what they see and know to be sinful, yet they will dare to venture upon. Whence is it else, that the generality of the world live in the commission of those that they call little sins, but because their hearts are hardened and their consciences seared; that those sins, that are great enough to damn them, are not great enough to trouble them? A

tender conscience is like the apple of a man's eye: the least dust that gets into it afflicts it. There is no surer and better way to know whether our consciences begin to grow dead and stupid, than to observe what impressions small sins make upon them: if we are not very careful to avoid all appearance of evil, and to shun whatsoever looks like sin; if we are not as much troubled at the vanity of our thoughts and words, at the rising up of sinful motions and desires in us, as we have been formerly; we may then conclude that our hearts are hardened and our consciences are stupifying; for a tender conscience will no more allow of small than of great sins.

*Labour always to keep alive upon your hearts awful and reverent thoughts of God, his omnipresence and omniscience;* that there is no sin so small, but he knows it: though but a sin in our thoughts, yet every thought of our hearts is altogether known unto him.

Call to remembrance his infinite purity and holiness, whereby he hates every little sin, even with an infinite hatred, as well as the greatest. Think of his power, whereby he can, and of his truth, justice, and severity, whereby he will punish every little sin, with no less than eternal destruction. And, whilst you thus think of God, indulge yourselves in little sins, if you can. The psalmist gives this very direction: Psalm iv. 4. "Stand in awe and sin not;" that is, of the infinite, glorious majesty of God. Have awful thoughts and reverential apprehensions of God abiding upon your hearts, and that will keep you from sinning: stand in awe, and sin not. To look upon sin through the attributes of God, is, to look upon it through a magnifying glass; and, thus you may best see its ugly deformed nature: this is the best way to represent the infinite guilt, that is in it; and that contrariety, that it bears to the holy nature of God. And, while you thus see sin, comparing it with God, even the least sin must appear heinous. And, when you are tempted to any sin, while you thus think, you may repel a temptation as Joseph did his mistress, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Gen. xxxix. 9. The world, indeed, counts it but a little sin; but, looking upon it and comparing it with the holiness and purity of God, we

must cry out, ‘ How shall we commit this sin, though accounted little by others, and so provoke a great and holy God ? ’

*3. Get a more thorough acquaintance with the spiritual sense and meaning of the law.*

This was the cause, why the pharisee did so slight the commission of small sins ; because he kept himself to the literal sense of the law : and so, because there he was commanded not to kill, not to commit adultery, and the like, he thought, if he did abstain from the outward act of those sins, he observed the law ; yea, and observed it sufficiently. But the spiritual meaning of the law forbids not only the outward act, but it forbids whatever tends to the outward act ; inward thoughts, motions, desires, complacencies in sin, that are presented to the fancy, with whatever tends to or belongs unto sin : the spiritual sense of the law forbids all these. Grow more in acquaintance with the spiritual sense and meaning of the law, and then you will think small sins, such as the sins of the thoughts, of the desires, and of the fancy, and the like, to be no less forbidden by the law, than murder or adultery, and other heinous sins ; the law having as strictly forbidden the one, as the other.

*4. Beware you compare not sins among themselves.*

The apostle speaks of some, 2 Cor. x. 12. who, “ measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, were not wise.” Truly, it is as great a folly for us to measure sin by sin, or to compare one sin with another. For, as, when we measure ourselves with others, our pride is apt to suggest to us, that such and such are inconsiderable persons in comparison of us : so, when we measure one sin by another, corruption is apt to suggest to us, such a sin is a small and inconsiderable sin in comparison of another sin ; and therefore I may venture upon it.

Certainly, if we observe it, two sad events usually follow upon our comparing sins among themselves : either we make little sins less than they are ;—or, if we are beaten off from such false opinions, by being shown how great an evil there is in them, then we make it as good to commit

the greatest sin as the least. These two sad events always happen, if we compare one sin with another. Compare not, therefore, sin with itself; but compare sin with thy duty. Compare the least sin with the holiness of that God, against whom thou committest it : and this is the way, whereby you may be brought to account no sin to be small or little.

## OF ABSTAINING FROM THE APPEARANCE OF EVIL.

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1 THESS. v. 22.

*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

My last subject, as you may remember, was to show you the great evil and danger that there is in little sins.

Now, because the words at present read to you, seem to have a near cognation to the truth then delivered : it being a most certain gradation, that he that would avoid great sins, must avoid little sins ; and he, that would avoid both great and little, must consequently shun also the very appearances of sin ; I have, therefore, pitched upon this brief exhortation of the apostle, that thereby we might, as far as possible, be led up unto that exact purity and holiness, the endeavour after which is absolutely necessary to all those, whose desire and care it is to obtain eternal salvation.

In sundry verses before the text, the apostle laid down several sententious commands : " Let none render evil for evil : rejoice evermore : pray without ceasing : in every thing give thanks : quench not the Spirit : prove all things : abstain from all appearance of evil." Being now towards the end and close of his epistle, and not willing to omit the mentioning of duties so necessary for their practice, he doth, as it were, pour them out in weighty, though short exhortations.

The connexion betwixt most of them is very dark, or else none at all : only, betwixt the text and the two im-

mediately foregoing verses, it may seem more plain and natural.

In v. 20. he exhorts them not to despise prophesying. "Despise not prophesying;" that is, the preaching even of the common and ordinary preachers and teachers, whose office it was to expound the scriptures to them, and to declare the mind and will of God out of the scripture. Did the apostle mean only that extraordinary and miraculous prophesying that he spoke of, 1 Cor. xiv. when, by an immediate impulse and influence of the Holy Ghost, either they foretold things future, or else spake in divers languages; he needed not then to have so solicitously forewarned them not to despise him, since so great a miracle as this prophesying would sufficiently have vindicated itself from all contempt. The meaning therefore is this: Whatever gifts or graces you may have attained unto, though you may know your duties as well, and though you may practise your duties better than they; yet, despise not their teaching: but what they propound to you as the will of God, that attend unto, with all reverence and submission.

'But yet,' says the apostle. 'I would not have you therefore pull out your own eyes, because of the gifts of your teachers and leaders. No: do not mancipate and captivate yourselves to whatever they shall dictate unto you; but "prove all things:" as it is in v. 21. "Search the scriptures: examine whether the things delivered to you be true or not. If, upon trial, you find them so; then, "hold fast the form of sound words: in v. 21, "Hold fast that which is good." But if, upon impartial search, you understand and find that the doctrine delivered to you be unsound, then abstain from it. Though the doctrine delivered to you be true, yet, if their expressions be deceitful or such as may lead into error, if their notions be dangerous, if their expressions be bold and adventurous, though you must not reject the doctrine, yet abstain from that appearance of evil that is in them.'

Hence, from the connexion, we may observe, that, in the delivering and receiving of doctrines, we should carefully abstain, not only from what is unsound and dangerous, but also from what is unsafe and venturous.

And, truly, had this caution of our apostle been duly regarded; had not teachers luxuriant tongues, and hearers itching ears, loathing old truths, unless they appear set off in new dresses; our times had not been so fruitful in those monsters of opinions, that make it disputable, whether our knowledge or our errors were more.

It is a true saying among the ancients, that heresies spread from words, if not falsely, yet unduly and improperly spoken. The foolish, rash, and daring expressions, that have dropped from men sound in the truth, being received by those, that have not been able to put a difference, betwixt what is proper and what is figurative, what is doctrinal and what is rhetorical, have been the occasion of leading many aside into most dangerous and destructive tenets. Certainly, Christian religion is a thing more severe and punctual, than to be rhetoricated upon, and flourished with oratory, that may, through hearers' mistakes, as much pervert the judgment, as it may please and tickle the fancy. There is great weight in words; for, by them, the understanding is steered, either into the knowledge of truth, or else into the embracing of error: and, therefore, we ought to use such expressions, as are least liable to any misapprehensions or misinterpretations.

It is not enough, to speak that, which may possibly be fetched off, with truth, by a distinction; but, if we did but consult the ignorance of some and the malice of others, we should see reason enough to speak, if possible, so as that the ignorant might not be able to mistake us, nor the malicious be able to misconstrue us. As, for instance, to affirm that we are mystically united unto Christ, and thereby become one with him, this is a most high and most undoubted truth; but, to say that we are Goded and Christed, as some have gone about to express this ineffable mystery in sweet and sugar words, this hath been the occasion of that familistical blasphemy and nonsense, that hath invaded so many parts of the nation.

We must observe and consider also, that the sense and meaning of many expressions vary and alter from the time in which they were used. Those very words, that were well used some ages since in matters of divinity and religion,

cannot now be used without appearance of evil in them ; because, now, their signification is quite different from what it was then. I will instance but in one ; and that is concerning the meriting of good works. It is true, the ancient fathers of the church did hold there was merit in good works : but, yet, it is clear also by their writings, that the word merit did not then signify, as now it doth : then, it signified only rewardableness ; and, when any maintained that works merited, the common sense of them all was no more than this, that their works should be rewarded by God : and this is all that they did affirm. But, now, the word 'merit' signifies desert in works, arising from the equality that is in them, to the reward propounded and promised to them ; and, therefore, now to assert, that works have merit in them, is very unsafe and erroneous ; which whilst the papists do, they do indeed still retain the expressions of the ancient fathers, but the sense is gone ; that is, they still hold fast the feather, when the bird is flown away.

We should, therefore, beware, in our discourses of the doubtful things of religion, that we venture not upon those phrases and expressions, that either border upon error, or that may likely lead into error. And, truly, the generality of Christians have need of much spiritual prudence and sobriety ; that, while they desire and are taken with luscious and sweet words and expressions, they do not withal suck in poisonous and destructive errors.

This shall suffice to be observed from the connexion of the words foregoing, " Prove all things ;" that is, all doctrines that are delivered to you : " Hold fast that which is good ;" but " abstain from" that which hath but "the appearance of evil" in it ; though the doctrines themselves, that are delivered, be, in some sense, sound and savoury ; yet, if they be delivered in a sense and expression that may be wrested aside to undue and erroneous interpretations, abstain as far as is possible from such expressions.

I shall now consider the words under a more general latitude, as they relate unto practice as well as to doctrine.

And so here the apostle lays it down as an unerring rule, that we must not embrace any thing, that hath but

an appearance and no more, whether that appearance be of good or of evil : we must not hold fast any thing, that hath but the appearance of good only ; and we must abstain from every thing, that hath but only the appearance of evil.

And, therefore, when licentious persons are reproved for the vanity, looseness, strangeness, and immodesty of their garbs and attire (that possibly more disguiseth than adorneth them), and other symptoms of a vain and frothy mind, they think presently to cover their nakedness with such fig-leaves as these : ‘ What evil is there in these things ? Can you prove them sinful ? If you can, we will forbear the use of them : if you cannot, forbear you to reprove them.’ What if they could not be proved to be in themselves sinful : yet have they not the show, the face, and the appearance of evil ? So judge all serious and sober Christians ; and you yourselves also, possibly, may so judge sometimes ; therefore, dispute not the lawfulness or the unlawfulness of these things in themselves : if they have but the show and the likeness of evil in them, they are to be abstained from absolutely.

And, truly, considering that great carelessness and want of circumspection, that is even among professors themselves, who, if they can but keep themselves from that which is intrinsically in itself sinful, make no scruple of venturing upon the borders and edges of sin, I thought it therefore very necessary to open this phrase and exhortation of the apostle unto you : which I shall endeavour to do, in the prosecution of this plain proposition ;—*That a truly conscientious Christian ought carefully to avoid, not only the commission, but also the very appearance of evil.* “ Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

This point is indeed full of niceness and difficulty : and, truly, when the most is said of it that can be, we must stand very much to the judgment of Christian prudence and Christian charity, for our chief resolution in it : of Christian prudence, to know when an action hath the appearance of evil in it, and when not ; and of Christian charity, to shun whatever may scandalize others, though we do not defile ourselves. It is a point hardly limited to such bounds, but in some places there will be a failing.

Yet that I may afford you some light in the knowledge of a duty so necessary as this is, I shall,

I. Lay down some *distinctions* concerning the appearance of evil ; and from them,

II. Lay down some *positions*, whereby it may be cleared how far forth we stand obliged to avoid even the very appearance of evil.

III. Some *demonstrations*, whereby it may appear how necessary and requisite this duty of avoiding of the appearance of evil is.

I. I will begin with *some distinctions* of the appearance of evil. And,

i. An appearance of evil may be either altogether *groundless* ; or, else, it may be built upon *good grounds*, and upon *probable presumptions*.

ii. That which hath only a groundless appearance of evil, may so appear either to *ourselves*, or to the consciences of *others*.

iii. We must also consider, whether this action, that appears to be evil, be a *necessary* action and duty in itself ; or only *free* and *indifferent*, and left to our own free choice.

II. Now from these distinctions, I shall lay down several *positions*, concerning the limitation of our obligation to abstain from all appearance of evil.

i. *We ought, in no case whatsoever, to do that, which hath an appearance of evil in it, if that appearance be grounded upon a probable presumption.*

1. Now, to explain this, an action then carries in it a probable presumption of being evil, either,

(1.) *When ordinarily it proves an occasion of evil.*

Such actions there be, that are in themselves possibly lawful : but yet they prove occasions of sin to most that venture upon them ; because, thereby, many times they are brought within the verge and compass of a temptation, which temptation overcomes them. It was not simply unlawful in itself for Achan to look upon the Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold : but yet, thereby the devil got an advantage upon him, and made that an occasion to stir up his covetousness ; and, therefore, because it was probably to be feared and presumed that this might

be an occasion of sin to him, therefore he ought to have refrained even his very eyes from looking upon them.

(2.) *When an action is ordinarily done to an evil end, then it hath in it the appearance of evil, grounded upon a probable presumption.*

Thus, to enter silently into another man's house in the dead of the night, carries in it a presumption of theft: and to enter into the temples of idols at the time of idolatrous worship, carries in it a presumption of idolatry: and so our intimacy, familiarity, and friendship with those that are wicked, is a grounded presumption that we are like them, and that we do as they do. And the reason of this is, because, when we do those actions that commonly tend to a bad and sinful end, it is an ill sign, that we intend the end itself to which those actions lead.

2. Now *from every such appearance of evil, we ought, in all cases, to abstain: and that for these two following reasons.*

(1.) *Because all such appearances of evil always prove scandals unto others.*

A scandal is two-fold; either the scandal of sin, or the scandal of sorrow. Now this venturing upon the presumed appearance of evil, proves a scandal in both respects: it proves a scandal of sin to the weak, and it proves a scandal of sorrow to the strong.

[1.] *It proves a scandal of sin to the weak.*

Then are we said to give a scandal of sin, when we do any thing, that tends naturally to bring others into the commission of sin. But the very appearance of sin in us may lead others to the practice of sin; when a weak Christian sees us run into those things that are occasions of sin, he also thinks he may lawfully venture as far as we do; and, venturing, because possibly he is weaker than we are, he is ensnared and entrapped in those sins, to the occasions of which we led him by our example.

[2.] *It proves also a scandal of sorrow to strong Christians.*

They see such probable signs and presumptions of sin in us, that they justly conclude, that certainly we are guilty of those sins; and, thereby, their hearts also are saddened and grieved.

And that is the first reason, why we must forbear all

appearance of evil, that is built upon strong presumptions that we have indeed committed the evil.

(2.) Another reason is, *beeause all such occasions of sin and such appearances of sin have guilt in them also; as being against the same commandment, which that sin violates and tends unto.* For the same commandment, that forbids the sin itself, forbids all occasions and all appearances of that sin. That commandment, that forbids theft, forbids also whatever may induce, though but remotely, thereunto: and that commandment, that forbids adultery, forbids also all remote occasions thereof. Hence it is, that Solomon gives the young man that scrupulous caution against a strange woman, in Prov. v. 8. "Come not nigh the door of her house." To pass by the door of her house, is not, in itself, unlawful: but yet, when this may be justly feared to prove an occasion of sin; or when, by going near a house, it may be strongly presumed by others, that we are guilty of any sin; then it must be carefully avoided and abstained from. So, again, when the wine looks red in the cup, Solomon bids us that we should not then look upon it. To look upon the wine in the cup, is not a thing that is unlawful; but because this may be an occasion of intemperance, and drunkenness, or the like; therefore, we must abstain from this very appearance and occasion of evil.

So then in the appearance of evil, there is not only the evil of scandal given to others, but there is also the evil of guilt in itself. And, therefore, let us all examine ourselves, what at any time hath proved a snare to us, and what hath been an occasion of sinning. Have you not often said it, and resolved it, that you would venture but so far and no farther; and, though you do approach near to sin, yet you will keep yourselves within your duty? and have you not found, that, when you have thus ventured upon the occasions of sin, you have stopped nowhere short of the commission of those sins? This is to put yourselves out of God's way, and to put yourselves from under his protection; for God doth not usually keep them from the commission of sin, who do not keep themselves from the occasions and appearrnces of sin.

And, so much, for the first position.

ii. But, if, in case an action appears evil to a man's self, though this apprehension of it be wholly groundless, then I shall lay down this second position;—*though an action be in itself indifferent; yet if it appear evil and sinful to us, we ought not, in any case, while that mispersuasion continues, to venture upon the doing of it.* No, though by doing of it, we might avoid the greatest evil. Yea, we are rather, if Providence bring us to that sad choice, to lose our very lives, than to do any thing against the persuasions of our own consciences, though in itself it be not evil or sinful.

The reason of this is clear: because we are rather to choose the greatest affliction and suffering, than to commit the least sin.

But to go contrary to the dictates and persuasions of our own consciences, this is sin: Rom. xiv. 23. “Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin:” that is, whatever a man doth, if he be not fully persuaded and convinced of the lawfulness thereof in his own conscience, that is a sin to him that ventures upon it while he is unsatisfied, though the thing in itself may be lawful. And “he that doubteth,” says the apostle in the same verse, “is damned if he eat;” that is, though there be no real difference betwixt one kind of meat and another, but all are alike lawful; yet, if a scrupulous conscience put a difference betwixt them where there is none, and if it account it unlawful to eat of some sorts of meat, if, after this, a man venture to eat them, hereby he sins, says the apostle, and incurs damnation, by doing that against his conscience, that yet, were his conscience otherwise informed, were lawful for him to do. And so in Rom. xiv. 20. “For meat destroy not the work of God. All things are pure; but it is evil for him, who eateth with offence.”

These and many other places clearly prove, that what is done against a man's own conscience is sinful to that man. Conscience hath the privilege of a negative vote in the soul: nothing can lawfully be done by us, but what hath the full consent and approbation of our consciences; and, though every thing we think is lawful doth not thereupon presently become lawful to us, yet

what we think is unlawful doth thereupon become unlawful for us to do, and we ought, whatever the case be, wholly to abstain from the doing of it.

iii. *If the action, that we judge evil and unlawful to us, be our duty, and so becomes necessary to us, then are we under a most sad entanglement: we sin, if we do it; and we sin also, unless we do it.*

This is the unhappiness of many, that, through a mis-informed conscience, they verily believe they ought to abstain from that, which is indeed their duty; and to do that, wherein they sin indeed if they do it.

And so Christ speaks of some, that thought verily they did God good service, when they persecuted and murdered his saints, in John xvi. 2. If they did not what they thought was good service to God, they sinned on that hand; and, yet, if they killed the saints, which they judged to be good service, they sinned on that hand also: so that they were entangled on both hands.

So is it in our days also. We have seen and known many, that thought it their duty to abstain from ordinances; yea, who thought it their duty to perform no duty at all to God. Now if these men abstain from them, they sin, in doing that, which is contrary to what God commands: if they use them, they sin too, because they do that, which is contrary to what conscience commands.

So that it is, indeed, the greatest plague and punishment in the world, for God to give men up to the power of an erroneous and misguided conscience.

Now it appears, that whatever a man doth against his conscience, be the action indifferent, or be the action his duty and so necessary; yet he sins. Which is evident in two things.

1. Because *there is no man, but thinks his conscience is rightly informed.*

No man thinks his conscience erroneous: every one judges himself to be in the right, and to be rightly informed. Now, if he thus judges, and acts contrarily, he sins, because he intends to sin: and, therefore, by crossing an erroneous conscience, though possibly he

doth well in the action; yet he sins in intention, since he doth that, that he himself thinks doth cross the rule by which he should walk.

2. Another reason is this;—because, *by acting contrary to conscience, though misinformed and erroneous, we do condemn the authority and will of God; and, therefore, it is sin.*

We are all to guide our consciences by the word, that is, God's written will; and we are all to guide our lives by our consciences. No man thinks his conscience to be erroneous; but thinks it to be according to the will of God. Now, if we do not act accordingly, we sin as much as if indeed it were informed according to the will of God. Conscience is God's deputy and vicegerent in the soul; and what conscience saith, we think it is God that commands, whether it be or not: and to act contrary to it, is virtually and implicitly to disobey God; because we think what conscience speaks, God speaks. And, therefore, it is very sad to fall under the entanglements of an erroneous conscience; for then we are under a sad necessity of sinning on both hands: if we act according to it, we sin; and if we act not according to it, we sin. We should, therefore, above all things, heartily beg and desire of God, who is the Lord of conscience, that he would rightly inform our consciences in those things that are our duties; that so, by guiding our lives by our consciences, we may guide them also according to his will.

These three positions respect those things that appear evil to ourselves.

iv. But there are other things, that have a good appearance unto us, that yet may have an evil appearance to others. They may scruple, and be offended at what we do, though, for our own parts, we ourselves are sufficiently satisfied in the lawfulness of it.

And, indeed, our times, what through different customs and interests, have brought men's consciences also to such different sizes, that it is utterly impossible, but some will condemn what others allow as lawful; yea, what others not only allow, but stiffly maintain to be necessary and our duty.

How then should we behave ourselves in this case? What rules must we walk by, so as to keep consciences void of offence, not only to God, but, as far as is possible towards men also? In this, if in any thing that belongs to Christianity, there lies a great deal of difficulty, to state the case aright, or aright to practise it.

And the difficulty is increased from these two considerations, which I shall lay down as general premises to the following discourse.

First. If we give no power to the scrupulous judgments of weak and tender consciences to oblige us to duty, to abstain from what appears evil to them, then we shall sin evidently against the law of charity; and against many apostolical injunctions and commands, that we should have respect to their opinions and censures: especially in Rom. xiv. and in 1 Cor. chap. viii. & x. almost throughout. Indeed there is scarcely any one thing belonging to Christianity, that hath more rules and prescripts prescribed by the apostle to us, than this of abstaining from offending the weak consciences of others.

Secondly. If we make other men's consciences the rule of ours, and if we lay down this for a maxim, that we ought to do nothing that appears evil to another; this would be utterly impossible: since men are of such contrary persuasions, that, if the doing of an action appear evil to one, the omission thereof appears as evil to another; so that, unless we can at once both do it and not do it, some will unavoidably take offence at it, and be scandalized at us. This would abridge, yea utterly destroy, all Christian liberty in things indifferent: because, if nothing should be lawful that another scruples, then almost every thing would become sinful, since almost every thing is scrupled by some or other. In vain, therefore, is it to reckon it as our privilege, that we are freed from the old ceremonial law, and that heavy yoke of ordinances that none were able to bear, if yet Christian religion brings our consciences under the most imperious laws of men's humours, censures, and opinions: it were far easier to observe all the Levitical law from one end of it to the other, than to be bound to those worldly rudiments; as the apostle calls them in Col. ii. 21. "Touch

not, taste not: " wear not, speak not; if such a person be offended at it, and count it unlawful.

From the consideration of these two particulars, I shall lay down this fourth position, concerning abstinence from the appearance of evil, in respect of others:—*If the appearance of evil be to others, and not to ourselves, then, in some cases, we are bound, in duty and conscience to abstain from it, and in others not.*

Whatever hath the show or appearance of evil in it, it must either be commanded, and so it is necessary; or, else, it is left indifferent and arbitrary.

And, accordingly, we may take these following rules.

1. *If so be those things, that appear evil only to others, either are in themselves, or at least appear to us to be, commanded, and so necessary, we are bound not to regard, yea we are bound to despise and scorn, the scruples of all the world.*

If they will be offended at us for doing of that, which is our duty, let them be offended. We may, in this case, use the same plea, that the apostles did: Acts iv. 19. " Whether it be right before the Lord, to obey men, rather than God, judge ye." To perform a duty, can be but a scandal to men at the most; and those also, usually, of the profaner sort: but to omit a duty for fear of scandalizing men, is a scandal and an offence even unto God himself. It is most preposterous charity, to run upon sin in ourselves, only to prevent scandal in others. Though all the world censure holiness and strictness of life, to be only a sour and rigid humour, and an affectation of singularity; yet must we not, upon any pretence of gratifying their humour or winning upon them, remit the least part of that severity, that the law of God and our consciences require from us.

But suppose, as too often it happens, that this strictness and holy severity prove to be an occasion of sin unto others accidentally, what must we do in that case? What is it, that makes so many hate religion, and scoff at the professors thereof, but only that their lives are too morose and reserved? Duties are too frequent and tedious: so that some laugh and mock; others storm and rage; and

all are frightened from the embracing of that profession, that requires so much rigour and severity.

Be it so : yet we must not abate any thing of our duty, nor sin ourselves, to keep others from sinning. Is it your duty to pray, or are you called to any other duty ? though you are assured that all that hear you will scoff at you, yet you ought not therefore, for fear of it, to forbear that duty, or to lessen your fervency and affection in it. Here, indeed, is required much spiritual prudence and discretion, to discern the seasons of our duty for several circumstances : and, among those offences that wicked men may take, it may make that cease from being a duty that at other times is our duty : and therefore, the wise man in Prov. xxvi. 4. bids us. not to " answer a fool according to his folly ; " and yet, in the next verse, he bids us, " answer a fool according to his folly : " two commands quite contrary, in two verses following one another. Now this is to note to us, that, according to several circumstances and several opportunities, it may be our duty to abstain at one time from that, which at another time it is our duty to do : it is our duty sometimes, not to reprove a fool, but to answer him according to his folly ; and, according to divers circumstances, at another time, it is our duty to reprove him, and not to answer him according to his folly. But yet, notwithstanding, that, which is our duty in its particular season, and which we are convinced to be so, we ought to perform, though all the world be offended at it : yea, and if it were possible that it should prove an occasion of sin unto all the world ; for, as we must not do evil out of hope that it may prove an occasion of good, so neither must we forbear the doing of good that evil may not occasionally ensue thereupon. Our Saviour Jesus Christ was, as it was prophesied of him, to be " a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence : " almost all were scandalized at him ; some at his doctrine, as a despiser of the law of Moses ; others at his conversation, as being " a glutton, a wine-bibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners : " but yet, for all these outcries, he alters nothing either in his teaching or his living ; but, whilst they are clamouring against

him and speaking evil of him, he still goes about doing good. And, truly, those, that will be the disciples and followers of Christ, though the way in which they are to worship and serve God be generally decried, and every where spoken against and carped at as needless peevishness; yet, if it be a known duty, they must not, they ought not to put themselves out of the way of their obedience, to put others out of their groundless offences.

Only, let me add a necessary caution to this particular also: for we cannot be too exact in stating this case of giving offence to others: and that is this. If that appear a duty to us, that hath an appearance of evil in it to the generality of the most sober and serious Christians (let us suppose that), though this should not presently sway our consciences, yet it should engage us to make a strict search and inquiry, whether it be our duty or not: if it is that, which is contrary to the opinion and practice of holy and pious Christians, it ought to have this authority with us, to put us to a stand: and to make us to examine, whether that, which we account a duty, be indeed a duty or not. As, for instance, some among us at this day are persuaded that they ought to worship God one way, and some another; and what appears a duty to one, hath the appearance of evil in it to another. Follow neither of these; because it is their judgment and practice: but yet, if thy persuasion be contrary to the persuasion of the most pious and most sober Christians, this ought so far to prevail, as to make men suspect lest they mistake; and to put them upon a diligent inquiry, and an impartial search into their grounds and arguments: but, after all, still follow that, which you are convinced in your own conscience is your duty, how evil soever it may appear to others, either one way or the other.

And that is the first particular:—if those things appear evil to others, that are our duty, or necessary, or that appear so to us, we ought not to regard the censures and opinions of others concerning them.

2. *If so be those things, that are in themselves indifferent, and appear to us so to be, have yet an evil appearance unto others, if they be offended and scandalized at them,*

*then the rule of Christian charity obliges us to abstain from them.*

I call those things indifferent, that are neither in themselves forbidden, nor yet commanded ; but only permitted, and left to the arbitrary government of every private Christian's prudence and discretion. As, for instance : under the Levitical law, some kinds of meat were unlawful ; as in Lev. xi. and some kinds of garments were unlawful to be worn ; as in Lev. xix. 19. But now, under the gospel, since the abolishing of those "carnal ordinances," as the apostle calls them, Heb. ix. 10. both all sorts of meat become lawful, whilst we use them within the bounds of temperance and moderation ; and all sorts of garments may be lawfully worn, while we use them within the bounds of modesty and decency. These things are left free, for us to use them or not to use them, without sin, according to our own conveniency and discretion. These things I call indifferent things.

And yet, such is the strictness of Christian religion, that these indifferent, lawful things are not to be used at random, neither. It is a certain truth, though it may seem a paradox, that we never sin in any thing more, than in doing that, which is in itself lawful. In these things we usually offend, either by using them immoderately ; or with a neglect, yea with a contempt of those consciences, that are weak. The use of our Christian liberty is not uncontrollable ; but God hath subjected it to the consciences of others : so that it is utterly unlawful for us to do that, which is in itself lawful, if it give offence unto others.

How this ought to be limited, I shall show you by and by.

In the mean time, see it clearly proved out of 1 Cor. x. from v. 25 to the end : where the apostle decides this question, whether it were lawful to eat meat that was offered to idols. For the understanding of this you must know, that it was a custom among the heathens to offer cattle in sacrifice to their idol-gods ; part whereof they did eat in their religious feasts in the temple, selling the remainder in the common market. Now the question was not, whether it was unlawful to join with the heathens in

eating of their sacrifices in the temple, before their idols ; for this were to join with them in their idolatrous worship : but there were some more scrupulous Christians among them, that judged it unlawful to eat of those sacrifices, when sold in the shambles or common market. The apostle determines this matter to be altogether indifferent, in v. 25. " Whatsoever is sold in the shambles," whether offered to idols or not, " that eat." But yet, if any weak Christian even so scruple to eat that which is offered to idols, after it is sold in the shambles, and if he be offended at others for eating of it, the apostle then gives this rule, that the strong ought not to eat for the sake of the weak : though the thing be indifferent, and might be done ; yet the strong ought not to eat for the sake of the weak : v. 28. " If any man say, This was offered in sacrifice unto idols," though sold in the shambles, yet " eat not, for his sake that showed you it." Now what the apostle here speaks of meat offered in sacrifice to idols, holds true proportionably in apparel, in recreations, and the like indifferent lawful things ; all of which become sin to you, if they become offences and scandals unto others. The reason of this is evident : because when men rashly do what they think is lawful, without regarding the scruples of others, hereby they do, as the apostle speaks, in Rom. xiv. 13. " put a stumbling-bock and an occasion of falling in their brother's way :" that is, they bring him into the commission of a sin, and this is against the law of charity. For, says the apostle, in v. 15. " If thy brother be grieved at thy meat, thou walkest not charitably."

Now, in doing that which appears evil to others, though it be lawful in itself, yet it may be an occasion of sin to them two ways.

(1.) *It may alienate their hearts from the ways of God.*

When, notwithstanding all the profession thou makest of holiness and of strictness of life and conversation, yet they see that what they account loose and sinful is generally practised and maintained ; whether it be sinful or not, yet seeing you generally practise that which is accounted evil, this alienates their hearts from the ways of God and from the profession of religion.

(2.) *It brings sin also, because it may encourage them to do the same things, that you do also.*

Now that may be sin to them, that is to you lawful; because as I told you, whatever is done contrary to the dictates and persuasions of a man's own conscience, that is sin to him. Now many weak Christians may be induced to act contrary to conscience, only acting according to the examples of stronger Christians, that are better informed, and that have more light to direct them; and so, by their unlimited doing what they think is lawful, they bring a great deal of guilt upon the consciences of others, that are weak; and that scruple the things they see others do; and yet, because they see others do them, will themselves venture to do them also, though they scruple it. It is not enough, therefore, that you yourselves are satisfied in your own consciences, that what you do is lawful; but you must weigh and consider how it will suit with the consciences of other men also: else, what you think is lawful, may be a sin both unto you and unto them; to them, because they are brought to sin by your example; and to you, because you brought them to sin by doing that which was to you lawful.

But here some may say, "This is to bring us under a most intolerable yoke of servitude, if we must be bound to observe every ignorant humorous man's conscience, that will scruple every thing. It is in vain to tell us, that some things are lawful and allowed to us, if yet we must do nothing to give offence in that which appears evil to others; for what one thing is there in the world, that doth not appear evil to some or other? This is to bring us into an intolerable bondage and slavery."

To this I answer:—there are several cases, wherein, though there be an appearance of evil unto others in some things, yet we may lawfully do them: as,

First. We are not obliged to abstain from things indifferent, that may have in them an appearance of evil to others, unless we have some ground to conjecture, that they take offence and are scandalized at them.

We are not bound to ask every one that we meet with, whether they scruple such and such a thing that we must

do : this were endless and ridiculous. We are not obliged to abstain, if there be only a remote possibility of scandal, unless there be also some great probability of it: nor are we bound to divine whether or no it be possible, that such an action of ours may be offensive to some or other ; but if there be no present probability to conjecture that such a thing may be offensive, we may then lawfully do whatever is lawful unto us.

And, therefore, if, by comparing the circumstances of an action together, we cannot probably guess that any should be offended at it, it is their weakness, and not our sin, if they be offended at it. Indeed, whenever we converse with others, it becomes our Christian prudence and charity, to weigh such circumstances exactly ; to consider the action that we do, though lawful, yet whether or no it be common or unusual; to consider the persons with whom we are, whether weak or strong, whether scrupulous or resolved Christians : for that, which may be lawful in some of these circumstances, may be unlawful in others of them. An action may be lawful, if it be common, though it be done before a weak and scrupulous Christian ; and it may be lawful, though uncommon, if it be done before a strong and a resolved Christian : but, if it be unusual, and if it be done before a scrupulous and a weak Christian, it may seem to have in it a great probability of giving offence and being a scandal to them ; and, therefore, we must forbear such uncommon, unusual actions before weak Christians, in which there may be any probable guess that they will take offence, and be scandalized at them ; but if, upon examining these and the like circumstances, we can find no such probability of giving offence, we may then make use of our Christian liberty in them.

After we have weighed these circumstances and can find no probability of scandal in them, if others, with whom we are or who are liable to take exception, do not discover their exceptions, we are not bound to abstain from any thing that is indifferently lawful. We have a hint of this from the apostle, 1 Cor. x. 28. " If any one say unto you, This was offered unto idols, eat not." If he say to you. But, if they take offence and will not make it known, the

offence, as it rests in their own bosom, so shall it lie on their own heads, and we shall be guiltless.

And that is the first limitation. We are not bound to abstain from things lawful in themselves, though they carry in them an appearance of evil towards others, if there be no probable grounds to conjecture that they will be offended at them.

Secondly. We must consider whether or not the action that we do, which another takes offence at, be as indifferent to us, as it is indifferent in respect of God; that is, whether it be of great conveniency, or of great importance and concernment to us: if it be not of such convenience and importance, then the rule of charity obligeth us to abstain from it.

There are those things, that are indifferent in respect of God, that yet may not be indifferent in respect of us; because they may be of great concernment unto us. If it be so, then we ought to observe this method: so long as we may without any notable inconveniency, we must abstain from these things; endeavouring, in the mean time, to satisfy their doubts, and inform their consciences of the lawfulness of that wherewith they are offended. This rule the apostle lays down for us, Rom. xv. 2. "Let every one seek to please his neighbour for his good to edification." We ought to abstain from those things, that are indifferent in respect of God and yet of importance unto us, from the exceptions of others, so long as we have no notable inconveniency accruing to ourselves thereby, endeavouring also to inform them of the lawfulness of them.

'But what if they continue scrupulous, and contemn information; resolving not to be satisfied with any reasons, that we can produce: what must we do in this case?'

Truly, it ceaseth now from being any longer an offence to a weak brother; and becomes a groundless offence taken up by a peevish, foward, and malicious person: and, certainly, in this case, no man is bound to abstain from that which is lawful, though he may give offence to such an one; especially, if it be of moment and concernment to him. As, for instance: if any be unsatisfied of the unlawfulness of another man's calling and profession;

as, at this day, the Socinians are unsatisfied of the lawfulness of warlike and military employments; if they will not be satisfied when sufficient reasons are alleged to justify it, we are not bound in this case to quit our callings; for they are matters of concernment to us: but we are bound rather to neglect their censures; as proceeding from malice and spite.

' But what if others still continue unsatisfied, not out of pride and malice, but out of weakness; as being insufficient to receive that information from us that we give them, and to conceive of the depth of our reasons and arguments for the justifying of such and such actions: what shall we do in that case?'

To this I answer, in the third place;—we are not bound to abstain from what they are offended at, unless they produce some probable grounds and reasons for their offences. It is not enough to oblige our consciences, that they tell us they imagine such a thing to be evil, unless they show some grounds for their imagination. Nor is it here required, that the grounds they produce should be demonstrative; but it is enough if they be probable grounds: though they amount not to prove the things that appear evil to them, to be in themselves evil; yet, if they prove that these things carry in them a probable presumption of evil, this is sufficient to oblige us to abstain from them.

Hereupon it was, that the apostle forbade the Corinthians to eat meat offered unto idols. If any took offence at that meat, others were not to eat thereof in their presence and company; and that, because their offence had some probable show of reason to judge that they thought they had too much communion with idols, because they did eat of those things that were sacrificed to them.

And, upon this ground, the apostle himself resolves, in 1 Cor. viii. 13. that if meat made his brother to offend, he would eat no flesh while the world stood: that is, as I take it, no flesh offered to idols; for that is the subject of which he had been treating all along in that chapter. Though it was lawful, in itself considered; yet, because the weak had probable grounds and reasons to show why flesh offered to

idols might not be eaten, therefore he would abstain from it whilst the world stood.

And so, in like manner, if any except against what we do, and bring this reason for it, that it is too like the custom of wicked men, that none do thus and thus but the generality of the looser and profaner sort: this is such a ground, that, though the thing in itself be not sinful, yet we ought hereupon to abstain from it; being a probable ground of evil, though the thing in itself be not evil.

But, if there be no such probable reasons produced as carry in them a show and appearance, that probably that is evil which we do; then we are not bound to abstain, merely because such a man says or thinks such an action is evil. As, for instance: if any take exception against preaching in a pulpit and by an hour-glass, as things unlawful, as of late many have; truly, unless they produce some grounds to prove these things to be unlawful, their cavils are not to be hearkened to nor regarded. And so, in any other things, that are indifferent to be used.

3. In the last place, take this limitation also:—*we are not bound to abstain from those things that appear evil to others, though they are in themselves lawful; unless in those places, and at those times, where there is danger of giving offence.* At other times, and in other places, we may lawfully do what is lawful. When there are any present, that are weak and scrupulous, and apt to be scandalized at us, then we must have respect unto their weak consciences; but, at other times, we are left to the free and full use of our Christian liberty.\*

\* The author does not appear to have completed this discourse according to the plan proposed in the beginning, as he has omitted the third general head.

THE  
NATURE, DANGER, AGGRAVATION,  
AND  
CURE, OF PRESUMPTUOUS SINNING,  
WITH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
RESTRAINING AND SANCTIFYING GRACE IN  
EFFECTING THEREOF.

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PSALM XIX. v. 13.

*“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins :  
let them not have dominion over me.”*

HAVING, in my former subject, treated of abstinence from those things that have in them the appearance of evil, I shall now, from the words read to you, speak something also of those things that are apparently evil : that, as you have already, in part, seen what Christian prudence and circumspection is required, that your conversation be not offensive ; so, here, you may also see what fervency of prayer, what measure of grace is requisite, that they be not grossly wicked.

In the verse immediately before the text, the Psalmist prays, that God would cleanse him from his secret faults ; that is, from sins of ignorance, whereof he knew himself to be guilty in the general, though in particular he knew not what they were. In this verse, he prays, that God

would keep him from sins of presumption. The connexion of these two requests is somewhat remarkable, and may afford us this pertinent and profitable observation ; that *sin is of a growing and advancing nature.*

From weakness to wilfulness, from ignorance to presumption, is its ordinary course and progress. The cloud, that Elijah's man saw, was at first no bigger than a hand's breadth ; and it threatened no such thing as a general tempest : but yet, at last, it overspread the face of the whole heavens : so, truly, a sin, that, at first, ariseth in the soul but as a small mist, and is scarce discernible ; yet, if it be not scattered by the breath of prayer, it will at length overspread the whole life, and become most tempestuous and raging. And therefore David, as one experienced in the deceitfulness of sin, doth thus digest and methodize his prayer : first, against secret and lesser sins ; and, then, against the more gross and notorious ; as knowing the one proceeds and issues from the other ; " Lord, cleanse me from my secret faults ; " and this will be a most effectual means, to preserve and " keep thy servant from presumptuous sins."

And this observation may be gathered from the connexion of the two requests. But I shall not insist on that.

The words are a most sincere and affectionate prayer : and, in them, are observable, 1. The person, that makes it. And that is not a vile notorious sinner ; one, that used to be overcome by presumptuous sins : but David, a man after God's own heart, eminent for holiness and piety : " Keep back thy servant," says he, " from presumptuous sins." 2. The request and petition itself. And that is, that God would keep him, not from sins of common frailty and daily infirmity, such as no man's holiness can exempt him from : but from sins of presumption ; from daring and ranting sins, such as one would think, that no man, that hath the least holiness in him, could ever commit : " Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins."

In this petition two things are evidently implied ;—First, that strong propension, that there is in the best, to the worst sins. Were it not so, what need David pray for restraining grace ? " Keep back thy servant." Lord, my

corruptions hurry me with all violence into the greatest sins: they persuade, they force, they drag, they draw, they thrust forward; and now, now I am going and yielding: but, Lord, withhold me: put a curb and check upon these violent and headstrong corruptions of mine: keep back, keep me back from presumptuous sins.— Secondly, it implies that utter impotency, that the best lie under, to preserve themselves from the foulest sins, without the special aid and assistance of divine grace. ‘ My heart is not in my own hands: my ways are not at my own disposal: I cannot stand longer than thou up-holdest me: I cannot walk longer than thou leadest me: if thou withdrawest thine everlasting arms from under me, I shall stumble, and fall, and tumble headlong into fearful precipices, into vile impieties, into hell and perdition itself; and, therefore, Lord, do thou keep me: do thou, by thy omnipotency supply my impotency: by thy power keep me from what mine own weakness will certainly betray me unto.’ “Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins.”

These two things are implied and couched in the petition itself. 3. In the text we have the reason also why David prays so earnestly against presumptuous sins. Which reason carries in it the form of a distinct petition by itself: “Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins: let them not have dominion over me.” But yet it may be well understood as a reason of the foregoing request: ‘Therefore, Lord, “keep me from presumptuous sins;” lest, by falling into the commission of them, I fall also under the power of them; lest, by prevailing upon me, they get dominion and sovereignty over me.’ And, in this reason also, we have a hint of the still encroaching nature of sin: from the allowance of little and secret sins, it proceeds to the commission of gross and presumptuous sins; and, from the commission of these, it proceeds to dominion over him: and, therefore, if we would not be slaves to our lusts and vassals to the devil, we had need all of us, to pray with David, ‘Lord, keep us from secret sins, lest they break out into open and presumptuous sins; and, Lord, keep us from presumptuous sins, lest they get dominion over us.’

From the words thus divided and opened, several useful observations may be raised. As, first, from the petition itself, we may observe these two doctrinal points;—first, that, *in the very best Christians there is great proneness and inclination to the very worst sins.* David himself prays for restraining grace, to keep him from presumptuous sins.—Secondly, observe, *it is not our own power, but only divine grace, that can preserve us from the most horrid and vile sins.* Those sins, that we now abhor the very thoughts of; yet, were we but left to ourselves, and were but divine grace abstracted from us, even those sins we should commit with all greediness. And, then, from the person who makes this prayer and request unto God, observe, thirdly, that, *because the strongest Christians are too weak of themselves to resist the greatest sins, therefore they ought continually to implore the aid and assistance of divine grace.* David, though a strong and mighty saint, yet durst not trust himself alone to grapple with a corruption or a temptation; and, therefore, in the sense of his own weakness, he prays the Lord to keep him: “Keep thou thy servant.”

And, then, from the reason, “Keep me from presumptuous sins, lest they get dominion over me;” or, “let them not get dominion over me:” observe, fourthly, that *the frequent commission of presumptuous and daring sins, will subject the soul to the reigning power and dominion of sin.*

But I shall not handle each of these by themselves; but give you the sum and substance of them all in one, and so prosecute that. Which is this; that *the best security, which the best of God’s children have from the commission and from the dominion of presumptuous sins, is only their own fervent prayers and God’s Almighty grace.*

In the prosecution of this doctrine, I shall endeavour to show you when it is that a man is guilty of presumptuous sins, and wherein the nature of such sins consists.

I. *When a man is guilty of presumptuous sins.*

i. Then a sin is presumptuous, *when it is committed against the powerful dictates of a man’s own conscience and against the clear conviction of the Holy Ghost.*

When conscience is awakened in conviction, and rings aloud in men’s ears, ‘The ways thou livest in are grossly

sinful, the end of them is hell and death: thou wadest through the dearest blood of thine own soul, if thou goest on. Seest thou not how guilt dismally stares thee in the face? Seest thou not how the mouth of hell belches out fire, and flames, and brimstone against thee? Stop, therefore: I here, as God's officer, arrest thee: If now, when conscience thus calls, and cries, and threatens, men will yet venture on, this is most bold and daring presumption. To disobey the arrest, but of the king's officer, is a most presumptuous crime: how much more, therefore, to disobey the arrest of conscience; which is the chief and supreme officer of God, and who commands in the name, yea, in the stead of God, as it were, in the soul!

And yet, truly, who among us is not, in some kind or other, guilty of this presumption? Sirs, if God should now come down in terrible majesty in the midst of us, and if he should ask every man's conscience here, one by one, 'Conscience, wert thou ever resisted? wert thou ever opposed in executing thine office, to this and to that soul?' where sits the person, whose conscience must not answer, 'Yes, Lord, I accuse him: I testify to his very face, I have often warned and admonished him, O, do not venture upon this or that action: there is sin, there is guilt lies under it: there is wrath and vengeance, that will follow it, oh pity, oh spare thine own soul: this sin will everlastinglly ruin thee if thou committest it?' 'And, what! didst thou commit it notwithstanding all this?' 'Yes, Lord: while I was laying before him all the arguments, that the thoughts of heaven and hell, of thy glory and his own happiness, could administer; yet, so presumptuous was he, as to fall upon me thine officer; and these stabs, these gashes and wounds I received, while I was admonishing him, and warning him in thy name.'

O sirs, a thousand times better were it for us, that we never had consciences; better, that our consciences were utterly seared and become insensible; better, that they were struck for ever dumb, and should never open their mouths more to reprove or to rebuke us; better, that we never had had the least glimmering of light to distinguish betwixt our duty and what is sin; than thus desperately to outface and stifle our convictions, and to offer violence

to our consciences, and presumptuously to rush into the commission of sin in despite of all these: better, men had no consciences at all, or that they were given up to a seared and reprobate sense; than to sin thus in despite of their consciences. What says our Saviour, Luke xii. 47? "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."

There are two things, wherein it appears that all sins against conscience and against convictions are presumptuous sins.

*1. Because, in all such sins, there is a most horrid contempt of the authority and sovereignty of the great God.*

And what higher presumption can there be, than for vile worms to set at nought the authority of that God, at whose frown heaven, and hell, and earth tremble? The voice of conscience, rightly informed by the scripture, is the voice of God himself: it is God speaking in a man, and whispering to a man's very heart. As Moses was the interpreter betwixt God and the Israelites, so conscience is the interpreter betwixt God and us. Would it not have been, think you, a most desperate presumption, and a most daring affront against the majesty and sovereignty of God, while he was with his own voice pronouncing the ten commandments, with thundering and lightning and earthquake, from mount Sinai, for the Israelites to have been notoriously breaking and sinning against every one of those commandments, as he spake them? Truly, though now God delivers his will and commands to us, not immediately by his own mouth, as then he did, but by conscience his interpreter; yet, while we know that conscience speaks to us in the name of God, it is as much fearful presumption for us to slight the voice of conscience, as if we should slight the voice of God himself speaking from heaven immediately to us.

And that is the first thing.

*2. By sinning against our consciences and against our convictions, we make it very evident, that we stand in no awe nor dread of any such thing as hell and eternal damnation.*

And is not that boldness? Is not that presumption?

You scorn, possibly, to be such puling, whimpering sinners, as to be affrighted with such bugbears as everlasting torments, and everlasting wrath and vengeance. You know the wages of sin is death ; and that the ways you take lead down to the chambers of destruction : and, yet, though God and the devil stand in the way, you will through. Are not these, think you, bold and presumptuous sinners, that will go on in sin, though hell-fire flashes in their faces ? Though God should cleave the ground upon which they walk, and through that chink should give them a view of hell ; though they should see the damned tumbling up and down in those torments, and hear their yellings, and shriekings, and roarings ; yea, though God should point them out a place in hell, and tell them, ‘ Look, sinner, yonder is a place kept void, and heated from the beginning of the world for thee : ’ yet are there some such bold and daring wretches, that they would out-brave all this, and would sin in despite either of heaven or hell. Yea, and which is a most sad and dreadful consideration, some there are, whose consciences are already brimfull of extreme horror and anguish ; and yet they will venture upon those sins, that have caused that horror. And are not such presumptuous sinners ? They give their consciences wound upon wound ; and, though sometimes they roar bitterly, yet they will sin outrageously, even then when they roar and smart for sin. So that this is a clear evidence of a presumptuous sin, when a sin is committed against a man’s own conscience, against knowledge, and against conviction. This makes a sin to be a presumptuous sin, when conscience cries out murder, murder, soul-murder ; when it beseeches, with tears of blood that they draw from it, to desist from their sins, and yet is not heard nor regarded. This is presumptuous sinning ; sinning, with a high hand, and with a brazen forehead.

ii. Then a man sins presumptuously, *when he sins upon long deliberation and forecast ; plotting and contriving with himself, how he may accomplish his sin.*

Some sins are committed merely through a sudden surprise : a temptation comes upon the soul unawares, and finds it unprovided to make any resistance : and so it prevails.

So it was with the apostle Peter. His apostacy and perjury were indeed very dreadful : yet he was overcome by a sudden surprise. He had no foregoing thoughts and purposes to deny his Master : yea, his resolution was, to own and confess him to the very death : and, therefore, though his sins were foul sins, yet they cannot be called presumptuous sins : but rather sins of weakness and infirmity.

And so there are divers Christians, that are overtaken with faults against their resolutions and prayers ; yea, and contrary to their own expectations. Now the sins of such persons are not presumptuous sins : but then a sin becomes presumptuous, when it is committed after long deliberation, premeditation, and forecast.

There is a two-fold deliberation, that makes a sin presumptuous,

1. *When a man sins, after he hath deliberated with himself, whether he shall sin or not :* when, upon debating the case at length, after much pondering and consideration, he consents to sin.

And thus, though St. Peter denied his Master upon a surprisal, yet Judas betrayed him upon deliberation. Now this is desperate presumption, to sin, when a man ponders and considers with himself, and weighs the reasons on both sides, whether he shall sin or not. And yet, truly, of such presumptuous sins as these are, we may all of us be found guilty. Ask but yourselves : did you never commit a sin, after you had weighed in your deliberate thoughts all circumstances : putting in the beneficial consequences, the pleasure, profit and credit of sin, in the one balance ; and the dangerous and destructive consequences, that wrath and hell that are due to sin, in the other balance ? Who of us all can acquit himself, from being guilty of sinning, after such comparisons as these have been made ; after the due weighing both of sin and our duty ? and, yet, have we not chosen the sin before our duty ? Truly, to sin after such deliberate comparisons as these are, is a provoking and a presumptuous sin.

2. *When men do deliberate and contrive, how they may sin to the greatest advantage, how they may make the most of their iniquities : when they plot and contrive with*

*themselves, how they may squeeze and draw out the very utmost of all that pleasure and sweet that they imagine sin carries with it : this makes that sin a presumptuous sin.*

Thus, those drunkards contrived to prolong their sin : Isaiah lvi. 12. " Come ye, say they, we will fetch wine, and fill ourselves with strong drink ; and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." Here they forecasted to make as great advantage as they could of their drunkenness, and to get as much pleasure out of it as they could. This is most presumptuous sinning. Thus, the prophet Jeremiah also speaks of those that were " wise to do evil :" Jer. iv. 22. that could improve sin to the very utmost; and could get more out of a sin by their husbanding of it, than another could that had not that skill and mystery : these are wise to do evil. And such are presumptuous sins : when men stretch and strain their wits brimfull of sinful devices, either so as they may reap most from them, or so as they may keep their wickedness secret from the observation and notice of men, then they sin presumptuously. Do not, therefore, flatter yourselves, that, though indeed you are sinners, as who indeed is not ? yet you sin only through weakness and infirmity. Ask your own consciences : did you never sin, or do you not use to sin, upon premeditation and forecast ? When you have conceived sin in your own hearts, do not you nurse it and nourish it there, till you find some fit opportunity to commit it; plotting to lay hold on some fit occasion to act some wicked imagination that you have hatched in your own heart ? If so, this is clear, your sinning is not out of weakness, but from stubbornness and wilfulness.

*iii. The more quiet and calm your affections are when you sin, the more free you are from the hurrys and perturbations of passion when you sin, the more presumptuous are your sins.*

Indeed, it is no sufficient excuse, that you sin in a passion ; no more than it is for a murderer to say he was drunk when he did it : but, yet, this takes off something from the presumption in sinning. Then a man is a bold and arrogant sinner, when he can sin calmly ; and bid defiance to God and heaven, in cold blood.

Now St. Peter's denial of Christ, was from the exces-

sive passion of fear, that then surprised him, and scattered his graces ; but when that passion was over, he recruited again : but Judas had no passion ; but the wickedness of his own heart wrought quietly and calmly in him, to the betraying of his Master.

When the winds rage violently, no wonder if sometimes the tallest cedars are overthrown by them ; but those trees, that fall of their own accord, when the air is still and calm, it is a certain sign that they were rotten. So it is in this case : when the tempest of passion rageth, be it fear or any other passion and perturbation of the mind, no wonder if sometimes the tallest and the strongest Christians fall, are cast down, and overwhelmed by it ; but if men fall into sin when their intellectuals are clear, and when their reason is calm and undisturbed, truly this is a certain sign these men are rotten, and these presumptuous sins have gotten dominion over them, for they fall like rotten trees of their own accord, without any tempest of passion to stir them.

*iv. When at any time you commit a sin, consider what the temptations are that assault you, and how you behave yourselves under those temptations ; for, from thence, you may conjecture, whether your sins be presumptuous or not.*

Temptations, as they are strong inducements unto sin, so sometimes they are great mitigations of sin. The more violently the soul is baited and wearied with temptations, the less presumption is it guilty of if at length it yields. This, God doth judge to be weakness, not wilfulness. He knows our frame ; that we are but dust and ashes ; and that we are no match for principalities and powers : and those mighty enemies, that we are to combat with, we can no more stand before, than so much loose dust before a fierce and rapid whirlwind.

Yea, were there no devil to tempt, yet the corruptions of our own hearts are much too hard for us : but, when both our own lusts and the devil shall conspire together, the one to betray us with all its deceitfulness, and the other to force us with all its power, who then can stand ? If God, at such a time as this is, withdraw his grace and Spirit, as sometimes he doth from the best of his servants,

where is the Christian that ever coped with these temptations, and was not vanquished and captivated by them?

It is true, when God assists him, the weakest Christian proves victorious over the strongest temptations. A dwarf may beat a giant, when he is manacled that he cannot stir nor resist. God sees that Satan is an overmatch for us; and, therefore, he ties his hands, before he sets us out on the conflict; and what wonder is it, if we then conquer? When God hath trodden Satan under us, no wonder, if, as weak as we are, we can then trample upon him too.

But, that all our success may appear to be, not from our own strength, but from God's might, he leaves us sometimes to Satan, and lets loose Satan upon us in all his rage. He leads us into temptation, and he leaves us under temptation; and, when we are buffeted, we then yield and fall, and the devil shamefully triumphs over us.

In this case, which is one of the saddest that a Christian can be in, though the sin be very foul and heinous; yet the same power of temptation, that makes us sin heinously, keeps us from sinning presumptuously. Presumptuous sins are not to be measured by the bulk and ugliness of the action, but by the forward and headlong consent of the will unto it; and, therefore, a gross sin may sometimes be but a sin of infirmity, when yet a sin of a less nature is desperately daring and presumptuous. In the law, if a person that was ravished struggled and cried out aloud for help, the crime was not imputed to her: so, if the soul be forcibly ravished by temptations, though it struggle and strive against them, though it call upon its God, crying aloud, "Help, Lord;" though it call up its graces, "Arise, help;" this sin shall not be imputed to it as a presumptuous sin.

How then shall we judge by our temptations, whether the sins which we commit are presumptuous or not? I answer; you may judge of it, by these following particulars.

1. *If we commit sin, when we are not besieged and disturbed by violent and invincible temptations, this is too certain a sign, that then we sin presumptuously.*

This plainly shows a will strongly fixed and resolved to sin. When men will surrender and yield up their souls to the devil, even before he summons them; and when they will consent to sin upon every small and trivial temptation, as soon as they have but a hint and glimpse of some sinful object passing before them, though it offer them no violence, though it present nothing to them of so much pleasure and profit and credit in it, but that a generous Christian might easily disdain, if yet they run out after it, and will sin merely because they will; these are most desperate sinners, that are impatient to wait the leisure of a lingering and lazy temptation. They know the devil hath much work to do in the world; many thousands to tempt, deceive, and draw to perdition: and, therefore, they will not trouble him; and, for his ease, they will sin without a temptation, and ruin their own souls without any help of any other devil than what their own hearts prove to them. As those are the best and most stayed Christians, that are constant in the performance of holy duties, even then when they have no strong impulses and motions from the Holy Ghost unto duty: so, truly, those are the worst and most stubborn sinners, that even then commit sin with greediness, when they have no violent impulses and temptations from the devil to hurry them into sin.

Now there are two things, whereby it plainly appears, that then a sin is presumptuous, when it is committed without strong and violent temptations to it,

(1.) *Hereby we do evidently declare a fearful contempt of the great God.*

We never more vilify and disparage God, than when we do that for nothing, which we know his soul hates. Should the devil, when he tempts you, take you, as he took Christ, and show you the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them all, and promise to bestow all these upon you: yet, when God shows you the infinite glory of the kingdoms of another world, you can plead no natural reason why you should consent to sin; God infinitely outbidding the devil, even then when the devil bids highest. But, when you will prefer a sin that bids nothing, a barren, fruitless, and unprofitable lust, before the holy will of the

great God and the sure promises of eternal glory, what reason or pretence can you show why you should sin, unless it be, because you are resolved rather to despite and affront God, than to advantage your own souls? And this was the great aggravation of Judas's sin, and that which made it so exceeding presumptuous: what a poor temptation were thirty pieces of silver, to induce him to the vilest wickedness that ever was committed since the world stood! It was no more than the ordinary value and rate of a slave: as you may see in Exod. xxi. 32. amounting much to about thirty-seven shillings and six-pence: and, yet, so far did he undervalue Christ, as that, for this small price, he sold the Lord of life and glory: and this, God himself takes notice of, as a great indignity done unto him; Zech. xi. 13. "A goodly price," says God by the prophet there, "was I prized at of them!" I know that, at the very hearing of this, your hearts rise up in detestation of the cursed covetousness of Judas, that ever he should suffer himself to be tempted by so base a reward as a few shillings were, to betray him to death, who was infinitely more worth than heaven and earth. Why, the case is yours: nay wonder not at it: he betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver, and you daily crucify him and put him to open shame: you wound and pierce him to the very heart, for much less than that is. Look back upon your past life, can you not recal to mind, that you have been prevailed upon to commit many a sin by such poor and inconsiderable things as scarce bear the show, or face, or appearance of a temptation? Have you not dealt very injuriously with God and Christ, and set them at nought for a little gain, for some vanishing delight, for compliance sake, for the fickle favour of men? Yea, very feathers and empty nothings have weighed down the scales with you against God! The devil's first and greatest sin was pride, and contempt of God: and how much is he pleased and humoured, to see the same contempt of God riveted in the hearts of men; and to see him so much slighted in the world, that he can scarce bid low enough when he tempts, but whatever he offers is greedily snatched at, and preferred before God and heaven, though it be but a very toy and trifle! This,

certainly, must needs be a very heinous contempt of the great Majesty of heaven, and must needs argue most desperate boldness and presumptuous sinning.

(2.) *When men sin upon small or no temptations, they declare plainly a wretched neglect of their precious souls; and, therefore, they sin presumptuously.*

I have read of a soldier, who, being with two others for some crime condemned, drew lots for his life; and, having drawn one lot that saved and pardoned him, seeing one of his companions come shivering and quaking to draw, told him, that, for two shillings, or thereabouts, he would take his lot, whatever it was: he drew again, and again it proved successful to him: however, it was a most daring presumption, that after so narrow an escape, he should again hazard his life, and set it to sale for so small a price as that was. Truly, the like presumption we ourselves are guilty of: we purchase toys and trifles, with the dreadful hazards of our souls, those souls, that are infinitely more worth than ten thousand worlds: we make common barter and exchange for every base lust; and, as prodigals pay very dear for very toys only to satisfy their fancies, so do we lay down our precious souls at stake for those lusts that usually have nothing in them besides the satisfaction of the humours and fancies of our own wills in sin. Would you not censure that man to be most desperately fool-hardy, that should venture to dive into the bottom of the sea, only to take up pebbles and gravel? How great deal of folly and presumption then are they guilty of, who dive even to the bottom of hell, only to get straws and feathers, and such impertinent vanities and inconsiderable nothings, that certainly men would never hazard their immortal souls for, unless they thought they did themselves a courtesy to be damned! How many are there, that would not suffer, no not so much as a hair of their head to be twitched off, to gain that, for which they will not stick to lie and swear; sins that murder their souls! They are so foolish, that the Lord complains in Isa: lii. 3. they sell themselves "for nought:" either they stay not till the devil comes to cheapen them, but sin beforehand; or, else they readily take any price, that he offers for them: any vile trifle is looked upon as a great purchase, if they

can procure it at so low a price as hell and damnation is. What is it, that makes the swearer open his throat as wide as hell against heaven and God himself: but only, that he fancies that a big, full-mouthed oath makes his speech more graceful and stately? And what is it, that makes the company-keeper run into all excess with riot, and drown himself in all sensuality; but only, that he may comply with his debauched companions, and not disgust them by any singularity and reservedness?

And can these things be called temptations? Are these things matters of such weight, as deserve to be put in the balance against the soul's eternal happiness and glory? Is it possible, that men, that have noble and immortal souls in them, should ever so far debase them, as to bring them into competition with, nay to make them to be the price of, such vile nothings as these are? And, yet, tell these men, that they hereby rouze up God's wrath against them, that burns to the lowest hell; tell them, that they destroy their precious souls; tell them, that they get nothing by such sins as these are, unless they reckon damnation for gain; yet, let God frown and hell triumph, and their souls perish, they will on; and will not raise the rate of sinning, nor put the devil to more charges; and so they are damned for nothing. Is not this most desperate boldness and presumption? and, therefore, do not lay the blame of your sins upon the violence of temptation, or upon the restless importunities of the devil. When God shall, at the last day, call, 'Sinner, stand forth: what is the reason you committed such and such sins, that had nothing in them to commend them, that left nothing after them but shame without and terrors within?' will you then plead as now usually you do, that temptations were too hard for you, and the devil too strong for you to resist? No, no: it will then be made apparent, that the devil was falsely charged with multitudes of sins, that he never knew of till they were committed. And, therefore, when men sin upon slight temptations, it is not from the power of temptations, it is not from the importunity of the devil, that they sin; but, only, from a presumptuous resolution, that they will sin whatever it cost them.

And that is the first trial.

*2. When a man wilfully and knowingly runs himself into temptations and upon occasions of sin, if he be overcome by these temptations, he sins presumptuously notwithstanding.*

In this case, though the temptation be violent and irresistible ; yea, though, when we are entangled by it, we strive and struggle to our very utmost : yet this doth not mitigate, but rather aggravate our sin ; because it was merely through our own presumption, that we brought ourselves under the power of such a prevalent temptation, from which Christian fear and caution might easily have preserved us. If a man, that is wholly ignorant of the art of swimming, shall plunge himself into a deep river, though he struggle hard for life afterwards ; yet, if he sinks and is drowned, he perishes only through his own presumption. That man deserves to be blown up, that will make gunpowder in a smith's shop, when the sparks fly thick about him : truly, occasions of sinning are the devil's forge, where he is continually heating and hammering out his fiery darts : now, for you, that know yourselves to be as catching as powder or tinder, wilfully to run yourselves into this forge, where his fiery darts glow, and sparkle, and fly about you ; what is this, but most desperate boldness and presumption ? What says the wise man, Prov. vi. 27 ? "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt ?" Can a man run himself upon such occasions of sin, and not run also into the commission of sin ? As the motion of a stone, when it falls downward, is still the swifter the nearer it comes to its centre ; so, when you are running yourselves into the occasions of sin, the more willingly you go to sin, the nearer you come to it, there is no stop nor stay : when you put yourselves upon these occasions and temptations, you put yourself out of the protection of God's grace, and you stand wholly at the devil's courtesy ; and, if you are overcome, blame nothing but your own venturousness and presumption. Consider this, therefore : hast thou not had frequent experience of many sad foils, that the devil hath given thee, by thy rash venturing upon occasions and temptations to sin ? Hast thou not found such and such company, such and such employments, and other like circumstances, always prove snares to thee ? Never plead these temptations were too strong for

thee to resist: what! canst thou not resist them? why couldst thou not have avoided them? And, believe it: if the experience of thine own weakness doth not make thee careful for the future to shun such snares and intanglements as these are, thy sins will be judged by God, at the last day, to be wilful and presumptuous sins: for they are so, if not in themselves considered, yet at least in their cause; for you presumptuously run into those occasions and temptations, whereby, in all likelihood, you will be overcome: and this is to sin presumptuously.

3. Suppose that we are strongly tempted, without the betraying of ourselves to the temptation: then consider, *if you commit the sin to which you are tempted, without vigorous and resolute resistance; this is a certain sign that you sin presumptuously.* Let the temptation be never so strong and irresistible; yet, if you yield to it without opposition or resistance made against it to your utmost, you then sin presumptuously.

A child of God, when he acts like himself, falls fighting. The devil gets not a foot of ground upon him, but by main force and strength. Though principalities and powers, though "the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickednesses in high places," set themselves all in array against him; yet he encounters them all, and wrestles with them all: and though, sometimes, through weakness, he is overcome; yet he never basely yields: he fights standing, and he fights falling, and he fights rising; and, therefore, when he sins, it is through weakness, and not through presumption. But others, though they are very bold and presumptuous against God; yet they are very cowards against their lusts, and against the temptations of the devil: when a temptation assaults them, they dare not presume to oppose that, but they dare presume to offend and provoke God himself: that, they dare do. Believe it, sirs: you must be bold and resolute, either against the devil, or against the great God: one of these you must grapple with: choose which you think you may best oppose, and soonest conquer. The devil stands before you, armed with his fiery darts: God follows you, armed with everlasting vengeance. If you will not engage against Satan, and resolutely oppose him and all his force; what

do you else, but turn upon God, and challenge him to the combat, and make him your enemy, that is “able to destroy both body and soul” in hell-fire for ever? What a most daring presumption is this, that ever we should basely surrender up ourselves to the devil, without striking one stroke in our own defence: and yet, at the same time, we should dare to provoke that God, that can, with one look and frown, sink us into the lowest hell!

And thus in these three particulars, we see when a sin is presumptuous, in respect of temptations: when it is committed, without temptations; when we run into temptations and occasions of sin; and when we make no vigorous opposition against them.

4. Another trial is this:—*when men will dare to sin, under eminent and remarkable judgments and afflictions, that God brings upon them, then they sin presumptuously.*

What is this else, but, when God stands visibly in your way, yet you will desperately run upon “the thick bosses of his buckler?” “He hedgeth up your way with thorns,” and yet you will break through, though it be to the tearing of your flesh. He strikes at you by his judgments: and O the madness and presumption of vile dust and ashes, that they dare to strike at God again by their sins! What is this else, but even to dare God to do his worst? When God treads upon us, should such vile worms as we are, turn the tail, and threaten to take revenge upon the Almighty? This is presumption and boldness, that God takes special notice of, in 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. Ahaz was brought very low, says the text; and, yet “in the time of his distress, he trespassed yet more against the Lord.” “This is that king Ahaz.” God sets a mark and brand upon him, that he may be known to all posterity for a most daring sinner, that, when God had brought him so low, when so many enemies waged war against him and distressed him; yet, even then, he provoked a greater enemy than they all, and challenged God against him: “This is that king Ahaz.” Truly, may it not be said of many among us, ‘This and this is that person, who, when God afflicted them, instead of humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God, grew enraged at their sufferings, and sinned yet more and more against him?’ O, it is dreadful, when

those punishments, that should break and melt us, prove only to harden our hearts, and to exasperate and embitter our spirits against God. What can reform us, when we offend under the very smart of the rod ? Hereby, therefore, judge of your sins : if so be God be gone out against you, if he have laid his hand heavy upon you ; and yet you regard it not, but still persevere in your old sins, and still add new iniquities to them ; if, instead of humility and brokenness of hearts, your hearts rise up against God, and you are ready to say with that wicked king, " This evil is of the Lord : what should I wait for the Lord any longer ? " conclude upon it, you are those desperate presumptuous sinners, that scorn to shrink for whatever God can lay upon them.

*5. When we can encourage ourselves with hopes of mercy, though we live in sin impenitently ; this is to sin presumptuously.*

You, that know yourselves to be sinners, what is it, that makes you to bear up with so much peace and confidence ? Why do you not every moment fear, lest hell should open its mouth and swallow you up ; lest God should suddenly strike you dead by some remarkable judgment ; lest the devil should fetch you away alive to torments ? Why do you not fear this, since you know yourselves to be sinners ? Why, truly, you still hope for mercy. And it is only from this very presumption, that men cry " Peace, Peace " to themselves ; when yet God is at enmity with them : they flatter themselves that it shall be well with them in the latter end, though God swears he will not spare them ; but his wrath and jealousy shall smoke against them. In Deut. xxix. 19, 20. God says, " If any man shall encourage himself when he goes on presumptuously in the way of his own heart, adding drunkenness to thirst, I will not spare him ; but my wrath and my jealousy shall smoke against him ; and all the curses, that are written in this book, shall fall upon him." Were but sinners truly apprehensive of their wretched estate, how they stand liable every moment to the stroke of divine justice, how that there is nothing that interposeth betwixt them and hell but only God's temporary forbearance of them ; truly, it were

impossible, utterly impossible, to keep them from running up and down the streets, like distracted persons and madmen, crying out with horror of soul, ‘O, I am damned, I am damned :’ but their presumption stupifies them, and they are lulled asleep by the devil ; and, though they live in sin, yet they still dream of salvation : and thus their presumption flatters them, till, at length, this presumption ends then, where their damnation begins, and never before.

And thus I have, in five particulars, showed you what it is, that makes a sin to be presumptuous ; which is that, which David, in the text, prays to God to keep him from : and, I doubt not, but these particulars have represented to you so much guilt and ugliness in presumptuous sins, as that you also pray with him, “Lord, keep us also from presumptuous sins.”

II. Now, though possibly it may seem altogether needless to dye scarlet redder ; yet, that your prayers against them may be more importunate, and your endeavours unwearyed, I shall, in the next place, by some aggravating considerations engrain these scarlet crimson sins, and strive to make them appear, as they are in themselves, out of measure sinful.

i. Consider, therefore, in the first place, that the commission of presumptuous sins doth exceedingly harden and steel the heart, with resolutions to persevere in them without repentance.

And what can be more dreadful than this is ? Resolvedness to sin is a disposition likest to that of the devil ; and it is a punishment next to that of hell. A man, that is confirmed in wickedness, is not many removes off from a devil, in his nature ; and from a damned person, in his state. There is a fatal consequence, betwixt man’s resolving to continue in sin to the end, and God’s resolving to punish him with those torments that shall have no end.

God hath two seals : the one, of the spirit of adoption, whereby he seals up believers to *the day of redemption* ; and, the other, of obduration, whereby he seals up the impenitent to the day of destruction : he seals them up under sin, and sets them aside for wrath. Hence the

apostle, in Romans ii. 5. speaks of a hard and “impenitent heart,” treasuring up wrath unto itself against the day of wrath.

Now presumptuous sins have a twofold malign influence, thus to harden and make men resolute in wickedness: for, either, they make them secure under sin; or, else, quite contrary, desperate for sin: and both these strongly conduce to the hardening of the heart.

1. *The commission of presumptuous sins oftentimes makes a sinner resolute and secure, under the blackest guilt the soul can contract, and the fearfulest threatenings God can denounce.*

Security under guilt arises from impunity. Sinners have read and heard terrible things against themselves, that “God will wound the hairy scalp of such as go on still in their iniquities;” that he will destroy the incorrigible suddenly, and that without remedy: but yet none of all this is executed: their heads, instead of being wounded, are crowned with blessings; and this speedy destruction still loiters; they neither feel terrors within, nor meet with troubles without; and, therefore, as Solomon observes, because they go unpunished they grow secure, in Eccl. viii. 11. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”

Carnal reason measures God’s way of taking vengeance by its own. It is the custom of men, if they can, to revenge while an injury is warm. Delay and forbearance usually cool them into forgiveness: and hence presumptuous sinners argue, that, certainly, were there any truth in God’s threatenings, were there any thing to be feared besides the huge noise that they make, they should then have been exemplarily plagued, when they committed such and such a daring sin, while the provocation was fresh. And from this it is, that the worst of sinners, after the commission of some vile and crying sins, are, for a while, troubled with a trembling and tormenting conscience; that the threatenings, that are denounced, should fall upon them by some visible appearance, and some signal hand of God against them: but, when they see no such thing come of it, but their condition is pros-

perous and all their ways sun-shine ; how doth this work with them ? Truly, instead of admiring God's patience and long-suffering, they despise his wrath ; and scoff at those threatenings, that before they dreaded ; and think none of them true, because none of them are felt.

We read of such bold sinners, as these are in 2 Peter, iii. 4. " Where is the promise of his coming ? do not all things continue as they were ? " So these presumptuous sinners say in their hearts, ' Where is the threatening of his coming against us ? Do not all things continue with us as they were ? Though preachers roar out whole pulpits-full of hell and damnation, and singe our ears continually with fire and brimstone ; making fearful clamours of death, hell, and damnation, and everlasting torments : yet all things are with us as they were. Is not the sun's light as cheering, the air's breath as refreshing, and the earth's womb as fruitful as it was ? ' Their greatest sins have not disturbed the least atom in the creation, nor moved so much as a hair of their head. For all that sudden and unavoidable destruction, that is denounced against them, they still flourish and prosper ; and because God doth not, as man, revenge in the first heat, they think all threatenings are made rather to affright, than to do execution : and, hence it is, that they embolden and harden themselves in sin, and take up resolutions, that they will continue therein.

And that is the first way, how the commission of presumptuous sins brings men to resolutions of sinning, by making them regardless of divine threatenings.

*2. The frequent commission of presumptuous sins leaves men desperate ; whereby they are hardened to continue in their sins.*

Nothing more fortifies resolution, than despair. Make a coward desperate, and you make him invincible. Now presumptuous sins usually end in desperate resolutions : they make men despair of ever gaining power over them, and of ever obtaining pardon for them.

*(1.) Men, that frequently commit presumptuous sins, despair of ever subduing them.*

Let your own hearts make answer : when you have sinned presumptuously against your own consciences and

God's known law, have you not been ready to conclude, that it were as good for you to abandon yourselves over to the swinge of such a lust, as still to strive thus in vain against it? When resolutions against sin prove unsuccessful, they commonly end in desperate resolutions to sin: and yet, truly, this is no other, than as if a man should therefore burn his house down about him, because it wants repairing. Are there none among us now, that, when we have sinned against light and against convictions, sit down under this despairing temptation, that it is in vain for us ever to make head against such a lust more: it will prevail; and why should we not, therefore, give up ourselves to it? Truly, what you have been tempted unto, others have practised: and, because the stream of their corruptions is violent, they therefore spread out their arms to it, and suffer themselves to be carried down by it into the gulf of perdition; resolving to run after the stream and current of their own corruptions, because they find it so strong; despairing of ever subduing them, having been so often overcome by them.

(2.) *The frequent commission of presumptuous sins makes men despair of ever obtaining pardon for them;* and that hardens them in resolutions to continue in them, and then they cry out with Cain, ‘ My iniquity is greater than can be forgiven.’

Despair of pardon oftentimes exasperates to more and greater offences. As if a thief, when he is robbing of a man, should argue with himself, ‘ If I am detected of this robbery, it will cost me my life; and, if I murder him, I can but lose my life;’ just so do many argue: ‘ My sins are already so many and so great, that I cannot avoid damnation for them: I see my name pricked down among reprobates: it is but in vain for me to struggle against my own fate and God’s decrees: it is too nice a scruple, since God hath given me up to the devil, for me not to give myself up to sin:’ and so, away they go to sin; and sin at random, desperately and resolvedly. O horrid hardness! that, when the thoughts of hell use to quench and allay the wickedness of other men, when it is most furious; yet these wretches never think of hell, but that

that eternal fire inflames their lusts, and the thoughts of their own destruction do even confirm them in the practice of those very sins that destroy them ! And yet to this pass doth the commission of presumptuous sins bring many a wretched soul in the world. Now resolution to sin, out of despair, is to sin as the devil sins : indeed, it is to give the devil's image in the soul its last flourish : the devils and the damned spirits, as they lie always smothering and burning in hell, so they always hear that dreadful sound, 'For ever thus : for ever thus ;' and, because their chains are made strong and eternal by an almighty decree, this makes them implacable : they fret, and look upward, and curse that God that hath plunged them into those torments, from which hell will never free them : this makes them desperate in their resolutions to sin, because they despair of ever bettering their condition. Beware, therefore, lest you also, by frequent commissions of presumptuous sins, be given up to hellish despair, such as this is ; so to despair of mercy, as, at the same time, to provoke and defy justice.

And that is the first great danger of sinning presumptuously : it will make men resolute, either through security or through despair, to continue in sin.

ii. Presumptuous sins, as they steel the heart with most desperate resolutions, so they also *bazzen the face with most shameless impudency*.

All shame ariseth from the apprehension of some evil suspected of us, or discovered in us ; and the eyes that can discover it, are either the eyes of God and angels, or the eyes of men like ourselves.

Now all presumptuous sinners are grown bold and impudent, as to God and angels. Though God be present with them in the closest secresy, though his eye see them in the thickest darkness ; yet this doth not at all overawe them : they dare sin, even before his face that must judge them. And, if some of them be yet so modest, as to conceal their wickedness from the notice of men : yet they are also so foolish and bold, as not to regard God's seeing them ; in comparison of whom, to sin in the sight of the whole world is but to sin in secret. But yet the frequency of

presumptuous sinning will also quickly cause them to abandon this shame too, and to outface the face of men, which they more dread than they do the face of God or angels.

The Lord himself takes notice of the impudency of such men: and, certainly, every sinner hath cause to blush, when God calls him impudent. In Jeremiah vi. 15. says God, "Were they ashamed, when they had committed all these abominations? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush:" and in Jer. iii. 3. they have "a whore's forehead, and they refuse to be ashamed:" and, in Isaiah iii. 9, "The shew of their countenance," says God, "doth witness against them: they declare their sin as Sodom; they hide it not."

There are three degrees of shamelessness in sinning, to which many of our grosser sinners do arrive.

*1. Those, that will dare to commit foul sins, even publicly and knowingly.*

Some men lose half the pleasure of their sins, unless others may know how wicked they are, and how far they dare affront the Almighty. The sweater swears not in secret, where none can hear him; but in company, and calls men to witness as well as God. The drunkard reels in our streets, in mid-day; and is ready to discharge his vomit in the faces of all that he meets with. Truly, presumptuous sinning will at last grow to public sinning. Not only at the last day, that, which hath been done in secret, shall be divulged upon the house-top; but, many times, even in this life: those sins, that, at first, wicked men durst not commit, but in secret where no eye saw them, after a while they are grown bolder, and will act and own before all men.

*2. Others are advanced farther; and, not only sin openly, but boast and glory in their sins.*

The apostle, in Phil. iii. 19. speaks of those, "whose glory was in their shame;" they boast, as if they had done some notable exploit; when, alas! they have only murdered a poor soul of their own, that lay drawing on towards its death before.

*3. There are others so shameless, that they boast of those very wickednesses, that they never dared to commit.*

As cowards brag of their exploits in such and such a

combat, which yet they never durst engage in : so there are a generation in the world, who dare not, for the terror of their consciences, commit a sin, that yet will boast that they have committed it ; as if it were a generous and honourable thing, to be called and accounted a daring sinner. Shall I call these men, or monsters rather, that boast of such things as make them more like devils than men ? and yet, even to this height of profligate impiety, will presumptuous sins lead you. But, let all such know, God is resolved to try the foreheads of these men at the last and great day of judgment ; and, in despite of all their swaggering and boldness, shame and everlasting confusion shall cover their faces, as impudent as they are now.

iii. Consider this ; *what a fearful thing it will be, if God should cut off such men in the very act of some presumptuous sin, without affording them any time and space of repentance.*

And have they any security that God will not ? What promise have they, that God will forbear them one moment longer ? Nay, they have been often told, that God will make a speedy end with them ; that he will " take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in his wrath ; " as it is in Ps. lviii. 9 : and, therefore, he strikes not, without giving them warning enough, though he strike suddenly.

God hath two chief attributes, that he especially aims to glorify in all his transactions with men ; his mercy and his justice. These are the two great hinges, upon which all the frame of his providence moves. The mighty affairs of eternal election and reprobation were first agitated, out of design to magnify mercy and justice ; and all temporal concerns are governed in such a way as may most advance these two attributes of mercy and justice.

Now mercy hath already had a large share of glory, in forbearing after so many provocations ; in waiting so long to be gracious ; staying year after year, expecting your repentance ; and, if you contemn the riches of God's grace and mercy still, have you not reason to fear it will be the turn of justice to deal with you next ?

And, believe it, the commission of presumptuous sins

gives God a fair opportunity, to glorify his justice upon you to the utmost: and why should you think God will lose such an advantage? All the world must needs fall down, and with trembling adore the just severity of God, when they see a notorious sinner cut off in the very act of some notorious and presumptuous wickedness. In Deut. xvii. 12, 13. when a presumptuous sinner is punished, says God, " all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously :" and, if so much glory will accrue to God by destroying you, why then should he spare you one moment longer than your next sin? This is the best use he can make of presumptuous sinners, even to set them up as examples and monuments of his wrath and vengeance to terrify others: and why should you think then, since his mercy hath been glorified already to you in waiting and forbearing so long, that he will not upon the next sin you commit glorify his justice also?

It may be, God hath begun to deal thus already with some of you. In the very midst of your sins, hath not the hand-writing of some remarkable judgment appeared against you? Hath not God smitten some of you in your persons, in your estates, or in your relations? Well, take Christ's counsel, " Sin no more, lest a worst thing befal you;" lest, on the next provocation, he strike you through, and sink you to hell. O consider what a fearful thing it is, while your souls are all on flame in the commission of sin, then for God to hurl them down into everlasting and unquenchable fire; as he may take just occasion and advantage to do, for the glorifying of his Justice.

iv. Consider this;—*It is very hard to bring presumptuous sinners to reformation and repentance.*

The first step to evangelical sorrow, is legal terror; which the Spirit of God works, by convincing the sinner of judgment and wrath to come. But, tell a presumptuous sinner what judgment and wrath are due to him, that it is impossible for him to escape the vengeance of God, that justice will overtake him; read to him all the curses contained in the book of God, and tell him that they are all entailed upon his sin: this moves him not: he knew and considered all this before. A presumptuous sinner must be a knowing sinner: he knows what hell is, as well as

ever any man did, that hath not felt it: he knows what a precious soul he destroys, how glorious a heaven he forfeits, what dreadful condemnation he exposeth himself to: he knows all this, and yet he sins; and, though this were enough, one would think, to daunt a devil, yet he breaks through all this knowledge to his own lusts again. The apostle speaks of such in Romans i. 32. " who, knowing the judgment of God, that they, which commit such things, are worthy of death," yet presumptuously continue in the commission of such sins. Now what hope is there, of reforming and reclaiming such as these are; that sin, after they have cast up their accounts what it will cost them? Certainly, they, that dare sin when they see hell before them, there is no hope that they will leave sinning, till they see hell flaming round about them, and themselves in the midst of it.

III. Now, though these presumptuous sins be in their nature and aggravation so heinous, yet *are the best Christians exceeding prone to commit them.*

When the sea is tempestuous, did we only stand safe upon the shore, it were enough to behold the woeful shipwrecks of others, with that horror and commiseration that such a spectacle deserves: but, when we are tossed in the same tempest, and see some split against rocks, and others swallowed up of quicksands, unto which naturally the stream strongly carries us also; truly, then, our pity and detestation of their dangers, our horror and consternation of their ruin, are not sufficient without great care and diligence for our own security and preservation.

Therefore, O Christians, look to yourselves. The glorified saints in heaven see the dangers they have escaped, with praise; and the dangers others fall into, with pity: but thou, O Christian, art not yet got to shore. Still thou sailest upon the same sea, wherein most do perish; even the raging sea of corruption, which is yet made more raging by the storms of temptation: and, if thou seest many, that are bound heaven-ward, make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, it is not enough for thee, to slight their dangers, or to censure and pity their miscarriages; but fear thou also, lest the same corruptions and temptations overwhelm and drown thee in the same perdition. This

is the apostle's caution : 1 Cor. x. 12. " Let him, that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall :" and, in Rom. xi. 20. " Thou standest by faith : be not high-minded, but fear."

And, indeed, because of that violent inclination that is in all unto sin, there is no state in this life so perfect, as to make this exhortation useless and unseasonable. David himself prays for restraining grace : " Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins."

From which words I formerly collected, and shall now prosecute this proposition ; that *in the best Christians, there is great proneness to the worst sins.*

In the handling of this so true a point, I shall, by some demonstrations, make it evident, that there is a strong inclination in the best to the worst sins ;—and then search out the original cause, whence it is, that, since, in the first creation, man's will was left wholly free and indeterminate, without any other inclination to good or evil, besides what his free and arbitrary choice made ; yet, in the new creation, whereby souls are repaired, there should be still left in it that bias that strongly sways it unto evil.

These two things, God assisting, I shall at present do.

i. For the *demonstrations* of the point, I shall give you them in these following particulars.

1. *The examples of others* may here be a convincing argument.

If I should summon in the most excellent of God's saints, a man might wonder that drunkenness, incest, murder, and abjuration of Christ, that such brats of Satan should ever be found in company with such an angelical troop as they are : and, yet, Noah is drunk, Lot is incestuous, David murders, and Peter abjures. These glorious stars have had their twinklings ; and, if the leaders and champions are thus foiled, what may we think then hath in all ages befallen the crowd of vulgar Christians ? We may, with truth and boldness, say, Never was there a sin committed in the world, how horrid soever, unless the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, but God may find it written down in his book of remembrance under their names, whose names he himself hath written down in the

book of life. And, what ! shall we say, when we see a stone falling, that there is no weight nor propenseness in it to fall ? Shall we say, when we see such eminent Christians falling into sin, yea even into great and gross sins, that they have not strong propensions and inclinations to sin ?

Yet, O ye saints, divulge not these things to wicked men : whisper them softly one to another, with fear and trembling, lest some profane wretch or other overhear you, and take that for encouragement that was only meant for caution. What is more common, than for the vilest sinners to plead for their excuse, or warrant rather, the foul miscarriages of God's dearest saints ? Thus the drunkard looks upon holy Noah as a pot-companion ; whereby he discovers his nakedness in a worse sense than ever Cham did : and, thus, the unclean sensualist quotes David, and calls him in to be the patron of his debauchery : certainly, if there be any grief than can overcast the perfect joys of the saints in heaven, it is, that their names and examples should, to the great dishonour of God, be produced by wicked and sinful men, to countenance their grossest sins and wickednesses. But, let such know, that though God hath set up these in his church to be monuments of his mercy, to declare to humble and penitent sinners how great sins he can pardon ; yet, if any hereupon embolden themselves in sin, instead of being set up as monuments of mercy, God will set them up as pillars of salt.

2. It appears, that there is a strong proneness in the best to the worst sins, from *those frequent and pressing exhortations, that are given us in scripture, to watchfulness against them, and to the mortification of them.*

Wherefore were these curbs necessary, but that God sees our lusts are headstrong, and ready to fly out and hurry us into all excesses ?

Nay, these exhortations are not so particularly, nor with so great emphasis, given to the wicked, as they are to the children of God. Of the wicked God saith, " He that will be wicked, let him be wicked still : that is all the care God takes of them ; as we use to say of them, that we despair to reclaim, " Nay, let them take their own courses." But he especially warns and exhorts the godly to beware

of those sins, that one would think a godly man were scarce liable to commit.

See how Christ cautions his disciples : Luke xxi. 34. "Take heed to yourselves," says he, "lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life." Would not any man wonder, that our Saviour should so solicitously warn them against surfeiting and drunkenness, which are the sins usually of a plentiful estate? but, what! warn them against these sins, whose poverty was such and was to be such, that those, that gave unto them a cup of cold water, should receive a plentiful reward for their pains! Were they in such danger, to be surfeited by the one, and drunk with the other? And, what! they like to be choked with the cares of this life, and with carking to get what they had not, who had but just before renounced all that they had to follow Christ ! Yea, but Christ knew, that even in these poor abstemious disciples, there was a natural proneness to gluttony, and rioting, and drunkenness ; and, therefore, he thus exhorts them : and he doth it, that grace may keep them from inclining to these sins, as their low and persecuted condition should be sure to keep them from committing them.

So also the apostle, in Col. iii. 5. speaking to them, that should certainly appear with Christ in glory, as you may see in verse 4. yet these he commands to mortify their members that were upon the earth. But what members are these ? It may be they are only vanity and inconstancy of thoughts, levity and unfixedness of affections, deadness and heaviness of heart, and such other less sins, that, should they be perfectly free from, they should be perfectly holy. "No," says the apostle : "these members are the big limbs of the old man : they are fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness." And, in verse 8. he exhorts them again, to "put off all these things ; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication," and lying : and so he goes on reckoning up foul and horrid sins ; and exhorts them to mortify these sins, who were to appear with Christ in glory. Those, who never lived in them, not at least after their conversion, is it not strange, that such eminent Chris-

tians as these were, should need exhortations against such foul sins ? There are many persons in a state of nature, that would count their morals much wronged, if you should be officiously importunate with them, not to commit adultery or blasphemy, not to be covetous or drunkards, or the like : this they would look upon as an injury done to them, that you should suspect such things as these are of them : would not they say, as Hazael did to the prophet, What ! are thy servants dogs, that they should do such great things as these are ? But the apostle knew that the inclinations of the best were too strong ; even to those sins, that a perfect moralist would think scorn that they should be suspected of : and, therefore, he exhorts them, with all earnestness and frequent importunity, to mortify such foul sins as these are.

3. It appears also from *the irritating power that the law hath.*

Even in the best of God's children, there is accidentally, through our corruption, such a malign influence, if I may so call it, in the holy, just, and good law of God, that instead of quelling sin, it doth the more enrage and provoke it ; and this we call the irritating power of the law. Thus, the apostle tells us in Rom. vii. 8. that sin takes occasion by the law, to work in us " all manner of concupiscence."

Now were it possible, that sin should grow strong by that law that was given on purpose to destroy it, but that there are in us violent propensions towards what is forbidden us, and eager desires after that which God hath denied us ? So strangely depraved are our corrupt natures, that we swell with our yoke and labour to throw off whatever may lay a restraint upon us : like green sticks, being bent one way by natural strength we start as far back the other way. Can none of us call to mind some sins, that possibly we should never have committed, had they not been forbidden to us ? The command oftentimes gives corruption a hint, in what and how it may offend God. And is not this therefore a clear demonstration of that mighty proneness that there is in all of us unto sin, when that law, that forbids sin, shall prove an incentive to it ? The more will a high-mettled horse foam and fling,

the harder you rein him in. And if you stop a river in its course, it will rise and swell till it overflows its banks : and whence is this, but because there is a natural proneness in it to run towards the sea ? And when God casts his law before men as a stop to them in their sinful course, they swell the higher, till they have borne away or overflowed all those bounds and dams, that God hath set to bound them in. And whence proceeds all this, but only because there is a natural tendency and propensity in men's hearts to sin ? and, therefore, the more they are opposed, the higher still do their corruptions swell, and the more do they rage. And, although the force of this sinful propensity may be, in some of God's children, in a good measure broken ; yet, in the very best of them, is there some degree or other of this irritating power of the law, to stir them up to sin, even by forbidding them to sin.

And that is the last demonstration.

ii. The next thing propounded, was to inquire into the *original cause, whence this sinful inclination proceeds* ; how it comes to pass, that there is, in all men, and even in the best Christians, such a strong propensity unto sin.

In the inquiry into this, I shall lead you on gradually, by these following steps.

1. *In man's first creation, the will had in it a natural power to determine the specification of its own acts* ; that is, freely to sway itself either unto good or evil, which of them it pleased ; and, if there was any bias in it to draw it more one way than another, as some there was, it was an inclination to that which is good.

For man's faculties were then entire and perfect : his knowledge clear, to discern what was his chief good, and his highest happiness : his will free, to choose it ; and his affections ready, to embrace and clasp about it. His love, his fear, his joy, his delight, were all of them centered in God : that, which is now in us from grace, was in him from nature.

Since the fall, we need a two-fold assistance, one, a common influence and assistance : such, as is vouchsafed to all men, to enable them to the performance of the common and ordinary actions of this life : it is from God's

immediate influence, that we are enabled to move, to think, to speak ; "for in him we live, and move, and have our being." And then we need also a special influence, vouchsafed only to the children of God : whereby we are enabled to perform holy and spiritual actions ; as to love, fear, and obey God sincerely : and this special influence we commonly call grace ; whereby we are enabled to act divinely and spiritually.

Now the difference betwixt common and special influence lies in this : that what God works in us by a common influence, is wrought without any grudge or reluctance in man's nature to the contrary ; but what is wrought in us by a special influence, is brought to pass, nature gainsaying and contradicting. Thus, when God enables a sinner to act faith, or love, or any divine and heavenly grace, this is contrary to the tendency of corrupt nature, and therefore this is called special grace.

Now while man stood in the state of innoeency, there was nothing in his nature, that contradicted his fear of God, his dependance on God, or his love to God ; and, therefore, to enable him to act all these, he needed no special influence of special grace, but only of a common and ordinary providence. Before the fall, Adam stood in no need at all of any such thing as that special grace of which we now stand in need ; but the same assistance of God, for the kind of it, that enabled him to move, or to speak, or to think, was sufficient also to enable him to perform the most spiritual obedience : because, then, the most spiritual obedience was no more to him, than those actions which we call natural, as eating, and drinking, speaking, walking, and thinking, are to us now ; and, therefore, he required no more assistance from God for the performance of spiritual obedience, than we now require from God for our natural actions. Now, as he had this perfection of power to perform what was good ; so, he had a proneness of will also to it : but, yet, in that proneness there was not perseverance ; he might, as afterwards he did, turn aside from God unto Satan ; and, notwithstanding his inclination to obedience and proneness to that which was good, yet, having not a persever-

ance in that proneness, but being lord over his own will as he was over the rest of the visible creation, he voluntarily and wilfully consented to the commission of sin.

2. *This voluntary inclination of Adam to sin hath ever since, by a dreadful yet righteous judgment of God, brought upon all his posterity a natural and necessary inclination unto sin: so that now, either whatever they do is sin, or there is sin in whatever they do.*

That we may clearly apprehend how Adam's first sin and provocation, committed so many thousand years ago, causes such strong propensions to sin in all his posterity, you must observe these following particulars.

(1.) *We and all mankind were in Adam, not only as in our common parent, from whom we received our being: but as in our common head, surety, and representative, from whom we were to receive either our well or our ill being.*

He was the head of the covenant. Both he and we were parties in the covenant: he obeying, we obeyed; and, he sinning, we transgressed: what he did, as in this public capacity, was not alone his personal act, but it was ours also. Now what right Adam had to indent for his posterity, and to oblige them to the terms of the covenant, I have long since opened to you on another occasion, and I shall therefore pass it by now.

(2.) The threatening annexed to the covenant of works was death. "In the day that thou eatest thereof," says God, "thou shalt surely die :" Gen. ii. 17.

There is a threefold death, that, by the violation of this command, man was subject unto: a temporal death; consisting in the miseries of this life, and, at last, in a separation of the soul from the body: an eternal death; consisting in the everlasting separation of the soul from God: and a spiritual death; consisting in the loss and separation of God's image from the soul. And, upon Adam's sin, this threefold death was threatened; namely, temporal, spiritual, and eternal. Of these three, the spiritual death was presently inflicted upon man's fall; consisting in the separation of the image of God from the soul: man was immediately deprived of that holiness and perfect righteousness, wherein the image of God did consist.

*3. No action can be holy, that doth not flow from the image of God in the soul, as from its principle.*

Every action is sinful, that hath not the glory of God for its end. Now no action can have the glory of God for its end, that hath not the image of God for its principle: and, therefore, man being despoiled of this image of God, there is no action of any man in the state of nature, but what is sinful and corrupt. And hence it is, that in regeneration, God again stamps his image upon the soul: not, indeed, so perfectly as at man's first creation; but, yet, in such a degree, as doth, through grace, enable him to act holily, and in some measure according to the will of God.

*4. Though man may be despoiled of the image of God, and cannot act holily; yet he is a busy and active creature, and must and will be still acting.* He hath an active nature, and he hath active faculties, still left him; though the image of God, that should make those actions holy, is justly taken from him.

And here, at last, we have traced out the true cause of that strong propension, that there is in all men unto sin. While the soul enjoyed the image of God, it sought especially to do all in reference unto God: but, now that it hath lost that image, it cannot any longer raise up its actions to a suitableness to the will of God; and therefore now it sinks them, and seeks only to please its own carnal desires and appetite. Take the whole resolution of it in two or three words. The nature of the soul makes it prone and inclined to act; for it is a busy, active creature: and, if it acts, it must sin; because it hath not the image of God to raise its actions to a holy and divine conformity to the will of God: and, therefore, now to be prone to act, is to be prone to sin: and this is the true ground of that strong propension, that is in all men, to that, which is evil and sinful.

But, you will say, "If this proneness to sin be from the loss of God's image, how comes it to pass, that those, who are renewed again according to the image of God, do still complain of this strong proneness and propensity to sin?"

To this I answer, that in those of fallen mankind, to whom God is pleased to restore his image in regeneration, accordingly as this image is more or less perfect, so is this

proneness to sin more or less strong; but, because the best are but in part renewed, therefore this sinful proneness is but in part destroyed in the best: grace weakens it, but grace doth not quite remove it; and therefore the holiest Christian hath, and shall have as long as he lives in this world, cause to complain, with the apostle, Rom. vii. 23. "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind." There is a carnal, sensual inclination in him; strongly swaying him to sin, contrary to the bent and inclination of his renewed part: and, therefore, he shall have cause still to cry out, with the apostle, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Because the image of God is but in part restored in him, therefore there is partly also an inclination in him to sin.

Yea, but you will say, 'Possibly this inclination, in the best Christians, may be to smaller and lesser sins; but it cannot be thought, that a child of God, who is renewed again according to the image of God, should have a strong proneness and inclination to those foul sins, that the wicked of the world lie in.'

To this I answer:—the most that grace doth, in the best of God's children, in this life, is, to weaken and lessen that natural propensity that is in a child of God to every sin; but not to destroy that propensity to any one sin at all, no not to the foulest and vilest sins. The old man, in this life, never loseth one limb; though it be weakened and consuming away in his whole body. Take a child of God, that, before his conversion, had a strong propensity to any sin; suppose what sin you will, though never so foul and horrid: the same propensity still remains: it is not indeed so violent and raging as it was; but there it is: it is abated and overcome by grace; but still there is the same proneness to sin. It may be, a Christian is not so sensible of this propensity to sin, nor so frequently as formerly he hath been; but, yet, the experience of the best sometimes can inform them, that, even to the worst sins and most horrid temptations, they find a faction and party in their hearts to promote them; and, it is as much work as grace can do, to subdue and quell these great sins.

iii. I now come to inquire into the *grounds and reasons*, why God should suffer their proneness to sin to continue in his dearest saints and children, after their conversion and regeneration.

Possibly, some may think it would have been far more conducible to God's glory, as well as to their own peace and comfort, if God had at once, at their first conversion, utterly destroyed all the seeds and remainders of corruption in them, and at first made them as perfectly holy as they shall be at last. Hereby, God would not have been so provoked as he is, nor his Spirit so grieved, nor the devil so rejoiced, at the daily miscarriages of the best Christians. Wherefore is it, that God hath perfected the saints now in glory, but that they might yield him perfect obedience and service? Why, truly our services would be as perfect and as well pleasing unto God as theirs are, were our imperfect natures as theirs are; and, therefore, God would have had a double heaven, an upper and a lower heaven, had he but destroyed sin in us upon earth: and, since it might seem so much to redound to his glory, why hath he not consummated our sanctification: but hath still left thorns in our eyes, and goads in our sides, with which not only we but he himself also is grieved and vexed? What should be the reason of this?

To answer this question: you must know the general and comprehensive reason thereof, is his own sovereign, unaccountable good-will and pleasure: into which the reason of all things is most rationally resolved: and, therefore, that, among all mankind that lay all alike in the same mass of corruption, some are sanctified and some are not; that, among them that are sanctified, some are sanctified in one degree and some in another, and yet none so perfectly as to be freed from sin; the best of God's saints may rest satisfied in this: it is God's good pleasure, to give forth his grace in such a measure; to some more, to some less; as shall only weaken, not utterly destroy, the corruptions of his people. Therefore the apostle, in Heb. x. 10. speaking of Christ's coming to do the will of God, "by the which will," says he, "we are sanctified." That we are sanctified, when others are not, is from the will of God: that we are sanctified in

such a measure, not more nor less, must be resolved into the sovereign and uncontrollable will of God : “ by the which will we are sanctified.”

And yet, there are also many wise ends and reasons of this will of God, why he should leave still such sinful propensions and incorrupt inclinations, even in the best of his people. As,

1. Hereby *God maintains a beauty and harmony in the works of grace, as well as in the works of nature.*

The beauty and harmony of the universe consists in gradation ; whereby, as by little steps or rounds, we ascend from one kind of being to another. Thus, God hath placed man in the world, as it were a middle step betwixt brute creatures and angels ; and, therefore, he partakes somewhat of the nature of both : his soul and his intellectual part—that, is made like the nature of angels : and then there is in him a sensitive part, desires and propensions ; and, on this side, he is akin even to the beasts that perish. So is it also in the works of grace : a Christian is, as it were, a step betwixt a wicked man and an angel : a wicked man hath no grace, and a holy angel hath no sin : now to make up this great gap, God hath placed a Christian as a middle step betwixt them, to tack and unite the moral world together : there is in him a heavenly and spiritual part ; and, by that, he is of affinity to the angels : and there are also in him sinful desires and sinful inclinations ; and, by these he holds hands with wicked men, and is thereby joined to them. And thus God illustrates his wisdom, in causing such an admirable harmony and gradual difference in the works of grace : bringing men out of a state of mere sinful nature, to a state of grace mixed with sin ; and, from a state of mixed grace, to a state of pure and complete grace, where, at last a Christian shall be fully consummated, and be as the angels of God. Thus, from step to step, God gradually carries on the work of sanctification to perfection ; and, hereby, he maintains an admirable beauty and harmony in the works of grace, as well as in the works of nature. This sets forth the beauty of the world, that there is such a conveyance from one kind of creature to another : where-

by they touch one another, and are tacked together by several orders, as inanimate and sensitive ; then, rational, as men ; then intellectual, as angels. So also is it in grace : from a wicked man, to a saint, partly wicked and partly gracious : from a saint on earth, to a saint in heaven ; where the imperfect work of grace, here on earth, is swallowed up by perfect grace and holiness.

2. Therefore doth God suffer sinful inclinations to remain in the best Christians, *that he might have wherewithal continually to exercise the graces of his people.*

Some graces are graces of war, if I may so call them ; which would never be exercised, if we had not enemies to encounter with. And, therefore, as it is said in Judges iii. 2. that God would not utterly drive out all the nations before the children of Israel, but left some of them among them, that, by continual combating and fighting with them, they might learn war : so neither hath God utterly expelled the Spiritual Canaanites out of the hearts of his people, to this end, that, by daily conflicting with them, they might learn “the wars of the Lord,” and might grow expert in the handling and using every piece of their spiritual and Christian armour. How should we keep up a holy watch and ward, if we had no enemies to beat up our quarters ? and how should we exercise faith, which St. John tells us is our victory, if we had no enemies to conquer ? and how should we exercise repentance and godly sorrow, whereby the soul is recruited and whereby its graces are reinforced again, if so be we were never foiled nor overcome by our spiritual enemies ? Part of our spiritual armour would soon rust, but that our corruptions and sinful inclinations put us daily upon a necessity of using it. Shortly, when we come to heaven, we shall have no need nor use of these graces : there, we shall be out of the reach of all enemies : and, therefore, God is resolved to exercise these graces here, and suffers corruption to abide in this life ; that so, grace, making way through this corruption, may enter into heaven, where it shall for ever rest and triumph. These warring graces of the saints have no time nor place to be exercised in, but only in this life : and, because God will have all the parts

of holiness have their due exercise, therefore hath he left these corruptions in the soul, that their warring graces might have enemies to encounter with.

*Hereby also the almighty power of God is exceedingly glorified, in preserving us, through faith, unto salvation; notwithstanding our own violent inclination and proneness to sin, unto our own destruction.* Though St. Peter, when he walked upon dry land, was upheld by the power of Christ, as God: yet that power was not so remarkably glorious, in his preservation and walking upon the dry land; as when Christ lent him his hand and upheld him from sinking, when he walked and stood upon the surface of the water; because then he had a proneness and propensity in him to sink, more than when he stood upon the dry land. So, truly, I may say that the standing of the glorified saints in heaven in a state of holiness, although it may be and is a work of God's almighty power: yet it seems not altogether so much to magnify the power of God, in preserving them in that state of holiness and glory, no not to eternity; as it doth to preserve a poor weak Christian one day in a state of grace: because there is no proneness in a glorified saint, to fall from his happiness into sin; but there is in a saint on earth, to fall from grace, and from the work of God upon his soul.

4. *This glorifies also the prevalence of Christ's intercession, and the triumph of God's pardoning grace and mercy.*

O, how exceedingly glorious is free grace! in that God can and doth, for Christ's sake, pardon many and great sins, though he certainly knows there is such a sinful propensity left behind in man's nature, that will again be breaking out into the same or greater provocations!

iv. The application of this point shall be in these particulars.

1. Is there so strong a proneness in the best Christians, to the worst sins? Hence then, *let wicked men learn, not to insult over them when they fall, nor to reproach holiness with their foul miscarriages.*

Truly, grace hath always found it ill-neighbourhood,

to dwell in the same soul with sin : for wicked men, being themselves all of one piece, know not how to distinguish betwixt the propensions of the one and of the other : they know not how to distinguish when the saint in a Christian acts, and when the sinner : and, so, they very irrationally charge holiness with those crimes, that, were they not in part unholy, they should never commit. When a man, that makes a forward profession of religion, and in the general course of his life makes conscience of his ways, doth, through temptation or inadvertency, fall into some sin that becomes notorious ; what is more common in the mouths of profane scoffers, than this ? " This is one of your godly ones ! This is one of the sanctified gang !" Thus they laugh and sneer at him. But, sinner, let me tell thee, thou mistakest the man. Did you ever hear him pray so as to charm heaven ; and, which is more, so as to melt even your hearts into affection ? Did you ever hear him discourse of spiritual things, as if he had been intimate with angels, and one of heaven's secretaries ? Have you formerly observed in him a blameless and exemplary conversation ? Then, indeed, you might say this is one of the godly : holiness owns him, religion glories in him, while he thus adorns his profession ; but, when he sins, say not, " Behold one of the godly :" this is blasphemy against religion. No : it is not the godly man that sins : no ; it is the corrupt and unholy part in him : it is that part in him, that is most like to thee. In Romans vii. 17. says the apostle, " It is no more I, but sin that dwelleth in me." And, if it be indwelling sin that is the cause of actual sin in the best, why then do you belie their graces ? Why do you accuse them, whom the apostle vindicates ; telling you plainly, that it is not they, but sin in them ? Learn, therefore, to put a difference betwixt a saint and a sinner in every child of God : and, if it be the sinner in them, that exposeth them to your scorns and flouts, what else do you in upbraiding of them, but more upbraid yourselves, that are nothing but sinners throughout ? Judge, therefore, how senseless and unreasonable it is for you to reproach them, whom, were they not so much like you, you would have

nothing to reproach with. Therefore, let wicked men never more flout and jeer at the falls and sins of those, that are holy; imputing them to them, as holy: for it is the sinner in them that sins, and not the saint; and, by upbraiding them for sin, they do more upbraid and reproach themselves.

2. Is there such a strong propension, in the best, to the worst sins? *See then what cause even the best have, to be continually humble.*

Oh, this is that, which breaks the very heart, and rends the very bowels of a true Christian, that he should be so violently inclined to that, which, of all things in the world, his God is most averse to; and which, of all things in the world, as it is the only thing he never made, so it is that which he always hates. This is that, which makes him smite his breast with anguish; and cry out, with the apostle, “O wretched man that I am!”

And well, truly, may the best saint call himself a wretched man, since he carries that in his bosom, that will be a perpetual torment and vexation to him as long as he lives. There are factions and rebellions, intestine dis cords and civil wars within; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the spirit lusting against the flesh. There is a sea of wickedness; and yet, in the midst of it, true grace, like fire, striving to burn it up. Nay, no wonder this great combustion makes such a smoke and smother, as wrings tears from his eyes. For, when he meditates, this chokes his meditation: he begins with God; but, through this sinful proneness, he falls, he knows not how, into some impertinent thought or other, and in a moment slides from heaven to earth: his thoughts are like ravelled thread: he knows not the method, order, nor end of them. When he prays, this corruption sits very heavy upon his heart: and as, at the evening, the shadow of the body moves much faster; so, truly, many times, the lips move apace in prayer, when yet the heart is dull and drowsy. Wherever he is, whatever he is about, lust is intruding into his company: corruption will be thrusting itself into all his actions. This is that, which makes him weary of his very life, so that he could very well be con-

tent, nay he really and heartily wishes from his heart, that this house of clay were pulled down about him.

Truly, when we look abroad into the world, and take notice in what filthy sins it wallows; what oaths and cursings, what blasphemies and drunkenness, what murders, uncleannesses, and riots have every where overspread the face of the whole earth, what do we see, but the effects of that sinful nature, that is common to us, as well as unto them? There we see our own hearts unbowedelled; and there we can discern what ourselves are, at the cost of other men's sins. What says the wise man, in Prov. xxvii. 19? "As in water, face answereth to face; so doth the heart of a man to a man." It was the proud pharisee's boast, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican :" as it is in Luke xviii. 11. Yes, believe it, you, and I, and all, yea the best of us all, are even as others are. The vilest sinners are the truest glasses to represent to our view what our hearts are. Their wickedness gives in a true inventory of what lies locked up in our breasts: there, we have the same vipers knotting and sprawling within, that crawl forth in others' lives: there, are rancour, and malice, and hatred, and slaughters, and adulteries; and the whole spawn of all those black sins, that have made men either infamous in story, or mighty in torment. And, that we have not yet out-sinned all the copies that ever were set us, that we have not yet discovered some new unknown wickedness to the world, is not because our inclination to sin or our stock of corruption fails us; but because God's grace, either preventing or renewing, fails not.

Where then is the Christian, that hath not cause to go mourning to his grave? Can you blame him, when you see him sad and disconsolate; when he hath no less reason for it, than a heart brimfull of sin? Certainly, that man neither loves God, nor his own soul, that can hear that there is in him such a violent propension to injure the one and ruin the other, without exclaiming, with the prophet, 'Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of an unclean heart and of polluted lips!' It is

but just, yea it is all the reason in the world, that, while our hearts continue to be fountains of sin, our heads should continue to be fountains of tears..

3. Is there, in the best, a strong proneness to the worst sins? *What cause have we then, to long and breathe after heaven!*

For, not till then, shall we be free from it. Indwelling sin hath taken a lease of our souls, and holds them by our own lives: it will be in us to the last gasp; and, as the heart is the last that dies, so also is that corruption that lodgeth in it. But, yet, die it must, and die it shall: and this is the comfort of a child of God, that, though he brought sin with him into the world, yet he shall not carry it with him out of the world. God hath so wisely ordered and appointed it, that, as death came in by sin, so also shall sin itself be destroyed by death: as worms, when they creep into their holes, leave their slime and their dirt behind them; truly, so is it with a Christian: when he dies, he leaves all his slime, all his filth and corruption, at the mouth of the grave; and his soul gets free from that clog, and mounts up into the bosom of God: and there alone is it, that it shall no more strive and struggle against sinful propensions and inclinations: there, shall it be eternally fixed and confirmed, not only in glory, but in holiness also: we shall there be out of the reach of Satan's temptations. We read, indeed, that sometimes the devil appears before God, as an accuser; but we never read, that he comes there as a tempter: we shall no more feel the first risings and steamings-up of corruption, there: no more shall we cast kind glances upon our sins, nor have hovering thoughts towards them. O blessed necessity, when the soul shall be tied up to one all-satisfying good! when it shall have as natural a proneness and ardour to delight in God, as to love itself, and to delight in its own happiness! And who then would desire to linger any longer here below; and to spin out his wretched life, wherein sin and sorrow shall have the greatest share? Here the best of us are in perpetual combats and quarrels betwixt sin and grace: the one will not yield, and the other cannot: corruption compels one way, and grace commands another. Haste, therefore, O

Christian, out of this scuffle : make haste to heaven, and there the controversy will be for ever decided : there, shalt thou no more live in fear of new sins, nor yet in sorrow for old sins ; but all sorrow and sighing shall flee away : all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and all sin shall be rooted out of our hearts ; and we shall be perfectly holy, even as the angels themselves.

4. Is there such a strong proneness, in the best, to the worst sins ? *This then should teach us, carefully to avoid all temptations to sin, and whatever may be an occasion to draw forth that corruption that lies latent within us.*

Wherefore is it, that one petition, of those few that Christ taught his disciples, was, that God would not lead them into temptation ; but because he knew that there are in all of us sinful natures, that do too, too well correspond with temptations ? And he knew, that, if we were brought into temptations, it is very seldom that we are brought off from them without sin.

Were we as free from inherent sin, as Adam was at first ; or, were we confirmed in grace, as the saints in heaven now are ; we might then repel all temptations with ease : and therefore our Saviour, whose nature was spotless by an extraordinary conception, and whose holiness was secure to him by an unspeakable union of the god-head, tells us, in John xiv. 30. the prince of this world came and found nothing in him. The devil came to tempt him ; but, because he found nothing in him, therefore he could fasten nothing upon him : no temptation could enter, because there was no corruption to receive it ; and, therefore, when he tempted Christ, he only cast fiery darts against an impenetrable rock ; a rock, that will beat them back again into his own face.

- But our corruptions have made us combustible matter, that there is scarce a dart thrown at us in vain : when he tempts us, it is but like the casting of fire into tinder, that presently catcheth : our hearts kindle upon the least spark that falls ; as a vessel, that is brimfull of water, upon the least jog, runs over. Were we but true to ourselves, though the devil might knock, by his temptations ; yet he could never burst open the everlasting doors of our hearts by force or violence : but, alas ! we ourselves are not all

of one heart and one mind : Satan hath got a strong party within us, that, as soon as he knocks, opens to him, and entertains him. And, hence is it, that, many times, small temptations and very petty occasions draw forth great corruptions : as a vessel, that is full of new liquor, upon the least vent given, works over into foam and froth ; so, truly, our hearts, almost upon every slight and trivial temptation, make that inbred corruption, that lodgeth there, swell, and boil, and run over into abundance of scum and filth in our lives and conversations.

Have we not great cause, therefore, to be jealous and suspicious of ourselves ; and to keep a watchful eye over all the motions of those bosom-traitors, our own hearts ? " He that trusteth to his own heart," says Solomon, " is a fool :" Prov. xxviii. 26. Certainly, it were the greatest folly in the world, to trust our hearts, after so frequent experience of their treachery and slipperiness. Venture then not therefore upon temptations. What security have you, that your sinful hearts will not sin ; yea and, it may be, betray you into such great abominations, as you cannot now think of without horror ?

As men presume upon the mercy of God, to pardon their lesser sins ; so they presume also upon their own strength, to preserve them from greater sins. They say of small sins, " Is it not a little one, and our souls shall live ? " And they say of great sins, " Is it not a great one, and our souls shall never commit it ? " Alas ! how know you, but, if once you lay your head in the lap of a temptation, these Philistines will be upon you ? and you, like Sampson, think to go and shake yourselves, as at other times : but, alas ! your great strength is departed from you ; and you, left a prey to the foulest and worst of sins.

And thus now you have seen in David's prayer, the best saints' proneness to the worst sins.

**IV.** The next thing observable is, *the best saints' weakness and inability to preserve themselves without the assistance of divine grace.*

And both these, namely, their proneness to commit sin, and their weakness to resist it, are evident demonstrations of the general proposition ;—the Almighty grace of God is their best, yea, and their only security.

Now, as the bottom and foundation of this present exercise, I shall lay down this point to be treated of ;—*that it is not a Christian's own, but God's power only, that can preserve him from the commission of the most daring and presumptuous sins.*

And yet, truly, if any sins are easy to be resisted and overcome, they are the sins of the grosser sort : for, many times, it is with sins, as with overgrown bodies ; the vaster the bulk of them is, the less is their force and activity.

i. *The soul hath great advantage to lay hold on great sins, and to keep them off at arm's length ; when less sins slip in, and seize upon the heart unperceivably.*

1. *For, great and presumptuous sins seldom make an assault upon the soul, but they give warning beforehand to prepare for resistance.*

The stratagems of war, if they are but discovered, usually prove unsuccessful : as strong liquors, taking vent, lose their strength and spirits. So is it in this holy war also : the soul may easily foresee gross sins, and therefore may more easily avoid them. If a man feel in himself sinful thoughts stirring, and sinful desires struggling, hereupon an assault is made, and the devil hereby gives us warning what sins we should especially watch against : are they lascivious thoughts ? beware of uncleanness : are they wrathful thoughts ? beware of murder : are they murmuring thoughts ? beware of blasphemy : are they worldly thoughts and desires ? beware of oppression and injustice. Thus these giant-like sins stand forth in view, and send open defiance to the soul, and bid it prepare for the combat. Sinful thoughts and sinful desires go before, as armour-bearers use to go before their champions, and proclaim what great lust is about to make an assault upon the soul.

Now such fore-warnings as these are a great advantage, that we have, to repel and subdue them. Job xxxiv. 32. “That, which I see not, teach thou me.” And what follows ? “If I have done iniquity, I will do so no more.” When a man sees his enemy before him, this is a mighty advantage, either to avoid or to conquer.

This advantage we have not against smaller sins. We cannot so easily escape sins of ignorance, because we can-

not see them ; nor yet the sins of our thoughts and desires, because we cannot foresee them. Who of us all knows what thoughts will next bubble up in our hearts, whether holy and gracious, or whether sinful and profane ? These strike without warning ; and, as an enemy within, rise up in the midst of our hearts unseen.

Sins are of two sorts : either those, by which we are tempted ; or those, to which we are tempted. The devil makes use of one sin, to tempt to another ; of a less, to tempt to a greater. Thus, wicked thoughts are, at once, sins in themselves, and also temptations unto wicked actions. Now it is very hard, and the best Christians find it so, to keep themselves free from sinful thoughts ; because these spring up immediately in the heart, without any foregoing temptations to them : but, while the devil is tempting us to sinful actions by sinful thoughts, then the soul hath leisure to recollect itself, to muster up all its graces, to set its guards, to call in divine help and assistance ; and, upon these preparations, it may more easily resist the sin and overcome the temptation.

And that is one great advantage which we have, to keep ourselves from presumptuous sins.

*2. Natural conscience also abhors more, and doth more oppose, these outrageous, presumptuous sins, than it doth those sins, that it judgeth to proceed only from weakness and infirmity ; and this also gives us a mighty advantage to keep ourselves from them.*

Little sins do not much disturb the peace and quietness of a man's conscience ; and, therefore, the apostle speaks of himself before his conversion, in Acts xxiii. 1. "I have lived," says he, "in all good conscience before God until this very day." And so, in Phil. iii. 6, "touching the law," says he, speaking of himself before his conversion, "I was blameless." How could that be ? What ! blameless ; and unconverted, and in a state of nature ? Yes, he was not guilty of notorious, scandalous sins ; and, as for lesser faults, his conscience overlooked them, and never blamed him for them. And so, truly, is it with many a moral man : his conscience has not a word to say against all his small and petty sins : let his heart be sensual, and his thoughts vain, and his discourse unsavoury, and his life unprofitable ;

yet, still, conscience and he live very friendly together : But, let the devil tempt such a sober sinner as this is, to murder, or adultery, or drunkenness, or some such branded impiety, conscience then flings firebrands and storms, and cries out, with Hazael, "What ! is thy servant a dog, that he should do such things as these are ?" As subjects pay to their prince, in many little sums, without grudging, that which, were it exacted from them, all at once, in one great tax, would make them repine if not rebel ; so is it with us : we stand not with the devil for small sins ; but, if he tempt us to greater abominations, then conscience makes an alarm and uproar in the soul, and will not, nay cannot consent to damn itself by wholesale. Certainly, that man, that can, as our Saviour speaks of the pharisees, swallow camels, sins of a huge bulk and size, without any check or straining at them, must needs have a conscience as wide-mouthed as hell ; and he, who hath so large a conscience, hath no conscience at all.

And that is another advantage which we have against presumptuous sins.

*3. The fear of shame and of infamy in the world, many times, puts a great restraint upon the lusts of men ; and keeps them from breaking out into those daring and presumptuous wickednesses, that otherwise they would do.*

Therefore, our Saviour describes the unjust judge to be one of a strange temper, that neither feared God, nor regarded man : Luke xviii. 2. Those, that have worne off all fear of God from their hearts, yet usually have some awe of man still left them : though they are so hardened, that they fear not God's judging them ; yet they are withal so childish, that they fear man's censuring them : loth they are, that their names should be tossed to and fro, from tongue to tongue ; that the world should say of them, 'This man is a drunkard,' and 'That man is an unclean person,' and 'That man is a thief.' Tell me, O sinner, why else dost thou seek corners to hide thy wickedness in ? why dost thou not do it in the face of the sun, and before the eyes of the whole world ? Why that very shame, that makes men skulk in secret when they sin, had they no secrecy to hide themselves in from the notice of men, would keep them also from the sin itself. It doth not terrify men

to consider, that God writes down all their sins in his book of remembrance ; but, should he write all their sins upon their foreheads in visible letters, that all the world might read them, where is the wretch so impudent, that would dare to be seen abroad ? Our streets would be desolate, and your pews would be empty, and the world would grow a wilderness ; and those, that we took for men, would appear to be but very monsters and beasts : such woeful transformation hath sin made in the world. How many swine are there, wallowing in their own vomit ! how many goatish sensualists are become brutish in filthy pleasures ! how many earth-worms are there, crawling up and down in the muck of this world, loading themselves with thick clay ! Certainly, if every sinner should be seen in his own shape, we should meet with very few men in the world. Now wicked men are ashamed to be seen abroad in such disguises as these are, and therefore they study to sin in secret ; or, if that cannot be, they force themselves to abstain from sin : unwilling they are to be pointed at in the streets, ‘There goes a drunkard, or an extortioner : there, a cheater, or an adulterer ;’ and the like : and, for very fear hereof, sometimes they are kept from the commission of those infamous sins, that would make them a reproach to all their neighbours.

And that is another advantage.

4. *The fear of human laws and penalties doth many times keep men from the committing many great and horrid impieties, such as would fall under the notice of the law.*

It is a great mercy, that God hath instituted magistracy, that may be a terror to evil works ; as the apostle speaks, Rom. xiii. 3. Were it not more for fear of human laws inflicting of corporal punishments upon men, than God’s threatening of eternal punishments, the whole world would become worse than a savage wilderness : within, would be fears and tumults ; without, would be rage and violence : our dwellings, our persons, our possessions, would be all exposed to the furious lusts of ungodly men ; and, “ by swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, men would break forth, till blood toucheth blood ;” as the prophet speaks : Hos. iv. 2. But

the wise providence of God, who hath subdued the beasts of the earth to man, hath also subdued man, who else would become more wild and brutish than they, to man : God hath therefore subdued man to man, so that those, that stand not in any awe of the God of heaven, yet are awed by the gods of the earth ; and those, whom the thoughts of hell and eternal wrath cannot scare from sin, yet many times the thoughts of a prison and gibbet do.

Now this fear is of great advantage, to keep men from the commission of presumptuous sins ; which they have not, to keep them from the commission of lesser and smaller sins.

And, what ! is not this security enough against them ? Is there need of any more ? Were it not strange, if the warning given beforehand to prepare for resistance, if the reluctance of natural conscience, if the shame of the world and the fears of human laws and penalties, should not be sufficient to preserve us from them ? Were not this strange ? Yes, it were so ; yet so it is.

ii. *Notwithstanding all these advantages, still we have great cause to pray, with David, "Lord, keep back thy servants from presumptuous sins."* All other defence is but weak, and all other security is but unsafe. Lord, therefore, do thou keep us.

And this I shall endeavour to demonstrate unto you, by two particulars : the one from scripture ; and, the other, from experience.

### 1. From scripture.

All our ability, whether for the performance of duties or for the opposing of corruption, is, in scripture, entirely ascribed unto the power of God.

Thus, the apostle exhorts the Ephesians, in chap. vi. 10. " My brethren, be strong." But, in whom ? What, in yourselves ? No, says he, but, " be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might :" for, in his almighty power, though mighty corruptions rush in upon you and threaten your ruin, though the devil and the powers of hell push sore at you to make you fall ; yet God calls upon you to stand, and to withstand them all. ' Stand, alas ! how can we ? such poor weak feeble creatures as we are, how can we stand ? ' Why, says the apostle, " Be strong in the

Lord : " there is your security against all the force of your spiritual enemies: lay hold on his almighty power, and engage that for you, and this will bring you off the field with victory and conquest.

So, again, in 2 Cor. iii. 5. " We are not sufficient," says the apostle, " of ourselves, to do any thing as of ourselves :" not sufficient to think a good thought, and therefore not sufficient to resist an evil thought. For our resisting of an evil thought must be by thinking a good one : if an evil thought rise up in our hearts, we cannot, of ourselves, so much as think that that thought is evil, nor think that it ought to be suppressed and stifled ; and, much less, can we then, of ourselves, suppress any sin. And what should we do under this utter impotency and inability, but call in divine help and assistance ? " Our sufficiency is of God."

Yet, in this, we cannot think our sufficiency to be of God, nor can we depend upon the sufficiency of God to enable us to do it : " For it is God," says the apostle, " that worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure :" both to think and to act ; so you have it in Phil. ii. 13.

So that it is most evident, to all, that will not wilfully shut their eyes against the light of truth, that both the first motions and the whole succeeding progress of the soul, either to the performance of duty or to the resistance of sin, are wholly from God's almighty power engaged for them, and strengthening them to the one and for the other.

2. Another demonstration of this truth shall be from *the common experience of all.*

Have you not found, sometimes, that you could, with holy scorn and disdain, reject those very temptations to sin, that, at other times, when God hath absented himself from you, when he hath withdrawn his power and grace, have sadly prevailed upon you, it may be to the commission of some daring and presumptuous sin ? Have you not found it to be so ? What else is this, but an evident argument, that it is not your own, but God's power, that keeps you from the worst sins ? We may conclude by our falls, when God doth forsake us, that, when we stand, we stand not by our own strength, but by his. Why do you not always fall ? or why do you not always stand ? will you say it is, because we are not always alike tempted ? if you

be not, why, then, since the devil is always alike malicious? even herein, appear the mercy and power of God, who almighty rebukes him: but when you are alike tempted, whence proceeds it, that sometimes you yield, and sometimes you resist and conquer; but only from hence, sometimes God is present to assist you, and sometimes he departs from you to humble you? he is present sometimes, that you might not utterly sink and perish under your sins; and he absents himself sometimes, that you may be sensible by your falls, that formerly it was not your own, but his power that preserved you.

And this may suffice for the demonstration of the truth; That it is not in the power of the best Christians to keep themselves from presumptuous sins, but God's power only can do this.

iii. Now, by this time, possibly it may arise up in the hearts of some profane ones, to make the same **OBJECTION**, as some did, in the apostle's days, against the doctrine of election: 'If it be so, that it is not in my own power to keep myself from the commission of sin, yea of the greatest and worst sins, but only God's power can do this: why doth he yet complain? why doth he yet find fault with us for doing that, which we cannot but do, unless he himself preserve us from it?'

I might here take occasion to vindicate the equity and righteousness of God, in requiring from us the exercise of that power, that he bestowed upon our natures at first, and which we lost only through our own wilful default: but I have done this divers times already; and therefore, I shall only at present briefly consider what power men have still left them, both in a state of nature and in a state of grace, to keep themselves from the commission of sin: and that, in a few particulars, briefly.

1. *Clear it is, that, whatever power men have, either to naturals or to spirituals; yet they cannot act or exercise that power, without exciting influence from God to quicken and rouse it.*

Who will say, that a man, that sits, hath no power to rise; and that a man, that stands, hath not power to walk? and yet it is certain, he neither shall rise nor walk, unless God move and excite and rouse that power of his,

and put it upon that work: for, in him, as we live, so we move and have our being. So, then, the power to use our power is from God's quickening, enlivening, and actuating of us.

2. *A child of God, who is regenerated and born again, hath a power to do something that is not sin:* because he hath a gracious principle wrought within him; and he acts for a right end, even the glory of God in the salvation of his soul.

But yet, this, withal, must be supposed, that he shall never so act, without the special aid and assistance of God, quickening and stirring up his graces.

3. *A man, in a state of nature, hath no power to keep himself from sin in general.*

That is, he hath no power to do any thing, but what is sinful; for, whatever action is not sinful must flow from a gracious principle, and must be directed to a right end; which no action of a wicked man can be, for both the first principle and also the last end of every action, that a wicked man doth, are carnal self.

4. *Though wicked men have not a power to do that, which is not sinful; yet they have a power to resist this or that particular sin.*

They are sadly necessitated to act within the sphere of sin; that is, whatever they act is sinful: but, yet, they may, as it were, choose which sin they will act. Neither doth this overthrow what was delivered before: for, when they choose a less sin rather than a greater, when they avoid the commission of a daring and presumptuous sin and choose rather to perform a duty; this proceeds not merely from their own power, but from the power and influence of God, raising and exciting their power. That men choose to feed upon wholesome meat rather than upon poison, though they have a free-will to do so; yet this doth not merely proceed from their free-will, but from God's guiding and exciting that free-will, to choose wholesome food rather than poison. So it is here: what sin man avoids, is not to be ascribed to his own power, though a power he hath: but it is to be ascribed only to God's common or to his special grace and influence, whereby that power, that would otherwise lie dead and

unacted, is quickened and actuated in us. What difference is there, betwixt a man that hath no power, and a man that hath a power but yet cannot use it? Truly, such are we: what power we have against sin, we cannot make use of, till God raise and act us by his exciting grace: therefore have we still need to pray, with David, ‘Lord, do thou keep me from sin: for, though I have a power, yet it is but a latent and sleepy power; and will not be available, till thou dost awaken and quicken it.’

V. The next thing to be inquired into, is *how God keeps men back from presumptuous sins*, even then, when their proneness to them is most violent and eager..

For satisfaction to this, you must know, that God hath two hands, whereby he holds men back from their sins;—the strong hand of his providence,—the powerful hand of his grace.

And, sometimes, God puts both these hands to it, in a mixed way of providence and grace together. These are, as it were, God’s left-hand and his right hand: by the one he overrules the actions; and, by the other, he overrules the hearts of men: and both, almighty.

i. God frequently withholds men from the commission of sin, *by a strong hand of providence upon them*.

Frequently, he doth so: and, that he doth not so always, is not because he is defective, either in power or goodness, whereby he should restrain them from evil; but because he is infinite in wisdom, whereby he knows how to bring good out of evil.

And, therefore, before I proceed to lay down those several ways, that providence takes to hinder the commission of sin, I shall premise this: that it is no taint at all to the pure holiness of God, that he doth, by his providence, concur to those wickednesses of men, that, if he pleased, he might prevent and hinder.

That God doth so is clear: for providence is not so often a restraint from sin, as it is a powerful temptation unto sin. It is a temptation, as it administers objects and opportunities, and as it suits them both unto the lusts of men. Thus, Cain killed his brother Abel, by a providence; and Achan stole the wedge of gold: Judas

betrayed his Master, and the Jews crucified him, by a providence: yea, all that villainy, that ever was acted under the sun, was all brought forth out of the cursed wombs of men's lusts, and made fruitful by God's providences,

Neither is it hard to conceive, how God should, without sin himself, concur to sin in others: since his most sovereign will, being above all law, cannot possibly fall under any guilt. We are obliged to keep back men from the commission of sin, when it is in our power to do it; but no such obligation lies upon God, though he can easily keep all wicked men in the world from ever sinning more: yea, though they are so tied up, that they are not able to sin without his permission and concurrence; yet he permits wisely, concurs holily, and yet notwithstanding at last punishes justly. In brief, God doth whatever man doth: for as the prophet saith, "he worketh all our works in us" and for us; and, "in him, we live, and move, and have our being." And yet, in one and the same action, man sins and God is holy: because man acts contrary to that law, which God hath set him; but God himself is subject to no law, besides his own sovereign will, and "where there is no law, there is no transgression," as the apostle speaks, in Romans iv. 15. God is not bound to hinder the commission of sin as we are; and, therefore, when he permits, nay when Providence accomplisheth it, still is he holy, just, and good; still is he "righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works," though he works that together with men, that makes them unrighteous and unholy.

This I thought fit to premise, that so, when you hear how many ways God is able to hinder the commission of sin by his providence, you should not suffer any undue thoughts to rise up in your hearts against his holiness, when he chooseth sometimes rather to permit and concur to the sins of men, than to hinder and forbid them: who, when he permits sin, permits it righteously; and, when he hinders sin, hinders it almighty.

1. There are five remarkable ways, whereby the all-wise providence of God hinders the commission of a sin even then when men are most bent and eager upon it.

(1.) *Sometimes, where his grace doth not sanctify the heart, his providence shortens the life, of the sinner.*

Where he doth not cleanse the fountain, yet there he removes the foundation of a sin ; that is, he takes away the very life and being of the sinner. Many times, when wicked men have imagined some presumptuous sin, and go big with it, God suddenly cuts them off from the land of the living ; and gives them no space to bring it forth, unless it be in hell among those devils that inspired it : Psalm lxiv. 6, 7. says the Psalmist, “ They search out iniquities : they accomplish a diligent search : ” but what follows ? “ God shall shoot at them with an arrow ; suddenly shall they be wounded : ” while they are thinking and contriving wickedness in their hearts, in that very day they perish and their thoughts with them. Thus, proud Pharaoh resolves, in spite of God and all his miracles, to bring back the children of Israel to their old bondage ; but, before he could bring his purpose into execution, God brings him to execution. And, so, Sennacherib intends the destruction of Jerusalem ; but, before he can compass it, God slays his army and his own children also. Herod intends a bloody persecution against the church ; but God smites him ; lice devour him ; and eat a way into that very heart, that conceived so wicked a purpose. It were endless to cite instances, in this particular. Histories and hell are full of those, whom God’s providence hath cut off, before they could fulfil their ungodly designs ; upon whom that threatening in Eccl. viii. 13. hath been signally verified, “ It shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, because he feareth not before God.” This providence God doth usually, if not only, exercise upon wicked men : snatching them away from their sins, and yet in their sins also. Yea, and herein he deals with them also, in some kind of mercy, in that he abridges the time of his patience to them, who, he foresees, will only abuse it, and treasure up to themselves “ wrath against the day of wrath ; ” for, hereby, their account is lessened, and their torments made more tolerable. It had been better for sinners, that they had dropped immediately from the womb to the tomb ; better, that they had been swaddled in their winding-

sheets : yea, shall I say it had been better for them, that they had been doomed to everlasting torments, as soon as they saw the light, than that God should suffer them to live twenty, forty, or sixty years, adding iniquity to iniquity without repentance ; and God accordingly adding torments to torments to punish them, never to be repented of ? O, the desperate condition, that sinners are in ! Unless God give them repentance, the sooner they are in hell, the better it will be for them ; and it is a mercy, if God will damn them betimes ! Those, whom God doth not endear to his grace by changing their natures, yet he indebts to his providence by shortening their lives : and, yet, are there none of us, that wish our lives were prolonged to a thousand years, were it possible ; not that we might have a longer time and space to repent, but that we might the longer enjoy our sins ? If God should grant your wish, and keep you alive till the day of judgment, would not that day become a thousand fold more gloomy and dreadful to you, than if God had cut you off at the ordinary time and age ? and, therefore, it is a great favour, that God vouchsafes both to the elect and to reprobates, in that, since the flood, he hath cut short the days of man upon earth : for, hereby, the elect come to enjoy the glory and happiness of heaven the sooner ; and reprobates feel the torments and punishments of hell the lighter ; providence, by a speedy dispatch, preventing those sins, that otherwise would sink them the deeper into condemnation.

(2.) *God providentially keeps men from sinning, if not by shortening their lives, yet by cutting short their power, whereby they should be enabled to commit sin.*

All that power, that wicked men have to sin, is either from themselves, or from their wicked associates whom they make use of as instruments for the accomplishment of their impieties : but providence can strike them in both ; and, thereby, give their lusts a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. Sometimes, God, by his providence, cuts off their evil instruments ; and thereby disables them from sinning : sometimes, their instruments for counsel ; thus providence, by overruling Absalom to reject the counsel of Ahithophel, prevents all that mischief that so

wise and so wicked a statesman might have contrived ; and thereupon he goes and hangs himself : sometimes he cuts off their instruments of execution ; and, so, God disappointed the hopes of blaspheming Rabshakeh, and sent an angel, that, in one night, killed almost two hundred thousand of the Assyrians dead on the place : certainly, it is great folly, for men, upon confidence of their wise and powerful instruments, to set themselves up against that God, that can, without or against all means and instruments, confound their designs and frustrate all their enterprizes. And, as God thus strikes their instruments : so, sometimes, he strikes their persons ; and takes from them the use of those natural faculties, by which they should be enabled to commit their sins : sometimes, he hides their wits from them, and besots them ; so he did to the Jews : John vii. 30. They sought to apprehend Jesus : who did hinder them ? was he not there among them ? Were there not enough of them to do it ? yet they only stand gazing at him, like men besotted, till he escapes away from them : sometimes, God hides away their hands from them, and enfeebles them ; as in Psalm lxxvi. 5. " None of the mighty men have found their hands :" God had benumbed them, and laid their hands out of the way when they should have used them : the Sodomites, you know, swarmed thick about Lot's house, intending villainy to his guests ; and God smote them with blindness, that they groped for the door, even at noon-day : Jeroboam stretcheth out his hand against the prophet, and God suddenly withers it. This is God's frequent course with wicked men : when he doth not subdue their wills, yet he oftentimes subdues their power of sinning. Yea, and possibly, altho'gh we have not such frequent instances of it, God may deal thus sometimes with his own children : thus he hath threatened or promised rather to his church, that he will " hedge up her way with thorns," that she should not be able to break through to her idols, as formerly she had done : so you have it in Hos. ii 6. And, indeed, it is a great mercy, that God doth take away that power from men, that he sees they will only abuse to their own destruction. It is not cruelty but compassion, that

chains up madmen ; and takes from them those swords, arrows and firebrands, that else they would hurl up and down abroad, both to their own and others' mischief : and, so, it is God's common pity to sinners, that are very madmen, that fetters and chains them up ; and lays such a powerful restraint upon them by his providence, that, where their wills are not defective, yet their power to execute sin should be. • What would wicked men think, if God should now suddenly strike them dumb, or blind, or lame, or impotent ? would they not account this a heavy judgment inflicted upon them ? they would so : and yet, believe it, it were better for them that God should strike them dumb upon the place, than that they should ever open their mouths more to blaspheme and rail at God and his people : better, they were struck blind, than that the devil and vile lusts should enter into the soul by those casements : better, that God should maim them, than that they should have strength to commit those sins, that, if but willed, will damn them ; but, if executed, will sink their souls sevenfold deeper into condemnation. Now the providence of God, by taking away their power, prevents their wickedness, and so mercifully mitigates their condemnation.

(3.) Sometimes God keeps men from the commission of sin, *by raising up another power against that, by which the sinner is to execute his sin.*

Thus, when Saul would have put Jonathan to death for breaking a rash vow that himself had made, God raiseth up the spirits of the people to rescue him ; and they plainly tell him, Jonathan shall not die. The Jews hated Christ, and would have killed him, but that they feared the people, whom his miracles had obliged to him, so that they durst not venture upon him till his hour was come.

(4.) *Sometimes providence casts in some seasonable diversion, that turns them off from the commission of that sin, that they intended.*

When they are hotly pursuing their wickedness, providence starts some other game for them, and sets them upon some other work. Thus it fared with Antiochus, in Dan. xi. 30 ; he sets himself against the holy covenant ; but

for all his rage against it, he shall return into his own land, says God: "for the ships of Chittim shall come against him," and the ships of the Romans; and, instead of invading others' dominions, he must return to defend his own: thus God diverted him from his design of ruining the Jews. And, sometimes, where God doth not dry up the spring of corruption, yet he turns the streams of it which way he pleaseth: as a skilful physician, when one part of the body is oppressed with ill humours, draws them to another part that is less dangerous; so God, by his providence, turns men from the commission of a greater to a lesser sin: thus he overruled Joseph's brethren: they consulted to cast him into a pit, and there to let him starve, unless he could feed upon his dream of wheat-sheaves; but God, by his providence, so orders it, that merchants pass by that way, and to them they sell him.

There are, I believe, but few men, who, if they will but examine back their lives, cannot produce many instances both of the devil's policy, in fitting them with occasions and opportunities of sin, and of God's providence, in causing some emergent affairs, some unexpected action to interpose, and hinder them from those sins that they purposed.

(5.) God sometimes keeps men from sin, *by removing the object, against which they intended to commit it.*

Thus when Herod intended to put Peter to death the next morning, that very night God sends an angel, and makes his escape, and so prevents that sin: and so, truly, in all ages, God hides away his children from the fury of ungodly men.

There are, doubtless, many other various and mysterious providences, whereby God hinders the sins of men; but these are the most common and most remarkable ways: by shortening their lives; by lessening their power; by raising up another power to oppose them; by diverting them another way; and by removing the objects of their sins.

The next thing is, to show you how God hinders the commission of sin, in a way of grace.

2. But I shall leave this till another time, and make some *application* of what hath now been spoken.

(1.) *See here the sad and woeful estate of wicked*

*men, whom grace doth not change, but only providence restrain.*

A mere restraint from sin, when the heart continues fully set and bent upon it, must needs cause torment and vexation. Their own corruptions urge them forward; but God's providence, that meets them and crosses them at every turn, and that disappointment, that they meet with when they fully resolve upon sin, cause great vexation of spirit. As God will torment them hereafter for their sins; so he torments them here, by keeping them from their sins. All the wicked in the world are strangely hampered by God's providence, as so many bulls in a net: that, though they struggle, yet cannot possibly break through; and, by their struggling only vex and weary themselves. God doth, as it were, give up the hearts of wicked men to the devil: only he ties their hands. Let them intend and imagine as much evil and mischief as they can; yea, as much as hell can inspire into them: yet none of these shall execute any of it, otherwise than as God permits them. Now if there be any real pleasure in sin, it is in the execution of it: that, which men take in the plotting and contriving of it, is merely the delight of a dream and fancy; and herein lies the exceeding wretchedness of wicked men, that, though providence almighty hinders them in the execution of sin, yet justice will justly punish their intention and plotting of it.

(2.) *This should teach us to adore and magnify this sin-preventing providence of God.*

Our lives, our estates, yea, whatever is dear and precious to us hitherto, have been secured to us only by his powerful hand, which hath curbed in the unruly lusts of men, and kept them from breaking forth into violence, and blood, and rapine. Should God slack the reins, should he throw them upon the necks of ungodly men, how would uproars, and confusions, murders, and slaughters overspread the face of the whole earth, and make the world a hell above ground! Redemption and providence are two wonderful works of God: by the one he pardons sin, that is committed; and, by the other, he prevents sin, lest it be committed: both of them are contrivances of infinite wisdom; and both of them are unsearchable, and past

finding out ; and, therefore, we ought to ascribe the glory of both unto God, that hath laid both the design of redemption and of providence for man's good, and for man's salvation.

(3.) If, at any time, we can recall to mind, as indeed who is there that cannot, that God has thus by his providence prevented us from the commission of sin, *how should this oblige us thankfully to own this mercy of God to us !*

May not all of us say, " Had not God taken away our power, had he not taken away the objects of our lusts, had he not diverted us some other way, we had now been deeply engaged in those sins, that the merciful providence of God hath diverted us from ? " He it was, that hedged up the broad way with thorns ; that so he might turn us into the narrow way, that leads unto eternal life and happiness.

(4.) Hath God's providence so many ways and methods to hinder the commission of sin ? *Then we may be assured, that he will never permit it, but when it shall redound to his own praise and glory.*

It is an excellent saying of St. Austin : " He, that is most good, will never suffer evil, unless he were also most wise ; whereby he is able to bring good out of evil." And, therefore, when we see wicked men let alone to accomplish their hellish designs, we may then quiet ourselves with this : " God knows how to make his own advantage out of their wickedness : he knows how, from such dung and filth to reap a most fruitful crop of glory to himself." " The rage of man," says the psalmist, " thou wilt restrain, and the residue thereof shall turn to thy praise." That wickedness, which God doth not restrain, he will make redound to his own praise and glory.

(5.) *This may establish our hearts in peace, when we see the wickedness of men most raging and violent.* " They cannot sin, unless God gives them a power." As Christ told Pilate, " Thou hast no power over me," in John xix. 11. " except it be given thee from above."

And, certainly, that God, that gives them a power to sin, still keeps a power in his own hands to limit them in their sins ; and, when their lusts are most unruly, he can say to them, " Hitherto shall ye go, and here shall your proud waves be stayed." He stints them, and bounds

them ; and he also can totally restrain them, when he pleaseth, and when it shall be most for his own praise and glory.

ii. Now, as God doth thus keep men back from the commission of presumptuous sins by a strong hand of providence : so, sometimes, he doth it by *his grace*.

And this grace is either merely restraining, or else it is sanctifying and renewing. Both of them are of very great force and efficacy : by the one, he holds men back from sin ; and, by the other, he turns them against sin.

1. You have, doubtless, heard much concerning sanctifying and restraining grace : but, yet, that your notions and apprehensions of them may be more clear and distinct, I shall give you *the difference that there is betwixt these two* in several particulars.

They differ in their subject : they differ in their essence and they differ in their manner of operation.

(1.) They differ in respect of *their subject*.

Restraining grace is but common ; and it works upon wicked men and reprobates, as well as upon others : but sanctifying grace is special ; and belongs only to those, who belong themselves to the election of grace. Esau, whom the scripture notes as the great instance of reprobation, comes out against Jacob, with a troop of four thousand ruffians ; intending, doubtless, to revenge himself upon him for the loss of his birth-right and blessing : but, at their first meeting, God, by a secret work, so mollifies his heart, that, instead of falling upon him and killing him, he falls upon his neck and kisses him : here God restrains him from that presumptuous sin of murder, not in a way of mere external providence, but with his own hand immediately turns about his heart ; and, by seeing such a company of cattle bleating and bellowing, so many timorous men and helpless children all bowing and supplicating unto him, he turns his revenge into compassion, and, with much urging, receives a present from him, whom before he intended to make a prey. The same power of restraint God laid upon the heart of Abimelech, that heathen king : you have it in Genesis xx. 6. when he had taken Sarah, Abraham's wife, intending to make her his wife or concubine, God tells him in a dream, "I withheld thee from

sinning against me : therefore suffered I thee not to touch her ; " here was nothing visible to hinder Abimelech from so great a wickedness ; but God invisibly wrought upon his heart, and unhinged his wicked desires. Now, from the instances of Esau and Abimelech, we may clearly collect how restraining grace differs both from restraining providence, and also from sanctifying grace. From providence it differs, because, usually, when God providentially restrains from sin, he doth it by some visible apparent means, that doth not work by bringing any change or alteration on the heart, but only by laying an external check upon men's actions : but, by restraining grace, God deals in a secret way with the very heart of a sinner ; and, though he doth not change the nature of his heart, yet he alters the present frame and disposition of it, and takes away the desire of committing those sins that yet it doth not mortify. And from sanctifying grace it differs also, in that God vouchsafes restraining grace to wicked men, as you have heard ; but none partake of sanctifying grace besides the children of God, and the remnant according to election : those whom he predestinates, them he also calls, that is, them he sanctifies ; as you have it in Rom. viii. 30. Election and sanctification are of the self-same breadth ; election is the cause of sanctification, and sanctification is a sign of election. Those, whom God will bring to himself in glory, he causeth a double separation to pass upon : the one, from eternity, when he calls them out from the mass of those that he leaves to perish in their sins ; and the other in time, when those, whom he hath set apart for himself by election, he brings home to himself by conversion. And, therefore, whatever measure of restraining grace God may afford to wicked men and reprobates ; yet sanctifying grace is the fruit only of election, and the portion only of those who are elected.

And that is the first difference.

(2.) They differ also in *their nature and essence.*

Sanctifying grace is a habit wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God ; called, therefore, a writing of the Law on the heart, and a putting of God's fear into our inward parts : Jer. xxxi. 33. And St. John terms it, a seed, that remains : 1 John iii. 9. These expressions clearly denote

it to be an internal principle or habit, deeply rooted and fixed in the soul: and, whatever holy actions a saint performs, as they are caused by a divine influence without him, so they flow also from a holy principle within him: hence our Saviour tells us, in Matt. xii. 35. that "a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things;" that is, out of that inward habit and principle of grace, that the Holy Ghost hath wrought in him, in the work of regeneration. But restraining grace hath no such habit and principle implanted in the soul; but is only a merciful actual influence from God, hindering the commission of those sins to which men's natural corruptions make them inclined. In brief, sanctifying grace is a quality wrought in us; but restraining grace is only an action flowing from God.

(3.) Sanctifying and restraining grace differ in *their manner of working and operation.*

And here we may observe a fourfold difference.

[1.] *Sanctifying grace keeps the soul from sin, by destroying it; but restraining grace keeps the soul from sin, only by imprisoning it.*

God, many times, shuts up the sins of those in prison, whom notwithstanding he will at last shut up in hell. It is sanctifying grace alone, that can do execution upon them: restraining grace may debar them of their liberty; but it is only sanctifying grace, that can deprive them of their life. There may appear but little difference betwixt the conversation of a child of God, whom special grace doth sanctify; and one in a state of nature, whom common grace doth only restrain. Doth the one walk blamelessly, without offence? Doth he avoid the grosser pollutions of the world? So doth the other: a star is not more like a star, than these meteors may be like them. But here lies the difference;—restraining grace only ties the hands, but sanctifying grace stabs the old man to the heart. It is one thing, to bind a thief to a tree; and another thing, to nail him fast to the cross. Restraining grace only binds corruption fast, that it cannot stir, not outwardly, but still it hath as much strength as ever; but sanctifying grace crucifies it, and nails it to the cross of Christ, where it weakens and languishes and hangs a dying body

of death. The earth is as dry and hard in a frosty winter, as it is in a parching summer; yet there is a great deal of difference in the cause of it; in summer the sun dries up the moisture; and, in winter, the frost binds it in: truly, restraining and sanctifying grace are, for all the world, like frost and sun: the ways of those, who have only a restraint laid upon them, may be altogether as fair and clean, as the ways of those that are sanctified: but there is a great difference in the cause: sanctifying grace dries up the filth and corruption in the heart of the one; but restraining grace only freezes in and binds up the filth and corruption of the other.

[2.] *Sanctifying grace strikes especially at the sins of the heart; but restraining grace, usually, only hinders the sins of the life.*

An unregenerate man, though never so moral, hunts his sins only in purlieus: as soon as they are gotten within the pale, he ceaseth his pursuit. It is usually, the highest care and upshot of a moral man's endeavours, to keep his lusts from boiling over, and raising smoke and ashes about him: and, if he can but obtain this, let the heart be brimful of sin, let the thoughts soak and stew in malicious, unclean, covetous designs and contrivances; he never opposeth nor lamenteth them. A mere restraint walks only round about the outward man; and, if it meets with any lust struggling abroad, it drives it again into the heart; but, for those sins that lie pent up there, it seldom molests, and never subdues them. The heart may indulge itself in vain, filthy, destructive, and pernicious thoughts: it may sit brooding over cockatrice-eggs, till it hatch them into serpents; and, in them, be stung to death: it may toss a sin to and fro in the fancy; and, thereby, make some kind of recompence to the devil for not committing it; and yet this man be only under a powerful restraint from God's restraining grace. But sanctifying grace doth more especially oppose the sins of the heart and of the inward man; for there is its seat and residence, in the heart. Restraining grace watches without; but true grace dwells within: and, as Christ speaks of the church of Pergamos, it dwells there, "where Satan's seat is;" it rules in the midst of its enemies; and it is

engaged so to do for its own security; that it may still crush them as they arise in the heart.

Now, from this particular, we may be helped in judging, whether our abstaining from sin be only from common restraining grace, or from sanctifying and renewing grace. See what sins they are, that you most of all labour to beat down. Do you strive only against the sins of your lives, and not against the sins of your hearts that are the spring and fountain of the other? Are you content, when you have beaten your corruptions from the out-works, and driven them in, where they do not rage so furiously as they have done? Whereas, before, they sallied forth at pleasure, and made havoc of your souls, and wounded your consciences; now, they are pent up in a narrower room and compass; doth this content you? Do you think it enough to lay close siege to your corruptions by conviction and legal terrors; and to shut them up, that they may no more break forth as formerly they have done, to the gross defilement of your lives? If this be all, then know, this is no more than what a mere common restraint may effect upon you; without any work of sanctifying grace upon the heart. True grace, when it beats back sin, follows it and pursues it into the heart; and there searches for it: and, if it sees it but breathe in a thought, or stir in a desire, presently it falls upon it and destroys it.

[3.] *Sanctifying grace, when it keeps a soul from sin, always engages the will against it; but common and restraining grace only awakens and rouses up the conscience against it.*

The will and the conscience are two leading faculties of the soul; the one commands what shall be done; and the other informs what ought to be done: and all the rest of the faculties and affections of the soul take part and side with these two. In a godly man, these two are at an agreement: what conscience prompts, the will commands, and the inferior faculties are all ready to execute. Sanctifying grace works immediately and specially upon the will, and makes a mighty change there; so that, whereas, before conversion, man's will is so utterly depraved, that it can like nothing but sin; after grace hath touched it and mightily turned it about, it cannot now any longer

give its full and free consent to the commission of any sin : if such an one sins, he doth it truly and properly against his will ; as the apostle speaks in Romans vii. 15. " That which I do, I allow not." Now a wicked man may sin against his conscience ; but it is impossible, that he should ever sin against his will : that is continually set upon sin : and, were it not that God sometimes raiseth up natural conscience in him to oppose his corrupt will, he would every moment rush into the most damning impieties, without any of the least regret or sense of it. When the devil presents a sin to the embraces of the will, and when the will closes with it, and all the faculties of the soul are ready to commit it, God sends in conscience among them. ' What, conscience art thou asleep ! Seest thou not how the devil and thine own devilish heart are now plotting and contriving thine eternal ruin ? ' This rouses conscience, and makes it storm and threaten, and hurl firebrands into the face of sin, while it lies in the very embraces of the will ; and though it cannot change the will from loving it, yet it frights the will from committing it. This is the most usual way, which restraining grace takes for the prevention of sin, by sending in conscience to make strong and vigorous oppositions against it.

There are none of us here, but, through divine grace, have been kept from many sins, that we were in great danger, through the corruptions of our own hearts, to have committed : sin hath been conceived by us : but God hath stifled and strangled it in the womb. Would you know whether this hath proceeded from God's restraining or from God's sanctifying grace ? Then make a judgment according to this rule ;—where restraining grace only resists and hinders sin, it doth it by setting one faculty and affection of the soul against another ; but, where sanctifying grace hinders it, it sets the same faculty and affection of the soul against itself. Restraining grace sets one affection against another ; conscience, against will ; the fear of hell, against the love of sin : hellish terrors, against sinful pleasures : God's threatenings against the devil's flatteries ; it martialls up these, and so enters the combat : here are bandyings of one power of the soul against another : but the will is entirely on sin's part ; and, if, con-

science prevail and pull away a beloved lust from the embraces of the will, the sinner parts with it very heavily and unwillingly, following it as Phaltiel did Michal weeping, though he durst not make resistance. But when sanctifying grace opposes and hinders sin, it sets the same faculty and affection of the soul against itself; will, against will; love, against love; desire, against desire; he wills the commission of sin, it is true; but yet, at the same time, he wills the mortification of it: he loves to gratify his sin; but yet, at the same time, he wills the crossing of it too: he desires to enjoy that pleasure and contentment, that he fancies he may take in sin; and yet he desires, at the same time, to destroy it. Here is one and the same faculty bandying against itself: and the reason of this is, because a child of God hath two principles in every single faculty: there is in him a mixture of flesh and spirit; a carnal part, that sides with sin, and a spiritual part, that always contradicts and opposes it: and these two are spread over his whole soul, and are mingled with every power and faculty thereof; so that he can neither do the evil nor the good that he would do, without contradiction, strife, and reluctance. Now try yourselves by this, when you are tempted to sin: what is it that resists it? is it your will, or is it only your conscience? are you only frightened from it? doth the fear of hell overcome the love of sin? all this may be from a mere restraint in those who are altogether unacquainted with the power of sanctifying grace. This is the symptom and character of a gracious soul, that, when it is most inclinable unto sin; yet, at the same time, it is most averse from it: when it most wisheth the accomplishment of sin; yet, even then, it strongly wisheth the subduing and mortifying of that sin. I know that this appears a riddle and a strange paradox to wicked men; but those, who have any true sense of the work of grace upon their own hearts, know it to be a truth, and rejoice in the experiences that they have of it.

(4.) *Restraining and sanctifying grace differ, in the motives and arguments, that they make use of for the resisting of sin.*

There are two general topics or common-places, whence

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all arguments against sin are drawn; and those are the law and the gospel: both of these administer such weapons, as, if rightly used, are very effectual for the beating down of sin. And, commonly, restraining grace useth those only, that are borrowed from the law: it urges the command: it thunders the curse: it brandishes the sword of justice: and makes reports of nothing but hell and eternal damnation; and such-like arguments, that scare men from the committing of their sins, though still they love them. Now sanctifying grace, though it also makes a most profitable use of these very arguments; yet it chiefly useth more mild and more ingenuous motives, drawn from the love of God, from the death of Christ, from the comforts of the Holy Ghost: and these, though they strike softer, yet they wound deeper.

Now, hereby also, you may give a guess, whether your abstaining from sin, be merely from restraining or from sanctifying grace. Observe what weapons you use. What considerations do over-awe your hearts? Are they such, as are drawn only from the law, and the sad reflections of the end and issue of sin; that it brings shame, and death, and hell? Must you run down to hell, every time a temptation comes, to fetch arguments thence to oppose against your corruptions? can you no where else "quench the fiery darts of the devil," unless it be in that lake of fire? If this be all (though this too is well) yet know, if it be all, this is no more than what restraint and common grace may perform. It is the proper character of restraining grace, to keep men back from the commission of sin only by dread and fear of punishment. But sanctifying grace especially betakes itself to gospel arguments; and considers how disingenuous it is to sin against a reconciled and a gracious Father, against a crucified and a bleeding Saviour, against a patient and a long-suffering Spirit; and heaps up many such-like ingenuous arguments, that work kindly upon the heart. The Christian leads every temptation to the cross of Christ, and there shows it his Saviour hanging and bleeding. 'And can I commit this sin, that hath drawn so much blood from my Saviour to expiate it, and would draw so much blood from my conscience to perpetrate it? Did he die to free me from the condemnation of it,

and shall I wilfully rush into the commission of it? No, O Lord: thy love withholds me: I cannot do this thing and sin against so rich, so free, and infinite mercy and goodness, that thou daily extendest towards me.' Thus true grace usually teacheth a child of God to argue against his sins; and this keeps him from the commission of those sins, that others, rising up against them only from the terrors and threatenings of the law and other such dreadful considerations, fall into notwithstanding. A wool-pack sooner damps a bullet than a stone-wall: and, truly, soft arguments taken from the gospel, from the love of God, from the death of Christ, from the patience and long-suffering of the Spirit; these soft arguments sooner damp a temptation and resist a corruption, than more rigid and severe ones will when alone used by themselves.

2. Having thus, in general, showed you the difference betwixt sanctifying and restraining grace, I shall now descend to *more particular considerations of those ways and methods, that God useth in keeping men back from sin, by his special and sanctifying grace.*

And here I shall premise this:—that whatever sin God doth prevent his own children from the commission of, I mean by his sanctifying grace, he doth it by exciting the inward principle of grace, to the actual use and exercise of it.

There is a two-fold grace, always necessary to keep the best Christians from sin: habitual and exciting grace; and God makes use of the one to quicken and stir up the other. He makes use of exciting grace to quicken habitual grace, that else would lie sluggish and dormant in the soul. Habitual grace denominates the soul alive unto God; but, yet, it is no otherwise alive than a man in a swoon is. It is exciting grace, that alone can enable it to perform the functions and offices of life. In the deepest winter, there is life in the seed, that lies buried under ground; but yet it acts not till the sun's influence draws it forth, and then it heaves and shoves away the earth that covered it, and spreads itself into the beauties of a flower. So is it here. Inherent, habitual grace, is an immortal seed; and it is but a seed, till the influences of the approaching and exciting grace of God awaken it, and chafe

its benumbed virtue ; and then it stirs and thrusts away all that dung and filth of corruptions under which it lay buried, and then it flows forth into actual grace. Habitual and exciting grace must both concur, to the producing of actual grace ; as necessarily, as there must be the concurrence both of the heat of the sun and of life in the seed, to produce a flower.

Now by God's exciting of inherent, habitual grace in the soul, he keeps men from sinning two ways ;—by prevention, and by suppression of sin.

(1.) *Hereby he prevents and excludes those sins, that, were we not employed in the exercise of grace, we should commit.*

When the soul is constantly employed in holy and spiritual affairs, sin hath then neither room nor opportunity to put forth itself. It is kept out from the thoughts, when they are busied in holy meditation : it is kept out from the affections, when they are set upon heavenly objects ; it is kept out from the life and conversation, when the duties both of the general and particular calling are duly performed in their respective seasons. The apostle exhorts us, in Eph. iv. 27. not to "give place to the devil." Truly, when God's exciting grace quickens our inherent grace into continual exercise, when every faculty is filled with holy actings and every season with holy duties, the devil can have no place to tempt, nor corruption to stir. It is the best security God can give from the commission of sin, to quicken to the performance of duty. When we pray, or meditate, or attend upon public ordinances, we ought to bless God for his exciting grace, whereby we have not only performed a duty, but also escaped some foul and notorious sin, that we might have committed had we not been so holily employed : we, who are here now present before the Lord this day, had we neglected this present opportunity, who of us knows, what horrid temptations and foul sins we might have been exposed to in our own houses, which in the house of God we have avoided ? David, when he walks idly upon the roof of his house, lies open to the snares of the devil, and sins foully : had he then been at his harp or psalms, he might thereby have driven the evil spirit from himself, as formerly he did from his

master Saul. Running streams preserve themselves pure and clean, when standing pools soon grow corrupt and noisome, and venomous creatures breed in them : so is it with the heart : whilst God's exciting and quickening grace puts it upon continual act, it is preserved from corruption ; but, when once it grows sluggish, and doth not freely flow forth into the actings of grace and performance of duties, the spawn of all manner of sin breeds there, and filthy lusts crawl to and fro in it without any disturbance : and, therefore, we should continually pray, that God would vouchsafe us the quickening influence of his Spirit ; that he would fill our sails with that wind, that blows where it listeth : " Arise, O north wind ; and come, thou south wind : and blow upon our gardens, that the spices thereof may flow forth ; " for if the spices do not, the stench will.

(2.) As God, by his exciting grace, hindereth those sins, that might arise in the heart, so *he also suppresseth those sins, that do arise.*

There is the greatest contrariety imaginable, betwixt inherent sin and inherent grace : when the one is vigorous, the other languishes : when the one is acted, the other grows dull and sluggish. Now both these opposite principles have their seat and abode in the same heart ; and both of them are in continual expectation of exciting influence to call them forth into act. Indwelling corruption is usually roused up by temptation ; when it stirs in the heart, and is ready to break forth in the life : habitual grace, though it looks on, yet is of itself so feeble that it can make no opposition, till a kindly influence from the Spirit of God calls out some particular grace, that is directly contrary to that sin that stirs : and this resists and subdues it. This method God used in keeping the apostle from sinning : 2 Cor. xii. He was there under a sharp and pungent temptation, that is therefore called " a thorn in the flesh :" ver. 7. Satan buffets, and the apostle prays : and God answers, " My grace is sufficient for thee." " My grace is sufficient; not thy grace : that grace, that is in thee, is but weak and helpless, yea a very nothing, if I withdraw my influence from it ; but that quickening grace, that flows from me, that alone is sufficient to remove the temptation and to prevent the sin." Now, while God's

exciting grace worked upon the apostle's inherent grace, this temptation, this thorn in the flesh only made him more watchful and more industrious against it: but, if God should have suspended this his influence, this thorn in the flesh would immediately, notwithstanding all his grace, sadly have wounded his conscience, by the commission of some great and foul sin. Now, as all manner of sin lies couched in that body of sin, that we bear about with us; so all manner of grace lies couched in that principle of grace, that God implants in his own children. Now, when the devil by his temptations calls forth some particular sin, God also at the same time by his exciting grace calls forth a particular grace, to hinder the commission of that sin: thus, when they are tempted to pride, God calls forth humility to prick that swelling, puffing bladder: when they are tempted to wrath and passion, he stirs up meekness; when to murmuring and repining against the dispensations of God, he puts patience upon its perfect work. Briefly, there is no sin whatever, that the devil can by his temptation stir up in the heart, but God also can stir up a contrary grace to it, to quell and master it. This is the method of God's exciting grace in the preventing of sin, that when the devil calls forth a particular corruption out of the stock of corruption, God calls forth a particular grace, contrary to it, from the stock of grace.

But yet there are some particular graces, that are more especially employed about this service, and which God doth most frequently exercise, and set on work to keep his children from the commission of sin.

[1.] God hinders the commission of sin, *by keeping up the lively and vigorous actings of faith.*

Indeed if faith fail, all other graces must fail, by consequence. Faith is the soul's steward, that fetcheth in supplies of grace from Christ, in whom is the treasure of it; and distributes them to all the other graces of the soul. Therefore, when Christ tells St. Peter, Luke xxii. 31. that Satan had desired to sift him by his temptations, lest he should be thereby discouraged and dejected, presently he adds, in ver. 32. " But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not :" and wherefore his faith, rather than any other grace, but because other graces must take their lot

with faith, and must be strong or weak, victorious or languishing, as faith is. And therefore it is called "the shield of faith :" Eph. vi. 16 : now the office of a shield is, to defend, not only the body, but the rest of the armour also ; and so doth faith, when it is dexterously managed : it keeps both the soul, and its graces also, from the attempts of the devil. I might be large here, in showing you how faith preserves from sin : as, by deriving virtue and strength from the death and blood of Christ ; by pleading God's engagements and promises to tread Satan under our feet ; by urging and importuning Christ to fulfil in us the end of his coming into the world, which was to destroy the works of the devil ; and many such ways I might name, by which faith prevents sin, and destroys it.

But, waving them, I shall only mention two particulars, wherein this energy of faith, in keeping men from sin, is the most conspicuous.

1st. Faith preserves from sin, *by bringing in and presenting to the soul eternal rewards and punishments.*

And that is the peculiar office of faith. These, indeed, are future unto sense, but they are present unto faith : for faith is the substance of things not seen : Heb. xi. 1. It gives them a being, before they are ; and what we hope for or fear, as to come, by faith it is enjoyed or felt, as already present. What a mighty advantage is this, to preserve men from sinning ! Would sinners treat with the devil, or hearken to a temptation, if they should now see the whole world on flame, angels hastening them to judgment, and Christ upon his throne ? Here, heaven, to receive and crown them ; there, hell, with all its horrors, to torment them ? Would any of you dare to sin, if all this were before your eyes ? Believe it, when faith acts lively, all this is as truly present to the soul, as it is certain it shall once be ; and, therefore, no more than we would commit a sin if sentence were now passing upon us, either of absolution or of eternal damnation, at the judgment-seat of God ; no more shall we sin, while faith sets these things evidently before our eyes, and makes them as real to us as they are sure.

2dly. Faith preserves from sinning, *by representing that*

*God, who must hereafter be our Judge, to be now our spectator and observer.*

It is only an eye of faith, that can discover things future as present, and things spiritual as real. God is a spiritual being, and therefore is invisible to the dull eyes of flesh ; but the quick eye of faith can see " him who is invisible ; " as it was said of Moses, Heb. xi. 27. It fixeth its eye upon the all-seeing eye of God, and fills the soul with awful thoughts of God's omnipresence and omniscience ; that all things are naked and bare before him, in whose company we are wherever we are, and with whom we have to do whatever we are doing. Now consider with yourselves : would you commit such or such a sin, to which possibly you are tempted, if some grave person were in the room with you, whom you did much respect ? And, what ! shall the presence of a mortal man keep you from sinning, and shall not the presence of the great God much more ? Shall we dare to sin, when God's eye is fixed upon us ; when he views not only our outward actions, but also our inward thoughts, more clearly than we can see the faces one of another ? It was the wise counsel, that a heathen man gave to a scholar of his, that if he would preserve himself from doing any thing that was indecent, he should suppose some sober and reverend man present with him ; and this would keep him from doing that, which he would be ashamed to do before him. Truly we need not make any such supposition. The great and holy God is present with us, in reality ; and the eye of faith discovers him so to be : he is always looking on us ; yea, always looking into us : and, certainly, this, to one that can exercise the discerning eye of faith, will be a more effectual means to keep a man from sin, than if all the eyes of men and angels were upon him.

[2.] As the exercise of faith, so *the sprightly and vigorous exercise of divine love, is an excellent preservative against sin.*

Love will not willingly do any thing, that may offend and grieve the object loved. Love is an assimilating affection : it is the very cement, that joins God and the soul together in the same spirit, and makes them to be of one

heart and of one mind: it is the loadstone of the soul, that toucheth all other affections, and makes them stand heaven-ward. When once God hath wrought the love of himself in our hearts, this will constrain us to love what he loves, and to hate, what he hates. Sin is the only thing, that God hates; and those, that love him, will not, cannot but hate sin: their love to God will constrain them to do it: Psalm xcvi. 10. "Ye, that love the Lord, hate evil." And, certainly the hatred of evil is the best security against the committing of it: will any one take a toad or a serpent into his bosom, to lodge it there? Truly, as utterly impossible it is, while the exciting grace of God stirs up and quickens our love to him, that we should ever embrace a vile lust and lodge it in our hearts; since our sight of the beauty of holiness hath made it ugly, and our loye to God hath made it hateful.

[3.] To mention no more, *a holy fear and caution lest we should sin is a most excellent preservative against sin.*

None are so safe, as those, that are least secure. Fear is the best preservative of grace. Whereas those, that are rash and venturous and confident of their own strength, run themselves into many temptations, and come off with wounded and smarting consciences. "Stand in awe," says the psalmist, "and sin not:" Psalm iv 4. The timorous and trembling Christian stands firmest, because such an one is apt, upon every occasion, to suspect his own strength, and to call in God's. And, indeed, when we consider the treachery of our own hearts and the subtlety of the devil, this holy fear and jealousy is no more than is needful; and it is less than sufficient. A man, that is to wade through a deep river, will first try his footing, before he takes his step: we are to wade through "the depths of Satan," as the apostle calls them: and, certainly, it is but a requisite caution, first to try our ground, before we venture upon it; to look about, and consider whether such and such an action be grounded upon a command and secured to us by a promise; whether, if we do it, we shall not lay ourselves open to such and such temptations; or, if we do lie open to them, whether or not we are in God's way, and may expect his protection and preser-

vation. Truly, such circumspection as this is will prove our best security : and, though we are not able, by all our own strength and diligence, to preserve ourselves ; yet, when God sees us so industriously solicitous to avoid sin, he will then come in by his almighty grace, that helps not the slothful, but the laborious, and he will keep us from those that we cannot keep ourselves from.

3. Now for the *application* of this.

(1.) If it be so, that it is the almighty power of God only that can keep us from sin, *this may then be convictive of that error, that now-a-days is very rife in the world, that ascribes our preservation in our standing, not so much to the almighty grace of God, as to the liberty and freedom of our own wills.*

Truly, this is an opinion, that proceeds much from the pride and stomach of such, who are loth to be too much beholden to the grace of God for their salvation. It is true, no man sins, nor does any man abstain from sin, but it is with his will ; but yet, still, there is an almighty influence from God : an influence of common providence to the wicked, without which they could not so much as will ; and an influence of special grace to the godly, without which they could not abstain from sin. "It is God," saith the apostle, "that worketh in us both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure." It is not, whether or not the will be free in abstaining from sin : that, is acknowledged : but, whether the motion of the will be principally and primarily from God, or from itself ; and this, the apostle concludes to be from God. From him it is, that we both will and do : he gives the first beginning : he adds the progress : and he concludes. He first begets grace : then, he increases it : and, at last, he crowns it. All is from God.

(2.) *This may instruct us, to whom we ought to ascribe the praise and the glory of our preservation from those foul and horrid sins, that we see others daily fall into.*

"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name, be all the praise and glory." We have natures, as sinful as the worst of men ever had ; and that such sinful

natures should not produce as wicked lives, whence proceeds this, but only from the miracle of God's grace? for it is a miracle, that, when the fountain is as bitter, when our hearts are as bad as the hearts of others, yet the streams should not be so. Whence is it, since we have the same corrupt hearts with Cain and Judas and all the wicked rabble in the world, whence is it, that we have not committed the same impieties with them, or worse than they have done? Why, God hath either restrained or sanctified us. But sanctifying grace is not enough: for, whence is it, that we have not been drunken, with Noah; adulterers or murderers, with David; abjurors of Christ, with Peter? are we more holy than they, or are we more sanctified than they? No: it is only our gracious God's vouchsafing to us a constant influence of exciting grace, that hath thus kept us from those sins, into which he suffers wicked men to fall; and, not only them, but sometimes his own dear children too. It is not a difference in our natures, it is not a difference from inherent grace within us, that makes this difference in our lives; but it is only a difference from the unaccountable exciting, influencing grace of God: there lies the difference. Well then, "let not the strong man glory in his strength; but let him, that glorieth, glory in the Lord," for he is our strength and our deliverer. "What have we, that we have not received; why do we boast as though we had not received?" It is not what we have of ourselves; but it is what we have received from God, and what we do daily receive in a way of special influence, that makes us to differ from the vilest and most profligate sinners in the world: and, therefore, let us ascribe the glory of all to the almighty grace of God.

(3.) To shut up all, if our preservation from sin be from God, *beware then how you provoke him to withdraw and suspend the influence of his grace, whereby you have been preserved, and still are.*

Indeed, if we belong to him, he will never so far depart from us, as utterly to forsake us: but, yet he may so far depart from us, as that we may have no comfortable sense of his presence, nor any visible supports from his grace.

We may be left a naked and destitute prey to every temptation; and fall into the commission of those sins, out of which we may never be able to recover ourselves to our former strength, comfort, and stability. We may fall to the breaking of our bones: and we may rise again, possibly; but it will be to the breaking of our hearts.

So much for this time, and for this subject.

THE  
DREADFULNESS OF GOD'S WRATH AGAINST  
SINNERS.

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HEB. X. 30, 31.

*For we know him that hath said, vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, the Lord shall judge his people.*

*It is a fearful thing, to fall into the hands of the living God.*

THERE are two principal attributes of God, which the scripture propounds to us, as the most powerful and efficacious motives to restrain us from sin: and they are his mercy and his justice.

Mercy, though it be a soft, yet it is a strong argument, to encourage us to purity and holiness. And, therefore, says the apostle, Rom. ii. 4. "The goodness of God leadeth us to repentance." And, certainly, that mercy, that expresseth itself so ready to pardon sin, cannot but lay a mighty obligation upon the ingenuity of a Christian spirit, to abstain from the commission of it. He, that can encourage himself in wickedness, upon the consideration of the infinite free-grace of God, doth but spurn those very bowels that yearn towards him, and strike at God with his own golden sceptre: yea he tears abroad those wounds, which were at first opened for him; and casts the blood of his Saviour back again in his face.

But because ingenuity is perished from off the earth, and men are generally more apt to be wrought upon by

arguments drawn from fear than love, therefore the scripture propounds to us the consideration of the dreadful justice of God, arrayed in all the terrible circumstances of it; that, if mercy cannot allure us, justice at least might affright us from our sins. And, as those, who are to travel through wildernesses and deserts, carry fire with them to terrify wild and ravenous beasts, and to secure themselves from their assaults; so doth the great God, who hath to deal with brutish men, men more savage than wild beasts: he kindles a fire about him, and appears to them all in flames and fury; that so he may fright them from their bold attempts, who otherwise would be ready to run upon his neck, and "upon the thick bosses of his buckler." Job xv. 26.

And, therefore, in the four preceding verses, we find the apostle threatening most tremendous judgments against all that should wilfully transgress, after they had received the knowledge of the truth. He tells us, ver. 26. that "there remaineth no more sacrifice for their sins :" nothing to expiate their guilt; but that they themselves must fall a burnt-sacrifice to the offended justice of God; consumed with that fiery indignation, that shall certainly seize and prey upon them for ever. And, in ver. 28, 29. he sets forth the exceeding dreadfulness of their judgment, by a comparison between those that violated the law of Moses, and those that renounce and annul the law of Christ. "He, that despised Moses' law," who himself was but a servant, and whose laws consisted of inferior and less spiritual ordinances; yet a despiser and transgressor of these was to die without mercy: certainly, much sorcer judgments await those, who reject the laws of Christ; and trample him, who is the Son and Lord of the house, under foot; accounting his blood unholy and profane, renouncing his merits, and blaspheming the Holy Spirit by which our Saviour acted: such as these, says the apostle, shall eternally perish with less mercy, than those that died without mercy.

Where, by the way, observe the strange emphasis, that the apostle lays upon this dreadful commandment. He tells us that they shall be sorcer punished, than those that are punished without mercy: to let us know, that, as there are

transcendent glories, such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter into the heart of man to conceive," reserved in the highest heavens for those that love God; so, also, are there woes and torments, such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter into the heart of man to conceive" how great and insupportable they are, prepared in hell for those that hate him. They shall die with less mercy, than those that die without mercy.

Now that we might not wonder at such a paradox as this, the apostle gives the reason of it in my text: "For we know him, that hath said, vengeance belongeth unto me." It is the vengeance of God, and a falling into the hands of God: and, therefore, it is no wonder if their punishments shall be beyond all extremity. They fall under the power and wrath of an infinite God; which, when we have heaped superlatives upon superlatives, yet still we must express defectively: and all, that we can conceive of it, falls vastly short of reaching but a faint and languishing resemblance thereof. It is a state so full of perfect misery, that misery itself is too easy a name to give it: yea, whatsoever we can speak most appositely of it, is but diminishing it; for, because it is the wrath and vengeance of an infinite God, it can no more be known by us, than God himself. Plunge your thoughts as deep into it as you can, yet still there remains an infinite abyss, which you can never fathom.

O that the consideration of this wrath might cause us all to tremble before this great and terrible God! that we might so fear it, as never to feel it; and be persuaded to fall down at his feet, that we may never fall into his hands!

And, that we may be thus affected, I have chosen this text to set forth the greatness and dreadfulness of that wrath and vengeance, which the righteous God will execute upon all stubborn and disobedient wretches. A text, that speaks to us, as God did to the Israelites from mount Sinai, out of the midst of the fire and blackness, darkness, and tempest, in the voice of a trumpet.

And, truly, we have all need to have such rousing truths frequently inculcated upon us; for the best of us

are lethargical: and though, sometimes, when our consciences are pinched hard by a severe and searching truth, we start up and look abroad; yet, as soon as the present impression is over, we suddenly close our eyes, and fall asleep again in sin and security. A strange dullness and stupor hath seized us; that we can no longer keep waking, than we are shaken.

And, therefore, as we use to apply fire and burning coals to lethargic persons to awaken them: so we have need to heap coals of fire upon men's heads; to speak with fiery tongues, and thunder woe and wrath and judgments against them, that we may rouse the secure, stupid world.

In the words, we have these two parts observable.

I. An appropriation of vengeance unto God: "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord."

II. The dreadfulness of that vengeance inferred, from the consideration of the Author and inflicter of it: "It is a fearful thing, to fall into the hands of the living God."

I. I begin with the first of these, *God's appropriating and challenging vengeance unto himself*. "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord."

Which passage the apostle cites out of Deut. xxxii. 35, 36. "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence." And, "the Lord shall judge his people." It is his great and royal prerogative, that he doth sometimes make use of in inflicting judgments upon the wicked, in this world; but, most especially, in the world to come: and, to this, future vengeance, the words ought particularly to be applied.

From this consideration, that vengeance in a peculiar manner belongs unto the great God, we may observe, that *God himself will be the immediate inflicter of the punishments of the damned*.

It is therefore, here, likewise, called a falling "into the hands of the living God," which denotes his immediate efficiency in their torments.

It is true, God doth use several instruments of torture in hell. There are the worm, that never dies; and the

fire, that never goes out: which I suppose to be not only a metaphorical, but possibly a material fire; elevated to such a degree of subtlety, as that it shall, at once, torture the soul and not consume the body. And this fire the devils, who are the executioners, will be still very officiously raking about them; using all their malicious art to increase their eternal misery.

But, yet, these things are but small appendages, and only the slighter circumstances of their torments. The most exact and intolerable part of their torture, they shall feel inflicted upon them from another fire; an intelligent, everlasting, and therefore an unquenchable fire: and that is God himself; for so he is said to be, Heb. xii. 29. "Our God is a consuming fire."

And, though we ordinarily speak only of hell fire; yet not only hell, but heaven itself is full of this fire.

Consult that place Isa. xxxiii. 14. "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Would not one think, at the very first sound of the words, that the prophet speaks only of such as should be damned; of such as should be cast into hell, to remain there in everlasting fire and burnings: and demands of them, who among them could endure this? No: but it appears plainly, that this fire and burning is in heaven itself; and the prophet, by putting this question, "Who shall dwell with the devouring fire, and everlasting burnings?" asks who shall be saved, and not who shall be destroyed. And, therefore, in the 15th verse, he tells us, that he shall do it, "who walketh uprightly, and speaketh uprightly; that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing of evil." Such an one shall dwell with the devouring fire: that is, he shall for ever dwell and remain with God in heaven.

So that we see God is a fire, both to the wicked, and to the godly. To the wicked he is a penetrating and torturing fire; and they are combustible matter for the wrath and vengeance of God to prey upon: but to the godly, he is a purifying and cherishing fire only. And, as

lightning doth not only cleanse and refine the air, but rend trees and rocks in pieces, dissolve metals, and break through whatsoever opposeth it in its passage : so this great and almighty Fire, only refresheth and comforteth the godly ; whereas it breaks and tears the wicked in pieces, and melts them down like wax before the scorching heat of it.

And, though I deny not but there may be somewhat like that which we commonly apprehend when we speak of hell, some unquenchable flames prepared by the wisdom and power of God for the eternal torment of those wretches that shall be cast therein ; yet, withal, I think that their most exquisite torments shall be from that fire that is God himself.

For, if we observe it, it is said to be "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels :" Mat. xxv. 41. Now the devils are spiritual substances, and flames of fire themselves. "He maketh his angels spirits ; and his ministers, that is his ministering spirits, whether good or evil, whether the ministers of his wrath and vengeance or the ministers of his mercy, he maketh them "flames of fire :" Psalm civ. 4. They are such piercing and subtle flames, that lightning itself is but gross and dull compared to them.

Yet here is a fire, that shall even torture fire itself ; a fire, that shall burn those flames of fire : and that is God ; who, being a spirit and the God of spirits can easily pierce and insinuate into the very centre of their beings.

So that the damned in hell shall for ever find themselves burnt up with a double fire : a material fire, suited and adapted to impress pain and torment upon the body, yet without wasting and consuming it ; and an invisible, intellectual fire, that shall prey upon the soul, and fill it with unspeakable anguish and horrror, and this is no other than God himself.

And, in this, there is a true parallel between heaven and hell. For, as in heaven, though there are many created excellencies and glories, which contribute to the beatitude of the saints ; yet their most substantial happiness is derived from their immediate fruition of God :

so, likewise, in hell, though there be many created, and, if I may so call them, many invented tortures; yet the highest and most intolerable misery of the damned, is from the immediate infliction and infusion of the divine wrath into them, which no creature doth or can convey to them in such a manner and measure as they there feel it, but God himself pours the full vials of it into their souls. And, therefore, as the saints are called vessels of mercy; so the wicked are called "vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction :" Rom. ix. 22 : vessels, into which God will pour of his vengeance, and which he will fill brimful with his wrath and fury, for ever.

The apostle, 2 Thess. i. 9. speaking of wicked men, tells us, that they " shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Where we must not think that this phrase, "from the presence of the Lord," denotes only that part of their punishment, which we call ' *pœna damni*,' or 'the punishment of loss;' but rather that it denotes the efficient cause of their ' *pœna sensus*,' or 'the punishment of sense:' not that their punishment shall only be, to be for ever banished from his presence; but that this presence shall be active in inflicting punishments upon them. And we may well read it thus; 'They shall be punished with everlasting destruction, by the presence of the Lord, and by the glory of his power:' for, as God's glorious power is effective of their destruction; so also is his presence, the dread presence of that consuming and tormenting fire.

And thus much, briefly, for the first thing observable in the text; namely, God's appropriating vengeance unto himself: "vengeance belongeth unto me," and it is a falling "into the hands of the living God."

II. I come now to the second thing observable in the words: and that is the *dreadfulness of this vengeance*, inferred from the consideration of the Author and Inflicter of it: for, because it is divine vengeance, and a falling into the hands of the living God, therefore it must needs be very terrible.

i. And here I shall take notice of those expressions that

*my text affords, to set forth the terror of this wrath : and then consider other demonstrations of it.*

1. Consider, that *all other vengeance is as nothing, in comparison of that, which God takes on a damned soul.*

You may possibly have heard of strange and horrid revenges, that some cruel men have carved out unto themselves ; putting those that have offended them, to such tortures, as were altogether unfit for men either to inflict or suffer. All histories abound with such barbarities. I am loth to offend your ears so much as to recount them. Let us only take an estimate, by the dreadful revenge that David took on the Ammonites : 2 Samuel xii. 31. where it is said, “ He put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln : ” and all this severity, if not to say cruelty, was to revenge the insolent affront done to his ambassadors. It is, doubtless, no small torture to be burnt alive ; for fire is a searching thing, and eats deep into the senses ; but, yet, this kind of death was a quick and merciful dispatch, in comparison of the others. Think what it is to be stretched along ; and to have the sharp spikes of a harrow tare up your flesh, and draw out your bowels and bones after them : or, what it is to be sawn asunder in the midst ; and to have those small teeth eat their way slowly through you, while they jar against your bones, and pull out your nerves and sinews thread by thread. How many deaths, think you, were these poor miserable creatures compelled to suffer, before they were permitted to die !

Yet, alas ! these, and all the witty tortures that ever were invented by the greatest masters of cruelty, are nothing, in comparison of the vengeance that God will take upon sinners in hell. And, therefore, he says, “ Vengeance is mine, I will recompense : ” as if he should say, ‘ Alas ! all that you can do one to another, signifies nothing : it is not to be called, nor accounted vengeance : that is too great a name for such poor effects.’

It is a prerogative, that God challengeth to himself, to be the Avenger : and whatever creatures meddle with, if they have not a commission from him, it is their sin : and therefore private persons whom he hath not invested

with any such authority, ought not to take upon them to avenge their own cause; or, if they have a commission, yet all their execution of vengeance is but feeble and weak.

We find in ecclesiastical history, that the holy martyrs have often mocked at all the cruel tortures of their enraged persecutors. And God hath either taken from them all sense of pain; or else, given them such strong consolations, that they have triumphed and exulted in all the extremity of them. How have they hugged the stake, at which they were to be burnt! courted the beasts, that were to devour them! and been stretched upon the rack, with as much content, as formerly they have stretched themselves upon their beds: and not so much suffered, as enjoyed their deaths! God hath so mercifully taken off the edge and keenness of their torments, to show that vengeance is his right and due; and that they are but contemptible things, that one man can inflict upon another, scarce worthy to be called vengeance.

And, besides, let it be never so sharp and cutting, yet it cannot be long durable. The more intolerable any torments are, the sooner do they work our escape from them. And, though spite and malice may wish the perpetuity of our pain; yet it is not possible for mortal men to prosecute an immortal revenge: the death, either of them or of ourselves, will put a period to our sufferings. And what a small matter is it, to undergo pain for a few days only! This is not worthy to be called vengeance; nor is it like that, which the great God will inflict: which is both insupportable and eternal.

2. And, therefore, the apostle calls it a falling "into the hands of the living God." And this denotes to us *the perpetuity and eternity of this vengeance.*

God for ever lives, to inflict it: and sinners shall for ever live, to suffer it: for they fall into his hands. God hath, as it were, leased out a life to every wicked man: he hath his term of years set him, wherein he lives to himself, enjoying his lusts, and the pleasures and profits of this present world; and, all this while, vengeance intermeddles but little with him. But, when his life is expired and his years run out, he then falls into the hands

of the great Lord of all, and becomes the possession of his vengeance and justice for ever.

And, then, he is "the living God;" and such wicked wretches must for ever live, to endure the most dreadful execution of his power and wrath. Were there any term or period set to their torments, should they when they have endured them thousands of thousands of years afterwards be annihilated, the expectation of this release, at the last, would give them some support: yea, it would be some solace to them in their sufferings, to think that, at last, they should be freed from them. But this is the accent of their misery, and that which makes them altogether desperate, that it is for ever: for ever, they must lie and wallow in those flames, that shall never be quenched; and shall always be bit and stung with that worm, that shall never die. They are fallen "into the hands of the living God," who will never let them go as long as he lives, that is, never to all eternity. He is "a consuming fire," but yet spends not any part of his fuel: he consumes, without diminishing them: and destroys, but yet still perpetuates their being. 'A wise and intelligent fire,' as Minutius calls him, 'that devours' the damned, but yet still 'repairs' them; and, by 'tormenting,' still 'nourishes' them for future torments: 'Sapiens ille ignis, urit et reficit, carpit et nutrit.' And, when they have lain burning in this fire all the ages that arithmetic can sum up, millions after thousands, and thousands of millions; yet, still, it is but the beginning of their sorrows.

O think with yourselves, how long and tedious a little time seems to you, when you are in pain; you complain then, that time hath leaden feet; and wish the days and hours would roll away faster with you: and you never find them so slow paced, as when they pass over a sick bed. O then, what will it be, when you shall lie sweltering under the dread wrath and vengeance of "the living God?" The intolerableness of your pain and torment will make every day seem an age, and every year as long as eternity; and yet you must lie there an eternity of these long years.

Methinks this consideration of eternal torments should astonish the heart, and sink the spirits of every wicked

wretch : for, though they were not to be so excessively sharp as they are ; yet the eternity of them is that, which should make them altogether intolerable. There is scarce any pain so small, but it would make us desperate, were we assured it would never wear off, that we should never obtain any ease or freedom from it : whatever pain we suffer, our usual encouragement unto patience is, that shortly it will be over : but, in hell, there is no period fixed to the torments : they are all eternal ; and, therefore, whatsoever they are for the degree and measure of them, yet are they utterly intolerable, at least for their duration and continuance. Couldst thou shove away millions of years with a wish, yet all this would avail nothing : for there are as many years in eternity as there are moments, and as many millions of years as there are years ; that is, it is an infinite and boundless duration ; and, when thou hast struck thy thoughts as deep into it as thou canst ; yet, still thou art but at the top of the heap, and it is still a whole eternity to the bottom.

3. Consider, also, that the wrath and vengeance of God is most dreadful, not only from the eternal continuance and duration thereof, but also *from the excessive anguish and smart of those torments that he inflicts.*

Nothing, that we have ever felt or can feel in this present life, can come into any comparison with them ; and therefore the text calls it, a falling into the hands of God. Here, on earth, God's hand doth sometimes fall upon us ; and it falls very heavy too, and lays upon us sore and weighty burdens : but these are nothing considerable, to our falling into the hands of God. There is as much difference, between his wrath and displeasure falling upon us, and our falling upon it, as there is, between our having a few drops of a shower falling upon us, and our falling into a river, or into the sea, and being overwhelmed with the great waters thereof ; and, yet, how dreadful is it, when God's hand only falls upon us ! It was a sad complaint of the psalmist, Ps. xxxii. 4. that God's hand " lay heavy " upon him : and, Ps. xxxviii. 2. that God's hand " pressed him sore."

"Grievous burdens and sore pressures may be laid upon

us by this hand of God ; and that, both as to outward afflictions, and inward troubles.

As to *outward afflictions*, how dreadfully doth God stretch out his hand against some ! making wide and terrible breaches upon them : some, in their estates ; some, in their relations ; and some, in their bodily health and strength. Have you never been about the sick beds of those, that have roared out through the extremity of their pains ; when every limb hath been upon the rack, and God hath filled them with a complication of loathsome, tormenting, and incurable diseases ? And, yet, all this is but a falling of God's hand upon them.

As to *inward troubles*, we see how God cramps some men's consciences, breathes fire and flames into their very souls, and makes deep wounds in their spirits ; forcing them, through the extremity of their anguish, to cry out, they are damned, they are damned. Yea, some have even wished that they were in hell : supposing those everlasting torments would not be more unsufferable, than what they here felt.

And, indeed, these inward troubles are far more grievous than any outward can be. We hear Heman crying out, that, because of these terrors of the Lord, he was "ready to die from his youth up :" and, whilst he suffered this wrath of God, he was even "distracted" with it : Psalm lxxxviii. 15. And Job, whose patience is celebrated for bearing all his outward afflictions, his loss of estate, of his children, of his health, with a heroic constancy, ("Ye have heard," says St. James, "of the patience of Job,") yet, when God comes to touch his spirit with his wrath, then we hear of his impatience : he curseth the day of his birth ; and wisheth that God would destroy him, "that he would let loose his hand and cut him off :" Job vi. 9 ; and wherefore are these passionate requests ? Why he tells us, ver. 4. "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit : the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me :" and, therefore, though he could patiently bear all that the rage and spite of the devil could do against him, when he touched his wealth, when he touched his children, yea when he touched his

body ; yet his patience could no longer hold out, when God came to touch his soul and conscience.

And yet the greatest terrors of conscience, whether in the children of God to their reformation, or in the wicked to their desperation, are still but light and small touches of his hand, in comparison with what shall be expressed hereafter on the damned in hell. For,

[1.] *To the godly, all these afflictions are mixed with love and mercy.*

They are brought upon them, not as plagues ; but as medicaments, to do them good. But, in hell, all is wrath, all is fury ; pure wrath and judgment, without mercy. And, certainly, if those sufferings, which are inflicted in love and allayed with mercy, are yet so very dreadful to the people of God, how dreadful will the wrath of God be in hell, where it shall be pure and unmixed, and nothing put into that cup which the damned are there to drink of, but the rankest venom that can be squeezed out of all the curses that ever God hath denounced ! And, then,

[2.] *To the wicked, all the troubles and terrors, which they here endure, are nothing, in comparison with what they must eternally suffer in hell.*

They are now only sprinkled with a few drops of God's wrath ; but in hell, all his waves shall go over them for ever. Here, they do but sip a little of that cup, and taste a little of the froth of it ; and, should they drink deeper, earth could not hold them, but they would grow drunk, and reel and stagger into hell : but, there, they must for ever drink the very dregs of that cup of trembling and astonishment. And thou, who now roarest and strugglest like a wild bull in a net, when God's hand is only upon thee, what wilt thou do, when thou shalt eternally fall into his mighty hands ? Thou now criest out of the intolerableness of thy present pain ; but, alas ! hadst thou but felt one gripe of the torments of the damned in hell, thou wouldest choose to live for ever here on earth in the most exquisite torture that could be devised, choose to bear the sharpest paroxysms of the stone or gout, to be stretched upon the rack, to lie broke upon the wheel, to have thy flesh plucked off by fiery pincers ; thou wouldest choose to suffer

all these to all eternity ; yea, and choose them too as recreations and diversions, rather than return again to that place of torment, where, not only the eternity, but the smart and anguish of them, is infinite and unconceivable. And, as one day in the joys of heaven is better than a thousand days, nay than a thousand years, in all the impure and low delights of earth : so, one day in the torments of hell, is far worse than a thousand in the sharpest miseries we can possibly endure in this life. Here, our pains usually are but partial : God aims and shoots with his arrow but at some one part of us : if he wound our spirits ; yet this invisible shaft, like lightning, passeth through, without making a breach in our bodies, or in our estates ; we have still our health and our plenty left us : or, if he strike the body, usually it is but in one, or at most but in some few places, and we enjoy ease in the rest : But, in hell, God doth, as it were, wrap the whole man up in searcloth, and set it on fire round about him, so that he is tormented in every part ; neither soul nor body escaping, nor any power or faculty of the one, nor any part or member of the other. When we fall into the hands of God, we are plunged into an ocean of wrath, and are covered all over with his fury and indignation : the understanding, will, conscience, affections, are all as brimfull of torments as they can hold : for what can be greater anguish to the mind, than to know our misery, and to know it to be remediless ? and what can be greater anguish to the will and affections, than most ardently and vehemently to desire freedom from those torments, but yet to despair of ever obtaining it ? and what can fill the conscience with greater anguish, than to reflect, with infinite horror and regret, that it was only sinners' own folly and madness that brought them to this woeful and miserable condition ? how will they be ready even to rend and tear themselves in pieces, their consciences curse their wills, and their wills curse their affections, and their affections the objects that enticed them to the commission of those sins, the revenges of which they must now eternally suffer ! And as for the bodies of these damned souls, they shall, after the resurrection and dreadful day of judgment, become all fire, like a live coal : fire

shall be imbibed into the very substance of them, and they not have so much as a drop of water afforded them to cool the tip of their tongues. Luke xvi. 24.

And this is a third consideration of the dreadfulness of everlasting vengeance: it is a falling into God's hands.

4. Consider, *it is a falling into the hands of the living God himself, and not of any creature.*

Indeed, we read in 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. that David chose rather to fall into the hands of the Lord, than into the hands of men. It is true, when there are true repentance and hopes of obtaining mercy, this is far more eligible: for the chastisements of the Lord are full of mercy; but "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." But, where all hopes and expectations of mercy are excluded, as they are in hell; certainly, there, it is infinitely more dreadful to fall into the hands of a sin-revenging-God, than into the hands of all the creatures in heaven, or earth, yea or hell itself.

One would have thought it had been terrible enough, if the apostle had said, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of devils." And so indeed it were; if we consider, either their power, or their malice. Certainly, they can easily find out such tormenting ingredients, and apply them also to such tender parts, that it would transcend the patience of any man on earth quietly to bear but what one devil can inflict. Do we not often see, in the illusions of black and sooty melancholy, what strange fears and terrors they can imprint upon the fancy; what horror and despair they can work in the conscience; so as to make men weary of their lives, and many times persuade them to destroy themselves, only to know the worst of what they must suffer? And all this he can do out of his own kingdom! What then can he do, when he hath got sinners into his own territories, and under his own dominion! What exact tortures can he inflict upon them there; such, indeed as we cannot tell what they are; and may it please God we never may!

And yet the devil is but a fellow-creature: but wicked men are to fall into the hands, not of a creature, but of the great Creator; into the hands of God himself, whose power

is infinitely beyond the devils, so that he is the tormentor even of them.

Think then with thyself, O sinner, that, if God binds and scourges and torments the very devils, who yet do so insufferably torment the damned : how infinitely intolerable then is that wrath, which God himself shall inflict upon them ! Consider with thyself, if thou canst not bear those pains and torments, which the devils inflict ; and if the devils cannot bear those pains and torments, which God inflicts upon them ; how wilt thou then, O sinner, be able to bear the immediate wrath, fury, and vengeance of the great God himself ?

Nay, let me go yet a great deal lower ; and suppose that God should make use of common and ordinary creatures, for the punishment of wicked men : who is there, that could bear even this ?

If God should only keep a man living for ever in the midst of a furnace of gross and earthly fire, how dreadful would this be ! If but a spark of fire fall upon any part of the body, consider what an acute pain it will cause : much more, if thy whole man should be all over on a light flaine, and thou for ever kept alive to feel the piercing torment of it. And, yet, what is our dull, unactive fire ; in comparison of that pure, intelligent fire ?

Or, suppose God, who knows the several stings that are in all his creatures, should take out of them the most sharp ingredients ; and, from them all, make up a most tormenting composition : if he should take poison and venom out of one, and fire and scorching out of another, and smart and stinging out of a third, and the quintessence of bitterness out of a fourth ; and, by his infinite skill, heighten all these to a preternatural acrimony : if now God should apply this composition, thus fatally mixed and blended together, unto any of us, what an intolerable anguish would it cause in us !

And, if creatures can cause such tortures, what a dreadful thing then is it to fall into the hands of God himself ! For, when God conveys his wrath to us by creatures, it must needs lose infinitely in the very conveyance. When God takes up one creature to strike another, it is but as if a

giant should take up a straw or feather to strike a man with ; for, though he be never so strong, yet the blow can be but weak because of the weakness of the instrument : and yet, alas ! how terrible are even such weak blows to us ! What will it then be, when God shall immediately crush us by the unrebat ed strokes of his own almighty arm ; and shall express the power of his wrath, and the glory of his justice and severity, in our eternal destruction ?

And this is the fourth demonstration of the dreadfulness of divine vengeance.

5. Consider, that the apostle calls this wrath, which the living God will inflict upon sinners by the name of " vengeance." " Vengeance is mine, I will recompense it."

Now vengeance, when it is whet and sharpened by wrath, will enter deep, and cut the soul to the very quick.

God acts a two-fold part, in the punishment of sinners.

(1.) *Of a Judge.*

In relation to which, their eternal torments are sometimes called condemnation : so, 1 Tim. iii. 6. we have mention made of " the condemnation of the devil ;" that is, that state of woe and wrath, to which the devil is for ever sentenced :—and damnation : Matt. xxiii. 33. " How can ye escape the damnation of hell ? " And, sometimes, it is termed judgment : Heb. x. 27. " A certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation : " and, in Jude 15, " to execute judgment upon all " the ungodly ; which denotes that their punishment shall be inflicted upon them from God, as he is a just and righteous Judge.

(2.) *God is an Avenger, as well as a Judge.*

He is a party concerned ; as having been wronged, affronted, and injured by their sins. And, in relation to this, the punishments, that God will inflict upon them, are called wrath and fury, smoking anger and jealousy : Deut. xxix. 20. " The anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man." Also, " fiery indignation :" Heb. x. 27. All which we find amassed and heaped together, Zeph. iii. 8. " My determination," saith God, " is to gather the nations, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger : for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy." All these expressions signify to us, the terribleness of that vengeance, which God

will take; for, when the wrath of man only stirs him up to revenge an injury, he will be sure to do it to the very utmost extremity of all his power: and, if the revenge of a poor weak man be so dreadful a thing; how insupportable will be the vengeance of the great God, who assumes it to himself as part of his royalty! "Vengeance is mine." See that terrible place, Nahum i. 2. "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth: the Lord revengeth, and is furious: the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies." God reserveth wrath for sinners, and keeps it up in store; even that wrath, which they themselves have treasured up against the day of wrath.

This revenging wrath of God hath these two things in it, that justly make it dreadful.

[1.] In that *revenge always aims at satisfaction*; and seeks to repair injuries received, by inflicting punishment on the offender.

This gives ease to the party grieved: and, if this revenge be commensurate to the greatness of the offence, he rests satisfied in it. And, therefore, God, speaking of himself according to the passions and affections of men, solaces himself in the thoughts of that vengeance, which he would take upon sinners; Isa. i. 24. "Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, I will avenge me of mine enemies."

And O think how dreadful that revenge must needs be, that shall ease the heart of God; and give him satisfaction, for all the heinous provocations, that sinners have committed against him!

1st. For consider, *how great and manifold our sins and offences have been*. And every act of sin, yea the least that ever we committed, is an infinite debt; and carries in it an infinite guilt, because committed against an infinite Majesty.

For all offences take their measures, not only from the matter of the act, but from the person against whom they are committed: as a reviling, injurious word against our equals, will but bear an action at law: but against the prince, it is high treason, and punishable with death. So, here, the least offence against the infinite majesty of the great God, becomes itself infinite: the guilt of it is far

beyond whatsoever we can possibly conceive. And, yet what infinite numbers of these infinite sins have we committed! The psalmist tells us, "they are more than the hairs of our head :" Psalm xl. 12. Yea, we may well take in all the sands of the sea-shore, to cast them up by. Our thoughts are incessantly in motion : they keep pace with the moments, and are continually twinkling ; and yet " every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts is evil." What multitudes of them have been grossly wicked and impious, atheistical, blasphemous, unclean, worldly, and malicious ! and the best of them have been very defective ; and far short of that spirituality and heavenliness, that ought to give a tincture unto them. And, besides the sins of our thoughts, how deep have our tongues set us on the score ! We have talked ourselves in debt to the justice of God ; and, with our own breath, have been blowing up our everlasting and unquenchable fire. And, add to these, the numberless crowd and sum of our sinful actions, wherein we have busily employed ourselves to provoke the holy and jealous God to wrath : and we shall find our sins to be doubly infinite, in their own particular guilt and demerit. And, now, O sinner, when an angry and furious God shall come to exact from thee a full satisfaction for all these injuries, a satisfaction in which we may eternally rest and acquiesce, such as may repair and recompense his wronged honour ; think sadly with thyself, how infinitely dreadful this must needs be. Assure thyself, God will not lose by thee : but will fetch his glory out of thee, and take such a revenge upon thee, as shall as much please and content him, as his infinite mercy doth in those, whom he saves and glorifies. And how great then must this vengeance be !

2dly. Consider *how dreadful a revenge God took on his own dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, when he came to satisfy his justice upon him for our sins.* His wrath fell infinitely heavy upon him : and the pressure of it was so intolerable, that it squeezed out drops of clotted blood from him, in the garden ; and that sad cry on the cross, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? "

And yet our Lord Christ was supported under all his sufferings by the ineffable union of the Deity.

He had infinite power for him, as well as against him : infinite power to bear him up, as well as to crush him : in Christ's sufferings, the power of God seemed, as it were, to encounter with itself ; and to run contrary to itself, in the same channel. And, as he had the support of infinite power in his sufferings ; so, likewise, had he in the greatest of his agonies the ministry of angels, to comfort him, and to refresh the droopings and faintings of his human nature.—And the infinite dignity of Christ's person, being God as well as man, might well compound for the rigour of his punishments ; and stamp such a value upon his humiliation, that less degrees of suffering from him might be fully satisfactory. For, indeed, it cannot be but an infinite punishment, for an infinite person to be punished.

But thou, that art but a vile contemptible creature, hast nothing in thy nature wherewith to satisfy the dread justice of God, but only the eternal destruction and perdition of it. Thou hast no worth nor dignity, the consideration whereof might persuade the Almighty to mitigate the least of his wrath and fury towards thee : and, when it falls in all its weight and force upon thee, thou hast nothing to uphold or support thee. It is true, the almighty power of God shall continue thee in thy being : but thou wilt for ever curse and blaspheme that support, that shall be given thee only to perpetuate thy torments ; and, ten thousand times, wish that God would destroy thee once for all, and that thou mightest for ever shrink away into nothing. But that, alas ! poor miserable wretch, will not be granted thee : no ; thou shalt not have so much as the relief and comfort of dying, nor escape the vengeance of God by annihilation ; but his power will for ever so support thee, as for ever to torment thee ; which is only such a support as a man receives on the rack or on the wheel ; supported, so as they cannot come off : the very engine of their torture upholds them. And, as for any help or relief which the ministry of angels will afford thee, think what solace it will bring thee, when God shall set on whole legions of infernal ghosts, black and hideous spirits, as the executioners of his wrath ; who shall for ever triumph in thy woes and add to them, hurl firebrands at thee, heap fuel about thee, and fully satiate their malice upon thee, as God satisfies his justice.

And this is one consideration of the dreadfulness of this vengeance : in that it aims at and exacts satisfaction for sin, which will be infinitely intolerable ; because our sins are infinite, both in number and heinousness ; and because Jesus Christ, who was to satisfy not for his own but for the sins of others, though he were upheld by the divine nature and possibly underwent not such acrimony of wrath as the damned do, yet his sufferings were unspeakable and unknown sorrows : and how much sorer then shall wicked men bear for their own sins, when justice shall come to reckon with them, and to exact from them to the very utmost farthing of all that they owe !

[2.] Consider, that *revenging wrath stirs up all that is in God against a sinner.*

Wrath, when it is whet and set on by revenge, redoubles a man's force ; and makes him perform things, that he could not do in his cold blood : it fires all a man's spirits ; and calls them forth to express their utmost efforts. So this revenging wrath of God draws forth all the force and activity of his attributes, and sets them against a sinner : and how dreadful then must that execution needs be ! We see what great works God can perform, when he is not stirred up thereunto by his wrath and indignation : he speaks a whole world into being, and speaks it with a cold and calm breath : certainly, it was no small piece of work, to spread out the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, and to work all those wonders of creation and providence which we daily behold ; but, yet, all these things God did, if I may so speak, without any emotion. But when he comes to take vengeance upon sinners, he is then enflamed : all, that is in God, is, as it were, on fire : " Jealousy," says Solomon, " is the rage of a man," Prov. vi. 34. Now, when God's jealousy shall be stirred in him, think how impetuously it will break forth in the fearful effects of it : Isa. xlvi. 13. " The Lord shall stir up jealousy like a man of war : he shall cry ; yea, roar : he shall prevail against his enemies." If the calm and sedate works of God are so great and wonderful, how great then will his vengeance be ; when anger, fury, and indignation shall excite and whet his power to show the very utmost of what it can do ! and, therefore, though

God had inflicted dreadful plagues upon the Israelites in the wilderness, and had shown mighty effects of his power and vengeance, yet we find that the church blesseth him, that " he turned away his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath :" Ps. lxxviii. 38. But, in hell, God stirs up all his wrath : every thing is set and bent against the damned : and as to the saints in heaven, every attribute of God concurs to make him merciful and gracious to them ; so, to the wicked in hell, all the perfections of God conspire either to stir up and kindle his wrath, or else to assist him in the execution of it upon them : the infinite wisdom of God contrives their punishments ; and which way to lay them on, so that they shall be most sharp and poignant ; the power of God rouses itself against them ; and proffers all its succours and assistance unto vengeance : the eternity and unchangeableness of God come in as a dreadful addition ; and make that wrath, which of itself is unsupportable, to be also everlasting : yea, that sweet and mild attribute of God, his mercy, the only refuge and the only comfort of miserable mankind, yet even this turns against them too ; and because they despised it when it shone forth in patience and forbearance, will not now regard them when they stand in need of its rescue and deliverance : so that all, that is in God, arms itself to take vengeance on sinners. An oh, think how sore and fearful that vengeance will be, when God shall put forth all that is in himself for the executing of his wrath upon impenitent sinners !

And thus I have done with the demonstrations of the dreadfulness of God's wrath taken from the words in the text, " Vengeance is mine, I will recompense it. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

ii. Let us now consider *some other demonstrations of the greatness of this wrath.* And,

1. It appears to be exceeding dreadful, in that *it is set forth to us in scripture by all those things, which are most terrible to human nature.*

God maketh use of many metaphorical expressions of things most grievous to our senses, that from them we may take a hint to conceive how intolerable his wrath is in itself.

It is called "a prison :" 1 Peter iii. 19. where mention is made of "the spirits in prison :" that is, the souls of those men, to whom the Spirit of Christ in Noah went, and preached in the days of their mortal life ; but which, for their disobedience, are shut up under the wrath of God in hell. And, certainly, hell is a prison, large enough to hold all the world : Ps. ix, 17. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." A prison it is, where the devil and wicked spirits are shackled with chains of massy and substantial darkness : 2 Peter ii. 4. they are, says the apostle, "reserved in chains of darkness, unto the judgment" of the great day. And they are there kept "in everlasting chains under darkness ;" there being not one cranny in this great prison, to let in the least ray or glimpse of light.

It is called "a place of torment :" Luke xvi. 28. It is a region of woe and misery : wherein horror, despair, and torture for ever dwell : and are in their most proper seat and habitation.

It is called, a drowning of "men in destruction and perdition :" 1 Tim. vi. 9. One would think, that, to be drowned, might signify death enough of itself ; but, to be drowned in perdition and destruction, signifies moreover the fatalness and the depth of that death, into which they are plunged.

It is called, a being "cast, bound hand and foot, into outer darkness :" Mat. xxii. 13 : a being thrown "into a furnace of fire," to be burnt alive : Mat. xiii. 42, 50.

It is called "a lake of fire :" Rev. xx. 15. into which wicked men shall be plunged all over ; where they shall lie wallowing and rolling among millions of damned spirits, in those infernal flames. And this lake is continually fed with a sulphurous stream of brimstone : Rev. xix. 20. And this fire and brimstone is that, which never shall be quenched : Mat. iii. 12. "He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

And, lastly, to name no more, it is called "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels :" Mat. xxv. 41. And now we are arrived at the highest pitch of what sense can feel, or imagination conceive.

Or, if it be possible, that, in your deepest thoughts,

you can conceive any thing more dreadful than this, you may call it a sea of molten brimstone, set all on fire, and continually spewing out sooty dark flames : wherein endless multitudes of sinful wretches must lie tumbling to all eternity ; burned up with the fierceness of a tormenting and devouring fire ; scourged with scorpions ; stung with fiery serpents ; howling and roaring incessantly, and none to pity, much less to relieve and help them ; grinding and gnashing their teeth, through the extremity of their anguish and torture.

If now you can fancy any thing more terrible and dreadful than this, hell is that ; yea, and much more : for these things are metaphorical ; and, though I cannot deny but some of these may be properly and literally true, yet the literal sense of these metaphors does but faintly and weakly show us, what is the least part of those everlasting torments.

2. Another demonstration of the dreadfulness of this vengeance is this, that "it is a wrath, that shall come up unto and equal all our fears."

You know what an inventive and ingenious thing fear is : what horrid shapes it can fancy to itself, out of every thing. Put but an active fancy into an affright, and presently the whole world will be filled with strange monsters and hideous apparitions. The very shaking of a leaf will sometimes rout all the forces and resolutions of men. And, usually, it is this wild passion, that doth enhance all other dangers ; and makes them seem greater and more dreadful, than indeed they are.

But, now, here, it is impossible for a wicked man to fear more, than he shall certainly suffer. Let his imaginations be hung round with all the dismal shapes, that ever frightened men out of their wits : let his fancy dip its pencil in the deepest melancholy that ever any soul was besmeared with, and then strive to pourtray and express the most terrible things, that it can judge to be the objects of fear, or the instruments of torment : yet the wrath of the great God vastly exceeds all, that fear itself can possibly represent.

See that strange expression, Ps. xc. 11. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger ? even according to thy fear, so

is thy wrath : " that is, according to the fear men have of thee, as dreadful and as terrible as they can possibly apprehend thy wrath to be, so it is, and much more. Let the heart of man stretch itself to the utmost bounds of imagination, and call in to its aid all the things that ever it hath heard or seen to be dreadful; let it (as that painter, who, to make a beautiful piece, borrowed several of the best features from several beautiful persons) borrow all the dreadful, all the direful representations, that ever it met with, to make up one most terrible idea: yet the wrath of God shall still exceed it. He can execute more wrath upon us, than we can fear.

Some wicked men, in this life, have had a spark of this wrath of God fall upon their consciences ; when they lay roaring out, under despair, and fearful expectations of the fiery indignation of God to consume and devour them. But, alas ! this is nothing, to what they shall hereafter feel. God now doth but open to them a small chink and crevice into hell : he now doth but suffer a few small drops of his wrath to fall upon them. And, if this be so sore and smart, that their fears could never think of any thing more dreadful than what they now suffer : oh, what will it be then, when he shall overwhelm them with a whole deluge of his wrath, and cause all his waves to go over them ? " Fear him," says our Saviour, " which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear him :" Mat. x. 28. Luke xii. 5. And yet, when we have feared according to the utmost extent of our narrow hearts ; still, his infinite power and wrath is infinitely more fearful than we can fear it.

3. Consider *the principal and immediate subject of this wrath of God*; and that is the soul.

And this adds much to the dreadfulness of it. The acutest torments, that the body is incapable of, are but dull and flat things, in comparison of what the soul can feel. Now when God shall immediately, with his own hand, lash the soul, that refined and spiritual part of man, the principle of all life and sensation ; and shall draw blood from it at every stripe ; how intolerable may we conceive those pains and tortures to be ! To shoot poisoned darts into a man's marrow, to rip up his bowels with a

sword red hot; all this is a nothing to it. Think what it is, to have a drop of scalding oil or melted lead fall upon the apple of your eyes, that should make them boil and burn till they fall out of your heads: such torment, nay infinitely more than such, is it, to have the burning wrath of God fall upon the soul. We find that spirits, which are infinitely inferior unto God, can make strange impressions upon the souls of men: and shall not the great God, much more, who is the Father of spirits? yes: he can torture them by his essential wrath. And that God, who, as the prophet Nahum speaks, (ch. i. 5, 6,) can melt mountains, and make hills and rocks flow down at his presence, can melt the souls of the damned, like lumps of wax: for, in his displeasure, he doth sometimes do it to the best of men, even in this life: Psalm xxii. 14. "My heart is melted like wax in the midst of my bowels."

4. The dreadfulness of this wrath of God may be demonstrated by this, that *the punishment of the damned is reserved by God as his last work.*

It is a work, which he will set himself about, when all the rest of his works are done. When he hath folded up the world, and laid it aside as a thing of no further use; then will God set himself to this great work, and pour out all the treasures of his wrath upon damned wretches: as if God would so wholly mind this business, that he would lay all other affairs aside, that he might be intent only upon this, having no other thing to interrupt him. Think, then, how full of dread and terror this must needs be, when God will, as it were, employ all his eternity about this; and have no other thing to take him off, from doing it with all his might.

God hath reserved two works, and but two, for the other world: one, is the salvation of the elect; and, the other is, the damnation of reprobates.

Now it is remarkable, that God's last works do always exceed his former. And, therefore, we find in the creation of the world, God still proceeded on, from more imperfect kinds of creatures, to those, that were more perfect; until he had fully built and finished, yea carved and as it were painted this great house of the universe: and, then, he brings man into it, as his last work; as the crown and

perfection of the rest. So God likewise acted, in the manner of revealing his will unto mankind : first, he spake to them by dreams and visions ; but, in "the last days," as the apostle expresseth it, "he hath spoken unto us by his Son." So, also in the dispensation of the covenant of grace and exhibition of the Messiah : first, he was made known only by promise to the fathers ; then, in types and obscure resemblances to the Jews : but, in the latter days, himself came and took upon him the form of a servant, and wrought out a complete redemption for us. So, usually, the last works of God are more complete, perfect and excellent than the former.

Now God's punishing work is his last work ; and, therefore, it shall exceed in greatness all that ever went before it. In his first work, the creation of the world, he demonstrated his infinite power, wisdom, and godhead ; but, in the destruction of sinners, which is his last work, he will manifest more of power and wisdom, than he did in his creating them : and how fearful a destruction then must this needs be !

God hath variety of works that he is carrying on in this world ; and, if his glory doth not perfectly appear in one, he may manifest it in another. But, when he shall confine himself only to two, as he will in the world to come, the saving of the godly and the damning of the wicked, and this without any variety or change ; certainly, then these shall be performed to the very utmost of what God can do : for, as he will save the saints to the very utmost ; so, likewise, will he damn and destroy sinners to the very utmost.

5. Another demonstration of the dreadfulness of this wrath shall be drawn from this consideration, that *God will for ever inflict it for the glorifying of his power on the damned.*

Rom. ix. 22. "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known :" and, 2 Thess. i. 9. They "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

Now, certainly, if God will inflict eternal punishments

upon them to show forth his power, their punishments must needs be infinitely great. For,

(1.) *All those works, wherein God shows forth his power, are great and stupendous.*

Consider what power it was, for God to lay the beams of the world, and to erect so stately a fabric as heaven and earth. The apostle therefore tells us, that by "the creation of the world," is understood the "eternal power" of God: Rom. i. 20. When God showed his power in creating, oh what a great and stupendous work did he produce! and, therefore, certainly, when God shall likewise show his power in destroying, the punishments he will inflict will be wonderful and stupendous.

(2.) Consider, *God can easily destroy a creature without showing any great power; or putting forth his almighty arm and strength to do it.*

If he only withdraw his power, by which he upholds all things in their beings, we should quickly fall all abroad into nothing: so easy is it for God to destroy the well-being of all his creatures. But, if God will express the greatness and infiniteness of his power in destroying sinners, whom yet he can destroy without putting forth his power, yea only by withdrawing and withholding it; oh how fearful must this destruction needs be! Alas, we are crushed before the moth; and must needs perish, if God do but suspend the influence of his power from us: how dreadfully then will he destroy, when he shall lay forth his infinite power to do it, who can easily do it without power!

And thus I have laid down some demonstrations of the dreadfulness of the wrath and vengeance of God; five of them drawn from the words of the text, and five drawn from other considerations.

III. I shall now shut up, with two or three words of application.

i. *Be persuaded to believe, that there is such a dreadful wrath to come.*

I know well, you all profess that you believe, that, as there are inconceivable rewards of glory reserved in heaven for the saints, so there are inexhaustible treasures of

wrath reserved and laid up in hell for all ungodly and impenitent sinners : but, oh, how few are there, that do really and cordially believe these things ! Men's own lives may be evident convictions to themselves, of their atheism and infidelity : for all that dissoluteness, which we see abroad in the world, proceeds much from hence, that men are not persuaded that these dreadful terrors of the Lord, which have now been set before us, are any thing but an honest artifice. They look upon them, as things only invented to scare the world into good order, and to awe men into some compass of civility and honesty : they think all those tremendous threatenings, that God hath denounced in his law, to be things intended rather to fright men, than to do execution upon them. And, whereas one of the most effectual motives to piety and a holy life, is, to be persuaded of the terrors of the Lord ; these are not yet persuaded, that there are any such terrors. But, assure yourselves, these are not the extravagant dreams of melancholy fancies, nor the politic impostures of men that design to amuse the world with frightful stories ; but they are sad and serious truths : such, as, however you may now slight and contemn them, yet shall you be woefully convinced of by your own experience ; when, after a few years, or possibly a few days, you shall be sunk down into that place of torment, that gulph and abyss of misery, where the great God shall for ever express the art and the power of his vengeance, in your everlasting destruction.

ii. This speaks abundance of comfort to all those, whose sins are pardoned, and who are delivered from the wrath to come.

Look what spring-tides of joy would rise in the heart of a poor condemned malefactor, who every moment expects the stroke of justice to cut him off, to have a pardon interpose and rescue him from death ; such, yea far greater, should be thy joy, who art freed merely by a gracious pardon, from a condemnation infinitely greater and worse than death itself. When we look into hell, and consider the wrath that the damned there lie under, oh, to behold them there restlessly rolling to and fro in chains and flames ; to hear them exclaim against their own folly and madness, and to curse themselves and their associates as

the causes of their heavy and doleful torments ; how should we rejoice, that, though we have been guilty of many great and heinous sins, and have ten thousand times deserved hell and everlasting burnings, yet our good and gracious God hath freely pardoned us our debts, and freed us from the same merited punishments.

iii. This also should *excite us to magnify the love of our Lord Jesus Christ towards us.*

Who, though he knew what the dreadful wrath of God was, how sore and heavy it would lie upon his soul : yet, such was his infinite compassion towards us, that he willingly submitted himself to be in our stead ; took upon him our nature, that he might take upon him our guilt ; and first made himself wretched, that he might be made accursed. He drank off the whole bitter cup of his Father's wrath, at one bitter draught ; received the whole sting of death into his body, at once ; fell and died under the revenges of divine justice, only that we might be delivered from the wrath that we had deserved, but could not bear. O Christian, let thy heart be enlarged with great love and thankfulness to thy blessed Redeemer : and, as he thought nothing too much to suffer for thee, return him this expression of thy thankfulness, to think nothing too much nor too hard to do or suffer for him.

iv. *You that go on in sin, consider what a God you have to deal withal.*

You have not to do with creatures, but with God himself. And do you not fear that uncreated fire, that will wrap you up in flames of his essential wrath, and burn you for ever ? Consider that dreadful expostulation, that God makes, Ezek. xxii. 14. " Can thy heart endure, or can thy hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee," saith the Lord ? The very weakness of God is stronger than man. God can breathe, he can look a man to death : Job. iv. 9. " By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed." " They perish at the rebuke of thy countenance :" Psalm lxxx. 16. O, then, tremble to think what a load of wrath his heavy hand can lay upon thee : that hand, which spans the heavens ; and, in the hollow of which, he holds the sea : Isa. xl. 12. What punishment will this great

hand of God, in which his great strength lies, inflict, when it shall fall upon thee in the full power of its might ! And tell me now, O sinner, wouldest thou willingly fall into the hands of this God, who is thus able to crush thee to pieces, yea to nothing ? O how shall any of us then dare, who are but poor weak potsherds of the earth, to dash ourselves against this Rock of Ages ? Indeed, we can neither resist his power, nor escape his hand : and, therefore, since we must necessarily sooner or later fall into the hands of God, let us, by true repentance and an humble acknowledgment of our sins and vileness, throw ourselves into his merciful hands ; and, then, to our unspeakable comfort, we shall find that he will extend his arm of mercy to support us, and not his hand of justice to crush and break us.

OF  
PARDON AND FORGIVENESS OF SIN.

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ISAIAH xliii. 25.

*I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*

IN the foregoing verses, we have a heavy accusation drawn up against the people of the Jews : in which they stand charged both with sins of omission and of commission.

By the one, they showed themselves weary of God ; and, by the other, God became weary of them.

“Thou hast not called upon me, nor brought me thy burnt-offerings, nor honoured me with thy sacrifices, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel :” as it is in 22d and 23d verses. Thou thoughtest my commands grievous, and my service burdensome : and though, as thou art my sworn servant, I might compel thee to work ; yet I have borne with thy sloth, and suffered my work to lie undone. “I have not caused thee to serve with offerings, nor wearied thee with incense :” as it is in the 23d verse. Nay, as if rejecting my service had not been indignity enough, thou hast even brought me into a kind of servitude ; even me, thy Lord and Master : thou hast wearied my patience ; thou hast loaded my omnipotency : “Thou hast made me serve with thy sins ; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities :” v. 24.

And what could we now, in reason, expect should be the close of so heavy an accusation, but only as heavy a doom and sentence ? “Thou hast brought me no sacrifices : therefore I will make thee a sacrifice to my wrath. Thou hast not called upon me ; and, when thou dost call, I will

not answer. Thou hast wearied me with thy sins : and I will weary thee with my plagues."

But there is no such expected severity follows hereupon but, "I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions: for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." The like parallel place we have concerning Ephraim : Isa. lvii. 17, 18. " He went on fowardly in the ways of his own heart :" Well, says God, " I have seen his ways :" and, what ! " With the foward, shall I show myself foward ? " No : but " I have seen his ways, and I will heal him."

Here is the prerogative of free grace ; to infer pardon there, where the guilty themselves can infer only their own execution and punishment. It is the guise of mercy to make strange and abrupt inferences from sin to pardon.

The words are a gracious proclamation of forgiveness ; or, an act of pardon passed on the sins of men : and contain in them three things.

1. Here is the Person, that gives out this pardon ; and, that is God : accented here by a vehement ingemination, " I, even I, am he."

2. Here is the pardon itself ; which, for the greater confirmation of our faith and hope, is redoubled : I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins.

3. Here are the motives, or the impulsive cause, that prevailed with God, thus to proclaim pardon unto guilty malefactors ; and, that is, for his own sake. " I am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake."

1. As for the first particular, I, even I, am he ;" we may observe, That God seems more to triumph in the glory of his pardoning grace and mercy, than he doth in any other of his attributes.

" I, even I, am he." Such a stately preface must needs usher in somewhat, wherein God and his honour is much advanced. Is it therefore, ' I am he, that spread forth the heavens, and marshalled all their host; that hung up the earth in the midst of the air ; that breathed forth all the creatures upon the face of it ; that poured out the great deeps, and measured them all in the hollow of my hand ; that ride upon the wings of the wind, and make

the clouds the dust of my feet ?' This, though it might awe and amuse the hearts of men, yet God counts it not his chiefest glory ; but, " I, even I, am he, that blotteth out transgressions, and forgiveth iniquities."

So we find, when God condescends to show Moses his glory, he proclaims, not the Lord, great and terrible, that formed all things by the word of his mouth, and can destroy all things by the breath of his nostrils : no ; but he passeth before him with a still voice, and proclaims himself to be, " The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."

So that, when God would be seen in his chiefest state and glory, he reveals himself to be a sin-pardoning God : " I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins."

2. As for the pardon itself, that is expressed in two things : " I am he, that blotteth out, and will not remember."

Blotting out implies, that our transgressions are written down. And written they are, in a two-fold book ; the one, is in the book of God's remembrance ; which he blots out, when he justifies a sinner : the other, is the book of our own consciences ; which he blots out, when he gives us peace and assurance. And, oftentimes, these follow one upon the other : when God blots his remembrance-book in heaven, that blot diffuseth and spreadeth itself even to the book of conscience, and blots out all that is written there also. Man blots his conscience by committing sin, but God blots it by pardoning it : he lays a blot of Christ's blood upon a blot of our guilt : and this is such a blot, as leaves the conscience of a sinner purer and cleaner than it found it.—Blotting out of transgression implies a legal discharge of the debt. A book, that is once blotted and crossed, stands void in law : whatever the sum and debts were before, yet the crossing of the book signifies the payment of the debt. So is it here : " I will blot out thy transgressions :" that is, ' I will acquit thee of all thy debts ; I will never charge them upon thee : I will dash them all out : I will not leave so much as

one item, not one sin legible against thee.' This is the proper meaning of this expression and notion, of blotting out transgression and sin.

And this is one thing, that pardon of sin is expressed by.

It follows, in the next words, " And I will not remember thy sins." Not that there is truly any forgetfulness in God : no ; his memory retains every sin which we have committed, surer and firmer than if all our sins were written in leaves of brass. But God speaks here, as he doth elsewhere frequently in scripture, by a gracious condescension, and after the manner of men ; and it is to be interpreted only by the effects : " I will not remember their sins ; " that is, ' I will deal so mercifully with them, as if indeed I did not remember the least of their provocations : I will be to them as one, that hath utterly forgotten all their injuries.' So that this, not remembering of sin, denies not the eminent act of God's knowledge, but only the transient act of his justice ; and is no more than his promising not to punish sin ; as if God had said, ' I will not be avenged on them, nor punish them for their sins.'

And here we may see what abundant security God gives his people, that they shall never be impleaded for those sins, which once they have attained the pardon of : they are blotted out of his book of remembrance. And, that they may not fear he will accuse them without book, he tells them, that they are utterly forgotten : and shall never be remembered by him, against them, any more.

3. Consider *the impulsive cause*, that moves God's hand, as it were to blot out our transgressions : and, that is, not any thing without himself, but, says God, I will do it "*for mine own sake*."

This admits of a two-fold sense, efficient and final.

First. " For mine own sake :" that is, ' because it is my pleasure : I will do it, because I will do it.'

And, indeed, this is the royal prerogative of God alone, to render his will for his reason : for, because his will is altogether sovereign and independent, that must needs be most reasonable, that he wills. If any should question why the Lord passed by fallen angels, and stooped so low as to take up fallen man ; and, why, among men, he hath rejected many wise and noble, and hath chosen those that

are mean and contemptible; why he hath gathered up and lodged in his own bosom, those that wallowed in the filth and defilement of the worst sins, when others are left to perish under far less guilt: the most reasonable answer that can be given to all, is this, ‘I have done it, for my own sake: I have done it, because it is my will and pleasure to do it:’ even the same reason that God gave unto Moses: “I will be gracious, because I will be gracious; and I will shew mercy, because I will shew mercy:” Exod. xxxiii. 19. which was the same answer, that our Saviour gave to himself: Luke x. 21. “Even so, Father; because so it seemed good in thy sight.

Secondly. “For mine own sake:” we may take in a final sense: that is, ‘I will do it, because of that great honour and glory, that will accrue to my great name by it.’

The ultimate and chief end of God in all his actions, is his own glory. God bestows pardon and salvation upon us, chiefly for the manifestation of his own glory; even the glory of his mercy and free grace. Our salvation is therefore accomplished, that it might be a means to declare to the world how merciful and gracious God is: not so much for our good, as for his glory; not for our sakes, but for his own sake. Such a parallel place we have in Ezek. xxxvi. 22. “I do not this for your sakes, saith the Lord, but for my holy name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen.” ‘I will show mercy unto you; not so much that you may be delivered, as that my holy name, that you have profaned, may be redeemed from that dis-honour, that you have cast upon it, and may be glorified among the heathen.’

And thus we have the full interpretation of the words; and, from them, I shall raise and prosecute this observation, that *the grace of God, whereby he blots out and forgives sin, is absolutely free and infinitely glorious.* “I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgression for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

I. Though this doctrine of free grace hath deserved well of all; as being the best tenure of our present enjoyment, and the best prop for our future hopes; yet hath it, in all ages, found bitter enemies; and, of old, like the

procurer of it, been crucified between two thieves, the Gnostics and the Pelagian heretics.

The Pelagians deprive it of its freedom, and enslave it to the will of man ; affirming, that God therefore pardons and saves some, because they will, by the power of their own nature, work faith in themselves ; whereas, the truth is, therefore God works faith in them, because he will pardon and save them. Thus they make free grace a handmaid, to wait upon the motions of free will. Now this is greatly derogatory to free grace, for men to bottom their faith and pardon upon the arbitrariness of free will ; and not upon the almighty sovereign grace of God, that first moves the will to believe, and then pardons it upon believing.

As these depress the free grace of God ; so there are others, that ascribe too much unto it : of old, Islebius, in Luther's time ; who was the first ringleader ; of latter days, the Antinomians. And these think the grace of God is so free, as to supersede all necessity of working, for it or with it ; and that it is enough for us to sit still and admire it, and so to be hurried away to heaven in a dream. Nay, some, even in our days, have, upon this principle, arrived to that height of blasphemy, as to affirm, that we never so much glorify free grace, as when we make work for it by stout sinning.

i. Now therefore, that we may avoid both these extremes, it will be very necessary to state aright, *how the grace of God is free, and how it is not free.*

Now there are many sorts of freedom : a freedom from natural necessity : a freedom from violent co-action, and from engaging promises, and the like : but these are not pertinent to our present business.

When grace, therefore, is said to be free, it must be taken in a two-fold sense, free from any procurement, free from any limiting conditions.

And, accordingly, I shall propound the resolution of two questions :—whether the grace of God be so free, as to exclude all merit and desert : and then, whether it be so free, as to require no conditions.

1. *Whether the grace of God be so free, as to exclude all merit and desert.*

In answer unto this question, I shall lay down three propositions.

(1.) That *the pardoning grace of God is not so freely vouchsafed to man, as to exclude all merit and desert on Christ's part.*

There is not the least sin pardoned unto any, but it first cost the price of blood, even the precious blood of the Son of God. It is this blood, that crosseth God's debt-book; and blotteth out all those items, that we stand indebted to him for. As Christ now sues out our pardon, by his intercession in heaven; so he bought out our pardon, by his sufferings on the cross: for, "without shedding of blood, there is no remission :" Heb. ix. 22. And, "This is my blood," says our Saviour himself, "which is shed for the remission of sins :" Mat. xxvi. 28. And, "we are not our own," but we "are bought with a price; even with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: as the two great apostles speak: 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. 1 Pet. i. 19. Some have made bold, and possibly with no bad intention, to call Jesus Christ the greatest sinner in the world; because the sins of all God's people met in him, and were imputed to him; they were his, by a voluntary susception and undertaking. And, if the foregoing expression may be allowed, there is one in heaven, the highest in glory, whose sins were never pardoned; for our Lord Christ paid down the utmost farthing that either the law or justice of God could exact, as a satisfaction for those sins that he voluntarily took upon himself: and, therefore, by law and justice, and not by free grace, he hath taken possession of heaven for himself, and is there preparing mansions for us. In respect of Christ, we receive nothing of free grace, or of free gift; but all is by purchase; and, as we ourselves are bought with a price; so is every thing we enjoy: even common and vulgar mercies come flowing in upon us in streams of blood: our lives, and all the comforts of them, much more our future life, and all the means tending to it, are paid for by the blood of Christ. So that the grace of God is not so free, as to exclude all merit on Christ's part; who hath purchased all we enjoy or hope for, by paying a full and equitable price to the justice of God.

(2.) *The infinite grace of God, in giving Christ to us and his blood for us, through which we have pardon merited, is absolutely free ; and falls not under any merit, either of ours or of his.*

It falls not under any merit of ours. For, certainly, could we have merited Christ out of heaven, we might as well have merited heaven without Christ. When God, in his infinite wisdom, foresaw how we would reject and despise his Son ; first spill his blood, and then trample upon it ; he did not account this demeanour of ours to be meritorious of so great a gift.

Which is yet more to the glory of God's free grace, he bestowed Christ upon us ; not only without any merit of ours, but without any merit of his also. It is free grace, that pardons, that sanctifies, that saves us ; yet all this Christ purchased for us by a full price. God will have a price paid down for all other things of a less value ; that so he might hereby set forth his own bounty, in parting with his own Son for us without price.

(3.) *Pardon and grace, obtained through the blood of Christ, in respect of any merit of ours is altogether free and undeserved.*

We cannot of ourselves scarce so much as ask forgiveness ; much less, therefore, can we do any thing that may deserve it. All, that we can do, is either sinful or holy : if what we do be sinful, it only increaseth our debts : if it be holy, it must proceed from God's free grace, that enables us to do it ; and, certainly, it is free grace to pardon us upon the doing of that, which free grace only enables us to do. Far be it from us to affirm, as the papists do, that good works are meritorious of pardon : what are our prayers, our sighs, our tears ? yea, what are our lives and our blood itself, should we shed it for Christ ? All this cannot make one blot in God's remembrance-book : yea, it were fitter and more becoming the infinite bounty of God to give pardon and heaven freely, than to set them to sale for such inconsiderable things as these are : heaven needed not to have been so needlessly prodigal and lavishing, as to have sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world, to lead a miserable life and die a cursed death, had it been possible for man to have bought off his own guilt and to have

quitted scores with God, by a lower price than what Christ himself could do or suffer.

And, so much, for the resolution of the first question : God's pardoning grace, though it be purchased, in respect of Christ ; yet is it absolutely free, in respect of any merit of ours.

2. The second question is, *whether the grace of God be so free, as to require no conditions on our part.*

Of gifts, some are bestowed absolutely, without any terms of agreement ; and some are conditional, upon the performance of such stipulations and conditions, without which they shall not be bestowed.

Of which sort is this grace of God ?

I answer,

(1.) *The sanctifying and regenerating grace of God, whereby the great change is wrought upon our hearts in our first conversion and turning unto God, is given absolutely, and depends not upon the performance of any conditions.*

Indeed we are commanded to make use of means, for the getting true and saving grace wrought in us ; but these means are not conditions for the obtaining of that grace : for the nature of conditions is such, that the benefits which depend upon them are never bestowed, but where the conditions are first performed : and therefore we call faith and repentance conditions of eternal life, because eternal life is never conferred upon any, who did not first believe and repent. But, certain it is, God hath converted some without the use of ordinary means ; as St. Paul, and the thief on the cross. Therefore, though we are commanded to use the means ; yet the use of means and ordinances cannot be called conditions of our regeneration. And, indeed, if any thing could be supposed a condition of obtaining grace, it must either be a work of nature, or a work of grace : now a work of grace it cannot be, till grace be wrought ; and to go about to make a work of nature a condition of grace, is to revive that old error of the Pelagians, for which they stand anathematized in count Palestine many years since. Sanctifying grace is given freely, excepted from any conditions, though not excepted from the use of means.

(2.) *Justifying and pardoning grace, though it be free,*

*yet is it limited to the performance of certain conditions, without which God never bestows it upon any ; and they are two, faith and repentance.*

And these graces God bestows upon whom he pleaseth, without any foregoing conditions. Faith in Christ is the freest gift, that ever God bestowed upon any ; except that Christ, on whom we believe. But pardon of sin is restrained to faith and repentance, as the conditions of it; nor is it ever obtained without them. These two things the scripture doth abundantly confirm to us : " Whosoever believeth on him shall obtain remission of sins ;" Acts x. 43 : " Repent, that your sins may be blotted out ;" Acts iii. 19 : " Whosoever believeth on 'him ;' there faith is made the condition of pardon : " Repent, that your sins may be blotted out ;" there repentance is made the condition of pardon. These two particulars correspond with the two-fold covenant of grace, which God made with man. His absolute covenant, wherein he promiseth the first converting grace : this covenant is independent of any conditions, a copy of which we have in Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. " A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." And then there is God's conditional covenant of grace, wherein he promiseth salvation only upon the foregoing conditions of faith and repentance : this we have, Mark xvi. 16. " He that believeth, shall be saved."

Thus I have stated the great question concerning the free grace of God. The first sanctifying grace of God is so free as to exclude all conditions ; but the justifying and pardoning grace of God is limited to the conditions of faith and repentance : and both sanctifying and justifying grace are freely bestowed, without any merit of ours ; but not without respect to the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who hath purchased them at the highest rate, even with his own most precious blood.

ii. In the next' place, I shall endeavour to set before you *some particulars wherein the glory of God's free grace in pardoning sin may be more illustrated* ; that it may appear God assumes to himself this, as the greatest honour, to be a sin-pardoning God. And,

1. This highly commends the freeness of pardoning grace, in that *God decreed to bestow it without any request or entreaties of ours.*

No rhetoric moved him, besides the yearnings of his own bowels. This was a gracious resolution, sprung up spontaneously in the heart of God, from all eternity. He saw thee wallowing in thy blood, long before thou wert in thy being : and this time was a time of love ; even a time before all times. What friend couldest thou then make in heaven ? What intercessor hadst thou then, when there was nothing but God ? When this design of love was laid, there were neither prayers, nor tongues to utter them. Yea, Christ himself, though now he intercedes for the application of pardon, did not then intercede for the decree of pardon : he could not then urge his blood and merits, as motives for God to take up thoughts of forgiving us ; for, had not God done so before, Christ had never shed his blood, nor wrought out salvation for us. What arguments, what advocates did then persuade him ? Truly, the only argument was our misery ; and the only advocate was his own mercy, and not Jesus Christ.

2. *God pardons sin, when yet he is infinitely ably to destroy the sinner.*

And this greatly advanceth the riches and freeness of his grace. The same breath, that pronounceth a sinner absolved, might have pronounced him damned. The angels, that fell, could not stand before the power and force of his wrath ; but, like a mighty torrent, it swept them all into perdition : how much less, then, could we stand before him ! God could have blown away every sinner in the world, as so much loose dust into hell. It had been easy for his power and justice, if he had so pleased, to have triumphed in the destruction of all mankind, but only that he intended a higher and more noble victory ; even that his mercy should triumph and prevail over his justice, in the pardoning and saving of sinners.

3. *God pardons sin, though he might gain to himself a great renown ; as he hath on the damned.*

God might have written thy name in hell, as he hath written theirs ; and might have set thee up a flaming monument, and inscribed on thee victory and conquest to

the glory of his everlasting vengeance : both books were open before him, both the book of life and of death ; and the contents of both shall be rehearsed, to his infinite glory at the last day. Now what was it, that dictated thy name to him ? that guided his hand to write thee down rather in the book of life, than in the book of death ? that set thee down a saint, and not a sinner ? pardoned, and not condemned ? What moved him to do all this for thee ? Truly, the only answer that God gives, and which is the only answer that can be given, is the same, which Pilate gives concerning our Saviour, "What I have written, I have written."

*4. Consider the paucity and smallness of the number of those, that are pardoned.*

Professors of Christianity are calculated, by some, to possess not above the sixth part of the known world : and if, among them, we make a proportionable abatement for those that are professed idolaters, for the grossly ignorant, for the profane, and for the hypocritical ; certainly, there will be but a small flock remaining unto Jesus Christ : here and there one picked and culled out of the multitudes of the world ; like the olive-berries, of which the prophet Jeremiah speaks, left on the top of the uppermost branches, when the devil hath shaken down all the rest into hell. Now is it not infinite mercy, that thou shouldest be found among these gleanings after harvest ? that thou shouldest be one of these few ? God might have left thee to perish upon the same reason that he left others ; but he gathered thee out of all nations, kindreds, and languages of the earth, to make thee a vessel of mercy for himself. Indeed, thou canst never enough admire the peculiar love of God, to thee herein, till the last day ; when thou shalt see the small number of those that are saved, standing on the right hand of Christ, compared with the vast numbers of those that perish standing at the left hand of Christ, and seest thyself among the small number of those that are saved.

*5. This also commends the freeness of pardoning grace, that whereas the fallen angels themselves were absolutely excepted out of God's act of indemnity and oblivion ; yet fallen man is again restored unto his favour.*

Them, God hath reserved in chains of darkness, unto the judgment of the great day: us, he hath brought into glorious light and liberty. Our sins are blotted out of the book of God's remembrance: whereas their names are blotted out of the muster-roll of God's heavenly host.

Now, here, there are four things, that do greatly advance the glory of free grace;—their natures were more excellent than ours, their services would have been much more perfect than ours, their sins were fewer than ours are, and their pardon might have been procured at as cheap a rate, and at as little expence, as ours.

And yet, not them, but us, God hath chosen to be vessels of his mercy.

(1.) *Their natures were more excellent than ours.*

They were glorious spirits; the top and cream of the creation: we, clods of earth; the lees and dregs of nature: our souls, the only part by which we claim kin to angels, even they are of a younger house, and of a more ignoble extract: how are they debased, by being confined to these lumps of flesh, which, with much ado, they make a shift to drag with them up and down the earth; rather as fitters of their bondage, than instruments of their service! nay, so low sunk are we in this slime of matter, that we have not excellency enough so much as to conceive what a pure, heavenly, orient substance a spirit is. And, yet, such as we are, dust and filth, hath God gathered up into his own bosom; though he hath disbanded whole legions of angels, and sent them down into hell. In these natures of ours, hath the Son of God revealed, or rather hid himself: even he, who “thought it no robbery to be equal with God,” thought it no scorn to become lower than angels: “He took not on him the nature of angels; but the seed of Abraham.”

(2.) *Their services would have been more perfect, upon their restoration, than ours can be.*

Indeed, when we arrive at heaven, our services, our love, our joy, and our praises, shall then attain to a perfection exclusive of all sinful defects: but, even then, must we give place to the angels; as in our beings, so in our actings also. Had God restored them and given them a pardon, heaven would more have resounded with the shouts

and hallelujahs of one fallen angel, than it can now with a whole concert of glorified saints: they would have burned much more ardently in love, who now must burn much more fiercely in torments: they would much more insightfully and sweetly have sung forth the praises of God, their Redeemer, who now curse and blaspheme him more bitterly; and as far have out-stripped a saint in the work of heaven, as they shall do a sinner in the punishment of hell. And yet free grace passeth by them, and elects and chooses narrower hearts to conceive, and feebler tongues to utter, the praises of their Redeemer; whose praises ought therefore to be the more, because he chooses not them that may give him the most.

(3.) *Their sins were fewer than ours are.*

We cannot exactly determine what their sins were: only the apostle gives us a hint, that it was pride which gave them their fall: 1 Tim. iii. 6. "Not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." Whether it was pride, in that they affected to be God, or in that they scorned to be guardians and ministering spirits unto man, or in that they refused to become subject unto the Son of God who was shortly to become man, the schools boldly enough dispute, but no man can determine: but, whatever it was, this is certain, God was speedy in the execution of wrath upon them; tumbling them all down headlong into hell, upon their first rebellion. The time of their standing in their primitive state is conceived to be very short; for their creation, though the Socinians hold it was long before, must fall within the compass of six days; for, in that space, the scripture tells us, God made heaven and earth, and all things therein; and, therefore, within the space of six days, he created the angels also: some refer their creation to the first day's work; others to the fourth day: and it is probably thought, that Adam's continuance in innocence was not much above one day; and yet, even then, there were fallen angels to tempt him: so that their glorious and blessed state could not, according to this computation, last above six or seven days; such a speedy issue did God make with them upon their very first sin. But, how are his patience, and forbearance extended towards sinful

man ! he drives Adam out of Paradise ; but it was of free grace that he did not drive him into hell, where he had but a little before plunged far more excellent creatures than Adam was : his patience is prolonged to impenitent, unbelieving sinners : he bears with their proud affronts ; waits their returns ; and, with a miracle of mercy, reprieves them for a much longer date, than he did the angels themselves. How much more then ought free grace to be extolled by us, which did not so much as reprieve the angels for one sin ; and, yet, every moment grants out a free and absolute pardon to his servants, not for one sin, but for reiterated provocations ! they could not obtain respite, and we obtain pardon. How many leaves in God's remembrance-book stand written thick with multitudes of sins ; and, yet, no sooner doth God write down, but he also wipes out ! His pen and his sponge keep the same measure : our sins find constant employment for the one, and God's free grace and mercy find constant employment for the other.

(4.) Add to this what some with great probability affirm, *the same price, that bought out our pardon, might have procured theirs also.*

By which it plainly appears, that there is no other reason, why our estate differs from theirs, but only God's free, sovereign grace. Upon the same account, God might have damned all mankind that he damned the angels for ; and, at the same cost, he might have saved all the fallen angels, at which he saved some of mankind. The merits of Christ are the price of our pardon and redemption ; and these have in them an infinite worth, and an all-sufficient expiation : not for our sins only ; but for the sins of the whole world, both men and devils : the streams of Christ's blood shed on the cross for us, were sufficient to quench the flames of hell, and utterly to have washed away the lake of fire and brimstone : hell might have been depopulated, and those black mansions left void without inhabitants for ever, and the devils and men might have been common sharers in that same common salvation ; for, Christ having an infinite dignity in his person, being God as well as man, his blood the blood of God, his sufferings the sufferings and humiliation of a God, this enhanced

his merits to such a redundancy, as neither fallen angels nor fallen men, were their sins more and their miseries greater, were ever able to drain out: not a drop more of gall and wormwood should have been squeezed into the cup of Christ's sufferings, though it had proved a cup of health and salvation to them, as well as to us. And, yet, such was God's dreadful severity, that he excluded the angels from the benefits of Christ's death, though he had been at no more expences to save them; the price of whose pardon and redemption would have been the same: and yet we, such are the infinite riches of his grace and mercy, are redeemed by a price that infinitely exceeds the purchase! O the freeness and riches of God's grace, that he should thus pass by the angels, and pitch upon and choose such vile wretched creatures as we are!

6. *Pardoning grace is free; whether we consider the generality of its designation, or the speciality of its application.*

(1.) It is free in its general designation; in that God hath designed and purposed, to forgive the sins of all the world, if they will believe and repent.

It is the universality of grace, that mightily exalts its freeness. Now what can be more universal, than that proclamation of pardon, that God makes to poor sinners, in Acts x. 43. "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins?" The whole world is under this conditional promise: not one soul of man excepted: be thy sins more than the sands, greater than mountains; though the cry of them reacheth up to heaven, and the guilt of them reacheth down to hell; yet thou hast no reason, O sinner, to exclude thyself from pardon, for God hath not: only believe and repent. But, as general as this pardon is, yet is there somewhat that is discriminating in it, that makes it more illustrious; for it is not tendered to devils and damned spirits: Christ is not appointed to be a Saviour unto them, nor is his blood a propitiation for their sins: they are not under any covenant of grace, nor have they any promise of mercy, no not so much as conditional: it is not said unto them, "Believe, and you shall be rescued from the everlasting residue of your torments; believe, and

those unquenchable flames, you are now burning in, shall be put out : " no ; God requires no such duty from them, neither hath he made any such promise to them ; yea, should it be supposed, that they could believe, yet this their faith would not at all avail them, because God hath ordained no ransom for them, and resolves to receive no other satisfaction to his justice than their personal punishment. But, while we are alive, we are all the objects of God's free, pardoning grace. And, if any man, that hears the sound of the gospel, and upon what terms God hath proclaimed forgiveness of sin, shall notwithstanding perish in his sins, it is not because God hath excluded him from pardon, which he doth, seriously and with vehement importunity, offer and urge upon him ; but because he excludes himself, by his own impenitency and unbelief, in not accepting of it.

(2.) Pardoning grace is free in *the special application of it.*

The application of pardon is not made unto any, till the performance of those conditions upon which pardon is tendered ; and they are faith and repentance. Now, herein, is God's grace infinitely free, who first fulfils these conditions in his children, that so he may fulfil his gracious promises unto them of life and pardon. The conditional covenant of grace promises pardon and remission of sins, unto all, that shall believe and repent : but, notwithstanding all this, the whole world might perish under a contracted impotency, whereby they could not believe nor repent, did not the absolute covenant engage God's truth to work faith and repentance in the hearts of his people. So that one covenant promiseth pardon, if we believe and repent ; and the other covenant bestows this faith and repentance upon us : the conditional covenant promiseth pardon of sin and salvation, if we believe and repent : and the absolute covenant promiseth faith and repentance to us, to enable us to believe and repent. And what could God do more, that might farther express the freeness of his grace to us, than to pardon, upon condition of faith and repentance, which faith and repentance he works in us ? This is to pardon us as freely, as if he had pardoned us without any faith or repentance at all.

*7. God sometimes selects out the greatest and most notorious sinners, to vouchsafe grace and pardon to them; when he suffers others eternally to perish under far less guilt.*

He makes a difference in his proceedings, quite contrary to the difference which he finds in men's demerits. And wherefore is this, but only to show forth the absolute freedom of his grace? Greater debts are blotted out, when smaller stand still upon the account, only that it may be known, that God is free to do what he will with his own; and that he will show mercy to whom he will show mercy; and whom he will he pardons. How many heathens, men of improved natural endowments and proportionable virtues, yet, not having faith in and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, are excluded from pardon and forgiveness, whose sins rather show them to be men, than not to be Christians! Whereas others, under the noon-tide of the gospel, are guilty of such flagitious crimes, that show them to be monsters rather than men; and yet these, upon their faith and repentance, obtain pardon and remission: as if it were with God, as it is with men; the more there is to be remembered, the sooner he forgets. These riches of pardoning grace, St. Paul admires and adores, when he tells us, concerning himself, "I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy:" 1 Tim. i. 13.

*8. God decrees to pardon, without foresight of merit or worth in us.*

When we lay before him, as the objects of his mercy, divine love did not foresee any attractive comeliness in us, but made it. When we were cast forth "to the loathing of our persons," yet then was it "a time of love;" and even then, when we were "in our blood," God said to us, "Live." When we were full of "wounds, bruises, and putrifying sores," divine love condescended to bind them up and cure them. Such miserable deformed creatures were we! and could there be anything amiable in such an object as this? only, hereby, God puts an accent on the riches of his love; laying it out upon such as were not worthy, with a design to make them worthy.

*9. God pardons, not only though he saw no merit in us; but, which is more to the glory of his free grace, though he*

*foresaw that many future wrongs and injuries would be added to those which we had already done.*

He fore saw all our provocations and rebellions ; how we would abuse his grace, and turn it into wantonness : he saw the rebellions of our unregeneracy, and the infirmities of our converted state. Yet, though he foresaw all before they were, he resolved not to see them when they are : Numb. xxiii. 21. “ He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel.” And this, though it ought not to encourage us in sin ; yet it may be a support and comfort to us, when, through weakness and infirmity, we have sinned ; that God, who loved us and decreed to pardon us, when he foresaw how sinful we would be, will not certainly now cease to love us and pardon us, when we are as vile and sinful as he foresaw we should be.

10. *The Lord Jesus Christ, by whom alone we are pardoned, is freely given to us by the Father.*

What price could we have offered, to have brought down the Son of his eternal love from his embraces ? What was there in us, to draw a Saviour out of heaven ? Were we so amiable, as to move him to divest himself of his glory, and to eclipse his Deity in our mortal bodies, only that he might become like such poor worms as we are, and take us unto himself ? Ask no more ; but admire : “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here is a mystery, that the whole college of angels can never comprehend ! What, God condemn his Son, that he might pardon rebels ! The Son of God blot his Deity in our flesh, only that he might blot out our transgressions with his blood ! This is such transcendently free grace and love, that in this we have an advantage above the angels themselves ; standing higher in the favour of God, upon this account, than they do.

Now compact all these ten particulars, in your thoughts, together, wherein the freeness of pardoning grace most illustriously appears ; and you will find there is good reason for God, in the text, triumphantly to ascribe to himself, “ I, even I, am he, that blotteth out your transgressions.”

iii. *The application*, which I shall make of this truth, I shall only briefly mention,

1. Is the pardoning grace of God thus free? *Take heed then, that you do not abuse nor turn it into wantonness.*

Shall we continue in sin because God so freely pardons sin? God forbid! who would make such an accursed inference as this, that ever had the least sense or touch of divine love upon his heart? Every one loves to have his ears tickled, with this soft, sweet, downy doctrine of God's free grace and love; and, when they hear it, they stretch themselves upon it, and lull themselves fast asleep in sin: but what says the wise man, Prov. xxv. 27? "It is not good to eat much honey." No: there is no such dangerous surfeit, as upon the sweet and luscious truths of the gospel. This honey leaves a deadly sting in men, that abuse it to encourage themselves in sin. It is such disingenuity, to argue from freeness of pardon to freedom in sinning, that, I dare say, No heart ever had a pardon sealed to it by the witness of the Spirit of God, but utterly abhors it. What! therefore to provoke God, because he is ready to forgive! What! to multiply sin, because God is ready to pardon! What is this, but to spurn at those bowels of mercy, that yearn towards us; and even to strike at God with that golden sceptre, that he holds out to us, as a token of love and peace? Certainly, they, who thus argue and who thus act, never knew what a sweet and powerful attractiveness there is, in the sense of pardoning grace and love, to win over the heart, from the practice of those sins that God hath forgot to punish.

2. *This should engage us to love that God, who so loved us, as freely, for his own sake, to forgive us such vast debts and such multiplied sins.*

This is the import of that speech of our Saviour, he loveth most, to whom most is forgiven. And, hence it is, and you may commonly observe it, that none are such great lovers and admirers of free grace, as those, who, before conversion, were the vilest and most flagitious sinners.

3. *Since God doth so freely pardon us, let this teach us, and prevail with us, to pardon and forgive the offences of others.*

This is that, which the scripture doth urge, as the most natural inference of this doctrine of God's pardoning grace.

Thus the apostle : Eph. iv. 32. " Be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you." Say not, as ignorant people are wont to do, ' I will forgive, but I will never forget ; ' for God doth forgive and forget too : I will blot out your transgressions, and I will remember your sins no more. Your sins against God are talents ; others' offences against you are but pence : and if, for every trivial provocation, you are ready to take your brother by the throat, and wreak your wrath and vengeance upon him, may you not fear lest your Lord and Master, to whom you stand deeply indebted, should also deal so with you, for far greater crimes than others can be guilty of against you, and cast you into prison until you have paid the utmost farthing ; especially considering that you pray for the forgiveness of your own sins, as you do proportionably forgive the sins of others : " Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

And thus I have opened and demonstrated unto you the former part of the doctrine, that the grace of God, whereby he blots out and forgives sin, is absolutely free.

II. I am now, in the next place, to prove, that *it is infinitely glorious.*

This I shall endeavour to do, by considering pardon of sin, in the nature of it, in the concomitants of it, and in the effects and consequences of it : from all which it will appear, both how great a mercy it is to us, and how great a glory it is to God, that he blots out and forgets sin. And,

i. Let us consider *the nature of pardon of sin* : what it is.

And this we cannot better discover, than by looking into the nature of sin.

" Sin," therefore, as the apostle describes it, " is a transgression of the law." Now to the validity of any law, there are penalties, literally expressed or tacitly implied, which are altogether necessary. The guilt contracted by the transgressing of the law, is nothing but our liableness to undergo the penalty threatened in the law. And this guilt is two-fold : the one is intrinsical and necessary ; and that is the desert of punishment,

which sin carries always in it: the other is extrinsical and adventitious, by which sin is ordained to be punished. These two things are in every sin. Every sin deserves death; and God hath, in his law, ordained and threatened to inflict death for it.

Now it being clear, that pardon and remission of sin is nothing but the removal of the guilt of sin: the question is, whether it removes that guilt, that consists in the desert of punishment: or that, which consists in the voluntary appointment of it unto punishment; or both.

To this, I answer, pardon of sin does not remove the intrinsical desert of punishment; but only the adventitious appointment and ordination of it unto punishment, flowing from the will of God, who hath in his own law, threatened to punish sin. Remission doth not make, that the sins, even of believers themselves, should not deserve death; for a liableness to the penalty of the law, in this sense, is a necessary consequent upon the transgression of the law: but, because God, in the covenant of grace, hath promised not to reward his penitent servants according to the evil of their doings, therefore pardoning grace removes this guilt of sin arising from God's ordination of it unto punishment. As, suppose a traitor should accept of the proffer of a pardon, the guilt of his treason ceaseth not in the inward nature of it, but still he deserves to be punished; but this obnoxiousness of his, through the prince's favour and appointment is taken away, and so that guilt ceaseth: so every sin, which the repenting sinner commits, deserves death; but, upon his believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, this liableness unto death ceaseth, being graciously remitted to him by God.

The scripture sets forth this pardon of sin in very sweet and full expressions. It is called a covering of sin: Ps. xxxii. 1. "Blessed is the man, whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." Though our covering of our sins is no security from the inspection of God's eye, who clearly beholds the most hidden and secret things of darkness; yet, certainly, those sins, that God himself hath covered from himself, he will never again look into, so as to punish for them. Nay, yet farther, as a ground of comfort, pardon of sin is not only called a

covering of our sins from God's sight, but a covering of God's face and sight from them : so we have it, Ps. li. 9. " Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." It is a casting of our sins behind God's back, as a thing that shall never more be regarded or looked upon : so it is expressed to us, Isa. xxxviii. 17. " Thou hast, in love to my soul," says good Hezekiah, when a message of death was brought to him by the prophet, " cast all my sins behind thy back." It is a casting of them into the depth of the sea : from whence they shall never more arise, either in this world to terrify our consciences, or in the world to come to condemn our souls : so we have it in Micah vii. 19, " I will cast all their iniquities," says God, " into the depths of the sea." It is a scattering of them, as a thick cloud ; so it is called, Isa. xliv. 22. " I will scatter their sins as a cloud, and their iniquities as a thick cloud." And, in the text, it is called a blotting out and a forgetting of sin : " I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins :" a blotting out, to show, that God will never read his debt-book against us ; and, a forgetting it, that we may not fear, that God will accuse us without book.

These, and such like expressions, with which the scripture doth abound, do very much illustrate the mercy of God, in pardoning of sin : and I shall unfold it in these following particulars.

1. *Pardon and remission of sin, is no act of ours, but an act of God's only.*

It is nothing done, by us, or in us ; but an act of God's Free Grace merely, without us : and therefore God ascribes it wholly unto himself : " I, even I, am he." And when our Saviour cured the paralytic, the Scribes stormed at him as a blasphemer : " Thou blasphemest," say they to him, not knowing him to be God ; " for who," say they, " can forgive sins but God only ? "

But, be it an act of God's only, and not ours, and an act wholly without us, what comfort is there in this ?

Much : and that, upon these grounds : because God's acts within us are always imperfect in this life, but God's acts without us are always perfect and consummate.

Sanctification is a work of God's grace within us, now this work, because it meets with much opposition in every faculty, from inherent sin which spreads itself over the whole soul, is therefore always in this life kept low and weak. But pardon of sin, is an act without us, in the breast of God himself, where it meets with no opposition or allay: nor doth it increase by small degrees; but is, at once, as perfect and entire, as ever it shall be.

I do not mean, as some have thought and taught, that God, at once, pardons all the sins of true believers; as well those they do or shall commit, as those they have already committed: but, only, that what sins God pardons, he doth not pardon gradually. There is nothing left of guilt upon the soul, when God pardons it; but there is something left of filth upon the soul, when God sanctifies it.

And, therefore, as it is the grief of God's children, that their inherent holiness is so imperfect here, that they are so assaulted with temptations, so dogged by corruption, so oppressed and almost stifled to death by a body of sin that lies heavy upon them; yet this, on the other side, may be for their comfort and encouragement, that God's pardoning grace is not as his sanctifying grace is, nor is it granted to them by the same stint and measure. A sin, truly repented of, is not pardoned to us by halves; half the guilt remitted, and half retained: as the papists fancy, to establish their doctrine of purgatory: but it is as fully pardoned as it shall be in heaven itself.

(1.) And hence it follows, *though the guilt of sin be removed; yet it is not our repentance that removes it.*

For then, as no man's repentance is absolutely perfect, so no man's sins should be fully pardoned; but still there would be remainders of guilt left upon the conscience, as there is still a mixture of impenitency in the best Christians. But pardon and remission is not mingled with guilt, as grace is with sin; because it is an act of mercy wrought, not in our breasts, but arising in God's only, where it meets with nothing to allay or abate it, and it is infinitely more perfect than our repentance can be.

(2.) Hence we may infer, that *our pardon is infinitely more sure, than our assurance of it in our own consciences can be satisfactory.*

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For the sense of pardon is a work of God's Spirit within us, which commonly is mixed with some hesitations, misgivings, doubts, and fears: and, therefore, though our comforts be never so strong, though it be spring-tide with us, yet our ground for comfort is still much more. O what rich and abundant grace is this in God towards us, that exceeds both our grace and our comfort! And, therefore, though, O Christian, thy sanctification be the best evidence of thy justification and pardon; yet is it not the best measure of it: for thou art justified and thou art pardoned, much more than thou art sanctified. Sanctifying grace in thee, indeed, is in its first rudiments and inchoation; but pardoning grace in thy God, is consummate and perfect.

And that is the first thing.

2. *Remission of sin makes sin to be, as if it had never been committed.*

Things, that are forgotten, are no more to us, than if they had never had a being. Now God tells us, that he forgets our sins: "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

Nor is there any long tract of time required, to wear the idea of them out of his memory; as is necessary among men, to make them forget the wrongs and injuries done to them by their fellow-creatures: for God forgets the sins of his children, as soon as they are repented of; yea, sometimes sooner than our consciences do: for, many times, a Christian, after a heart-breaking repentance for some great sin, lies under the upbraiding of conscience, when God hath forgiven it; yea, and forgotten it also. God's officer is not so ready to acquit them, as God himself is. He forgets, as though no provocation or offence had ever been committed. "He retaineth not his anger for ever," says the prophet: Micah vii. 18, not for ever; but, so soon as ever we grow displeased with ourselves, he begins to be well-pleased with us: no sooner do sorrow and grief overspread our faces, but favours and smiles clear up his face to us.

See this gracious disposition of God, in Jer. xxxi. 19, 20. Ephraim is there brought in bewailing his sin: "Surely," says he, "after that I was turned, I repented;

and, after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh : I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." Now, what doth God, but presently embrace him, with most tender and most melting expressions of love, as if he had never been angry, nor had any cause for it ? " Is Ephraim my dear son ? is he a pleasant child ? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still : therefore my bowels are troubled for him : I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

And, therefore, O Christian, thou, who now perhaps criest out in the bitterness of thy soul, ' O that I had never committed this or that sin against God ! O that I had never offended him in this or that manner ! ' Why thou hast thy wish, O sinner, herein : for God, when he pardons sin, make it as if it had never been committed against him.

3. Hence it follows, that, *upon remission of sin, God no longer accounts of us as sinners, but as just and righteous.*

It is true, after a pardon is received, we still retain sinful natures : still, original corruption is in us, and will never totally be dislodged out of us, in this life : but, when God pardons us, he looks not upon us, as sinners, but as just and righteous. A malefactor, that is discharged by satisfying the law or by the prince's favour to him, is no more looked upon as a malefactor ; but as just and righteous, as if he had never offended the law at all. So is it here : we are both ways discharged from our guilt ; by satisfaction unto the penalty of the law, in Christ, our surety ; and by the free grace and mercy of God, who hath made and sealed to us a gracious act of pardon in Christ's blood : and, therefore, we stand upright in law ; and are as just and righteous in God's sight, as if we had never sinned against him.

O how great consolation is here, unto the children of God ! They account themselves great sinners, yea, the greatest and worst of sinners ; but God accounts them just and righteous. They keep their sins in remembrance, as David speaks, " My sin is ever before me ; " when

God hath not only forgiven, but forgotten them. They write and speak bitter things against themselves ; when God is writing out their pardon, and setting his seal unto it.

4. *Pardonning grace can as easily triumph, in the remitting of great and many sins, as of few and small sins.*

What a great blot upon the heavens is a thick cloud, and yet the beams of the sun can pierce through that, and scatter it easily. God will blot out our transgressions as a thick cloud : so himself tells us, by the prophet : Isaiah xliv. 22. “ I will blot out thy transgressions, as a cloud ; and thine iniquities as a thick cloud.” A great debt may as easily be blotted out, as a small one. Ten thousand talents is a great sum ; yet it is as easily and freely forgiven, by the great God, as a few pence. God proclaims himself, to be a God “ pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin ; ” that is, sins of all sorts and sizes. The greatest sins, repented of, are no more without the extent of divine grace and mercy ; than the least sins, unrepented of, are without the cognizance of divine justice. Isaiah i. 18. “ Though your sins be as scarlet, yet shall they become as white as snow : though they be red as crimson, yet they shall be as wool.”

And can there then be found a despairing soul in the world, when the great God hath thus magnified his grace and mercy above all his works ; yea, and above all ours also ? Say not then, O sinner, ‘ My sins are greater than can be forgiven : ’ this is to stint and limit the grace of God, which he hath made boundless and infinite ; and thou mayest, with as much truth and reason, say, thou art greater than God, as that thy sins are greater than his mercy. Of all things in the world, take heed that thou be not injurious to this rich grace, to this free love and mercy, that pardons thee even for its own sake. God pardons thee for himself, for his own sake ; and dost thou fear, O penitent believing soul, that ever he will condemn thee for thy sins ? no ; but as much as God and his mercy are greater than our sins, so much more reason will he find in himself to pardon the repenting believing sinner, than he can find reason in his sins to condemn him.

Thus we see what cause of comfort there is in this pardoning grace of God. And thus also we have considered pardon of sin in its own nature.

ii. We shall now consider pardon of sin in its concomitants and adjuncts.

And so we shall take a view of those things, which do inseparably accompany it : and thereby also we may see, how great and unspeakable a mercy it is.

It is a mercy, that is never bestowed upon the soul singly and alone ; but evermore comes environed with whole troops of associate-blessings. As,

1. *Pardon of sin is always conjoined with the acceptance of our persons.*

Indeed these two are the twin parts of our justification : and, therefore, we have them coupled together, Eph. i. 6, 7. " He hath made us accepted in the beloved." " In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." The whole mystery of our justification stands in these two things, remission and acceptation. Remission takes away our liableness unto death, and acceptance gives us a right and title unto life : for, to be accepted of God in Christ, is no other, than for God, through the righteousness and obedience of Christ imputed to us, to own and acknowledge us, as having a right and title unto heaven. And, therefore, we have mention made of pardon and an inheritance together, as the full sum of our justification : Acts xxvi. 18. " That they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among those that are sanctified." It is not, therefore, O soul, a bare negative mercy, that God intends thee, in the pardon of thy sins : it is not merely the removing of the curse and the wrath, that thy sins have deserved ; though that alone can never be sufficiently admired : but the same hand, that plucks thee out of hell by pardoning grace and mercy, lifts thee up to heaven by what it gives thee together with thy pardon, even a right and title to the glorious inheritance of the saints above.

2. Another concomitant is this ;—*whomsoever God pardons, he doth also in some measure sanctify.*

He subdues our sins, as well as blots them out : he abates their power, as well as removes their guilt. And,

indeed, it were no better than lost labour, for God to pardon sin, if he did not purify the sinner also : for, were but the least sin and corruption left to rule and reign in us, we should presently run ourselves as far into debt and arrears, as ever we were. Indeed, the best Christian, in whom grace is most prevailing and corruption weakest, yet even he stands daily and hourly in need of pardoning mercy : but yet, withal, his sins are not of so high a nature, nor so deep a stain, as usually the sins of wicked men are : his sins usually are such, rather for the manner of them, than for the matter of them : God, by his pardoning grace, forgives infirmities, failings, and defects ; and, by his sanctifying grace, ordinarily keeps him from the commission of more gross and scandalous sins. And how then can we enough admire the rich grace of God, that not only forgives us our debts, but withal bestows a new stock upon us, to keep us from running into debt again, in any great and desperate sums !

3. Pardon of sin is always conjoined with *our adoption into the family of heaven.*

Herein is the love of God greatly seen : not only to pardon rebels ; but to make them his children : not only to forgive debtors ; but to make them heirs of his own estate. The same precious blood, that blots out our sins, writes us down heirs of glory and co-heirs with Jesus Christ himself. O infinite and unspeakable mercy of God, thus richly and bountifully to give as well as freely to forgive ! that he should thus instate us, at present, in his love and favour ; and, hereafter, instate us in his glory ! This is not the manner of men, O Lord ; but, as far as the heavens are above the earth, so far are the thoughts of God above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways : and, therefore, "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our sins from us." And why so far, but only that he might make room for these great and unspeakable mercies of justification, sanctification, and adoption to intervene ?

And, so much, for the second thing proposed, namely, the concomitants and adjuncts of pardon of sin.

iii. Let us now consider pardon of sin in *the effects and consequences of it.*

And from hence also it will appear, how transcendent a mercy it is, and how just a title God hath to glory in it, when he saith, "I, even I, am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions."

Mercies temporal and spiritual, the blessings of this life and the glory of a future, whatever indeed can be called a mercy or good thing, doth acknowledge itself a retainer to this primitive and fountain-mercy of pardon of sin.

In such a heap of them, I shall only cull some few that are most conspicuous.

Remission of sin may be considered, either as it lies in God's eternal intention, or in the Spirit's temporal application of it. The one, is God's purpose, before all time, to forgive us : the other is the execution of that purpose in time.

1. If we consider pardon of sin *in God's eternal purpose and intendment*, so there are two blessed effects flowing from it : and they are these ;—the sending of Jesus Christ into the world ;—the great gift of faith.

(1.) *The sending of Jesus Christ into the world*, who is the cause of all happiness unto sinful man, was itself the effect of this purpose of God, to pardon and forgive sinners.

It is very difficult to trace out the order of the divine decrees concerning the salvation of mankind ; and to pass from one of them to another, as they lie ranked and methodized in God's breast : and divers, that have attempted to search out these 'arcana Dei,' this art and mystery of justice and mercy, have trodden in paths different from one another ; and, doubtless, many of them differing from the truth also. I shall not stand to draw a scheme of these decrees of God. Let it now suffice us to know, that God, from all eternity, foreseeing the sin and misery, which man would, by his permission and his own sin, involve himself in, did, for the manifestation of the riches both of his mercy and justice, enter into counsel, how to pardon and save him. This was the end of God's design, even to restore again to happiness some of mankind ; ever as many, as he should select out of the mass and common rubbish of sin and misery, and set apart for himself. But how shall this end be accomplished and brought about ?

Justice brandisheth its sword in the face of sinners: and demandeth as great a share of glory in punishment, as mercy doth in pardoning: and God is resolved to glorify both of these attributes of his, in their several demands. This now put him upon ransacking of the deepest counsel that ever lodged in his heart, even of an adored Mediator; in whom justice receives full satisfaction, and mercy triumphs in a full pardon, and both are infinitely glorious. For this end, God sent down his Son from heaven to earth, to become a propitiation for us; and so, through the shedding of his blood, to obtain remission and forgiveness of sins for us. God's mercy and his beloved Son could not rest together in his bosom; and, therefore, his purpose of pardoning sin was so efficacious, that, to make room for the displaying of his mercy, he sends his own Son out of heaven, never to enter again there, till, by his merit and sufferings, he had procured remission of sins for all those that believe in him. Hence the apostle, Rom. iii. 25, 26. tells us, that "God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through God's forbearance, that he might be just, and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus:" as if the apostle had said, God could not be just, if he should justify sinners that deserve his wrath, unless he had sent forth Jesus Christ into the world to become a propitiation and sacrifice to his justice for their sins; for, having threatened in his unalterable word to inflict vengeance upon all that are guilty, his truth obliged him to this dreadful severity upon all, since all are guilty: but Christ, taking on him the guilt of sinners, by his undergoing the wrath of God and the curse of the law hath so fully appeased divine justice, that now God, though he doth not punish sinners in themselves, can yet be just and the justifier of sinners: therefore, he sent forth Christ to be a propitiation. God's eternal purpose, to glorify his justice in the punishing of sin, and yet to glorify his grace and mercy in pardoning sinners, wrought this great effect of sending Christ into the world, whereby two such different ends might with infinite wisdom be accomplished. So that Christ, who is the cause of all our happiness and mercy,

is yet himself the effect of God's purpose and intent to pardon sin. And what can be said more to advance the greatness of this mercy ? a mercy so great, that one of the fathers, St. Gregory by name, doubted whether it were more misery or happiness, that Adam fell ; since his sin and fall occasioned such a wonderful Redeemer, and such a glorious salvation : ‘ *Fœlix culpa,*’ says he, ‘ O happy fall, that obtained such a Redeemer ! ’

(2.) Another blessed effect of God's purpose in pardoning sin, is *the great gift of faith.*

Indeed, to give Jesus Christ were utterly in vain, did not God withal give faith to accept him. To tender Christ to an unbeliever, is to offer a gift where there is no hand to receive it. Hence, that God's purpose of giving pardon might stand valid, that the death of Christ might not be fruitless, and that his blood might not be like water spilt on the ground that cannot be gathered up again, God decreed to bestow faith upon them that believe, that may convey to them the benefits of Christ's merits in their pardon and remission.

These two blessed effects follow in God's purpose and intention of pardoning sin ; even the gift of Christ to procure, and the gift of faith to apply, pardon unto the soul.

2. And, more especially, let us consider pardon of sin in its *temporal and real application.*

And so the happy effects of it are manifold. I shall only instance in some, at present.

(1.) Pardon of sin gives *an inviolable security against the pursuits of avenging justice.*

This is its formal, and most immediate effect. Justice follows guilty sinners close at the heels, and shakes its flaming sword over their heads : every threatening contained in this book of God stands ready charged against them ; and their sins make them so fair a mark that they cannot be missed. Hence is that sad complaint of Job, “ Why hast thou set me up as a mark ? ” into which he emptied his arrows as into his reins : Job vii. 20. Now while justice is driving the sinner before it from plague to plague, resolving never to stop till he hath driven him into hell, the great assembly and meeting of all plagues ; mercy interposes, and lays its arrest upon it : and this

gracious act of pardon rescues us, though under the hands of the executioner, and ready to be turned into hell. Here, the challenge, that justice makes to us, ceaseth : and we are left to walk safely, under the protection of mercy : for, when God issues out a pardon, he calls off justice from its pursuit. Thus you have the psalmist thankfully acknowledging. Ps. lxxxv. 2. "Thou hast forgiven our iniquities ?" and what follows ? "Thou hast taken away all thy wrath : thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger." Nor is it to be feared, O soul, that thou shalt ever more be questioned for those sins that are once forgiven thee : God's acts of oblivion can never be repealed : no : God sets an everlasting sanction upon them, and justice shall never again molest thee : Jer. xxxi. 34. "I will forgive their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." And, indeed, well may divine justice seize its pursuit of the guilty sinner : for, always, when God pardons a sinner, he turns his pursuit after Christ, and satisfies all his just demands upon him : for, though we are the principals in the debt, yet our Surety, who stands bound for us in the covenant of redemption, is far the more able and absolving person. Now is not this an unspeakable mercy, that justice and vengeance, the heavy strokes of which many thousand wretches lie under, and which thy sins have provoked and armed against thy own soul ; that might, every sin thou committest, that is every moment of thy life, strike thee dead in the place ; in the dread of which, if thou hast any tenderness of conscience left in thee, thou must needs live in continual fearful expectations of this wrath of God, to destroy thee as his enemy ; is it not infinite mercy, that God should call in the commission given to his justice, that mercy might secure thee from it ? What is this, but the effect of pardoning grace, that gives this destroyer charge to pass over all those, upon whose consciences the blood of Christ is sprinkled for the removal of their guilt ?

(2,) Another blessed effect of pardon of sin, is *peace and reconciliation with God.*

And what happiness can be greater, than when the quarrel betwixt heaven and earth, betwixt God and the inner, is taken up and compounded ? Open wars have

been long proclaimed, and long maintained on either part: ever since the first great rebellion, man hath stood in defiance with, and exercised great hostility against his Creator; and God, on the other hand, hath thundered out whole peals of curses against these rebels, and hath slain whole generations of them eternally dead upon the place. God hath still maintained his cause with victory, and man his with obstinacy; and this war would never cease, did not God proclaim pardon and forgiveness to all that will lay down their arms and submit.

Now, hereupon, peace is concluded fully: for God's pardoning of sinners manifests him to be fully reconciled to them.

So the apostle tells us, Rom. v. 1. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." God is a sworn enemy to all guilty sinners. Himself hath affixed this title to the rest of his name that he *will by no means clear the guilty*. Guilt hath a malign influence: not only on our consciences, to discompose them with terrors and affrightments; but on God's countenance also, to ruffle it into frowns and displeasure. Now when God pardons sin, he wipes away this overcasting cloud: and, the cause of enmity being removed, his face and favour clear up to us.—And then pardon of sin is a strong inducement to us, to lay down the weapons of our warfare, and to be at peace with God. What argument can be more prevailing, where there is any principle of ingenuity? "When God thus proclaims peace, shall I continue war? He pardons, and shall I rebel? He is reconciled, and shall I be implacable? Shall I persist in those sins, which he forgives? No: far be it from me. I submit to that God, whose rich grace conquers by condescending, as well as his power by crushing." And thus the soul lays down its weapons at the feet of God; and humbly embraces the terms of agreement propounded by him in the gospel.

(3.) Pardon of sin *lays a good foundation for the soul's near acquaintance and communion with God.*

Guilt is the only thing, that breeds alienation. "Your iniquities," says the prophet, "have separated between you and your God :" Isa. lix. 2. Nor, indeed, is it pos-

sible, that a guilty sinner should any more delight in conversing with God, than a guilty malefactor delights in the presence of his judge. And, therefore, we see, when Adam had contracted guilt upon himself by eating the forbidden fruit, how childishly and foolishly he behaved himself! God calls him, and he runs behind a tree to hide himself! What a sudden change was here! Adam, who but a little before was his Creator's familiar, now dreads and shuns him: his guilt makes him apprehend God's call, to be no other than a summons to the bar. Nor, indeed, can it be otherwise, but that guilt should produce alienation betwixt God and the soul: for look how distance grows between two familiar friends, so doth it here: if a man be conscious to himself, that he hath done his friend an injury; what influence hath this upon him? why, presently it makes him more shy and reserved to him than before: so is it here: consciousness of guilt fills us with a troublesome, ill-natured shame: we are ashamed to look God in the face, whom we have so much wronged by our sins: and this shame is always joined with a slavish and base fear of God, lest he should revenge himself upon us, for the injuries that we have done to him: and both this shame and fear take off from that holy freedom and boldness, which reverently to use towards God, is the gust and spirit of our communion and fellowship with him; and all these lessen that sweet delight in God, that formerly we relished in the intimacy of this heavenly fellowship. And what can be the final product of all this, but a most sad alienation and estrangement between God and the soul? But pardon of sin removeth these obstructions; and causeth the intercourse betwixt God and the soul to pass free, because it gives the soul a holy and yet awful boldness in conversing with the great and terrible majesty of God. So much sense of pardon and reconciliation as we have, so much boldness shall we have ordinarily in our addresses to God: what is the reason that the consciences of wicked men drag them before God; and they come with so much diffidence, dejectedness, and jealousy? it is, because they are conscious to themselves of guilt that lies upon them; and this makes them look on God, rather under

the notion of a judge, than of a friend or father ; and this makes them perform their duties so distrustfully, as if they would not have God take any notice that they were in his presence. But, when a pardoned sinner makes his addresses to God, he may do it with a holy freedom : the face of his soul looks cheerfully, and he treats with God with an open heart. What ground is there now, for such a confidence as this is ? for poor, vile dust and ashes, to appear thus before the Great God of heaven and earth ?—Guilt is removed : peace is made in the blood of Christ: all enmity is abolished : all quarrels are decided : and it becomes not him, to serve God with such suspiciousness as guilty sinners do. Hence we have that expression of the apostle, Heb. x. 22. “ Let us draw near ” to him, “ in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience ; ” that is from a guilty and accusing conscience : now when the heart and conscience are sprinkled with the blood of Christ, whereby this guilt is taken off, then hath a man good ground to draw near to God, “ in full assurance of faith.”

(4.) Pardon of sin *lays a good ground for peace in a man's own conscience.*

I do not say, that peace of conscience is always an inseparable attendant upon pardon of sin ; for, doubtless, there are many so unhappy, as to have a wrangling conscience in their own bosoms, when God is at peace with them : but this is certain, that pardon of sin lays a solid ground and foundation for peace in a man's own conscience ; and, were Christians but as industrious as they should be in clearing up their evidences for heaven, they might obtain peace whenever they are pardoned. What is there, that disquiets conscience, but only guilt ? nothing, but the guilt of sin, doth it : this is that, which rageth and stormeth in wicked men, and is as a tempest within their breasts : this is that unseen scourge, that draws blood and groans at every lash : this is that worm, that lies perpetually gnawing at the heart of a sinner : this is that rack, that breaks the bones, and disjoins the soul itself. In a word, guilt is the fuel of hell, and the incendiary of conscience : were it not for guilt, there were not a more pleasant and peaceable thing in all the

world, than a man's own conscience. Now pardon of sin removes this guilt; and, thereby, makes reconciliation between us and our consciences: and, therefore, says our Saviour to the paralytic man, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." Might not some say, 'This is an impertinent speech, to say to one that was brought to be cured of a sad infirmity of body, that his sins were forgiven him, whilst yet his disease was not cured?' No: our Lord Christ knew, that there was infinitely more cause of joy and cheerfulness to have sin pardoned, than to have diseases cured: to have all calm and serene within, not to have a frown or wrinkle upon the face of the soul, to have all smooth thoughts and peaceful affections; this is some faint resemblance of heaven itself, and is never vouchsafed unto any but where pardon and the sense of it are given to the soul.

(5.) He, whose sins are pardoned, may rest assured, that *whatever calamities or afflictions he may lie under, yet there is nothing in them of a curse or punishment.*

It is guilt alone, that diffuseth poison through the veins, as of all our enjoyments so of all afflictions also, and turns them all into curses: but pardon of sin takes away this venom, and makes them all to be medicinal corrections; good, profitable, and advantageous to the soul. See how God, by the prophet, expresseth this: Isa. xxxiii. 24. "The inhabitants shall not say they are sick:" why so? for "the people that dwell therein, shall be forgiven their iniquities." When sin is pardoned, outward afflictions are not worth complaining of: the inhabitants shall not say, we are sick. A disease then becomes a medicine, when pardon hath taken away the curse and punishment of it.

God hath two ends with respect to himself for which he brings punishments upon us: the one, is the manifestation of his holiness; the other, is for the satisfaction of his justice. And, accordingly as any affliction tends to either of these ends, so is it properly a punishment, or barely a fatherly chastisement. If God intend, by the afflictions which he lays upon thee, the satisfaction of his justice, then, thy afflictions are properly punishments, and they flow from the curse of the law: but, if the

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manifestation of his holiness be all he intends by them ; then, are they only fatherly corrections, proceeding from love and mercy.

Those, whose sins God hath pardoned, he may afflict for the declaration of his holiness ; that they may see and know what a holy God they have to deal with : who so perfectly hates sin, that he will follow it with chastisements, even upon those, whom his free grace hath pardoned.

God inflicts no chastisements upon those, whom he hath pardoned, for the satisfaction of his justice : and, therefore, they are not curses, nor properly punishments ; but only corrections and fatherly chastisements. Christ hath satisfied the demands of justice for their sins ; and God is more just, than to exact double satisfaction for the same offence, one in Christ's punishment, and another in theirs. The apostle tells us, Gal. iii. 13. " Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." It is not the evils that we suffer, that makes them curses or punishments, be they never so great ; but only the ordination of these evils to the satisfaction of divine justice upon us. And, therefore, Christ, in scripture, is said to be made a curse ; not simply because he suffered : but because he was adjudged to his sufferings, that thereby satisfaction might be made unto the justice of God.

Hence, therefore, with what calmness and peace may a pardoned sinner look upon any afflictions ! Though they are sore and heavy, though they seem to carry much of God's anger in them ; yet there is nothing of a curse, or of the nature of a punishment : the sting was all of it received into the body of Christ ; and now God's righteousness will not suffer him to punish them again in their own persons, whom he hath already punished in their Surety. Imagine what affliction thou canst. Art thou pinched with want and poverty ? Dost thou sustain losses in thy estate, in thy relations ? Art thou tormented with pains, weakened by diseases ; and will all these bring death upon thee, at the last ? Yet, O soul, if thy sins are pardoned, here is nothing of a curse or punishment in all this : justice is already satisfied, by Christ's bearing the curse of the

law for thee. Come what will come, it shall not hurt thee. Afflictions are all weak and weaponless; they are only the corrections of a loving Father, for the manifestation of his holiness, and for thy eternal gain and advantage.

Very sad is the condition of guilty sinners: for, whether they know it or not, there is not the least affliction, not the least gripe or pain, not the least slight or inconsiderable cross, but it is a punishment inflicted by God upon them, for the guilt of their sins. God is now beginning to satisfy his justice, and these are sent by him to arrest and seize on them: he now begins to take them by the throat; and calls upon them to pay him what they owe him. Every affliction to them is part of payment, and is exacted from them as part of payment. Oh, the vast and infinite sums of plagues, that God will most severely exact from them in hell, where they shall pay to the utmost farthing! There is not the least calamity, that befalls wicked and unpardoned sinners, but carries the venom of a curse in it; and is inflicted by God upon them, in order to the satisfaction of his justice on them: which complete satisfaction he will work out upon them in their complete torments in hell.

So much for this time and text.

THE END.