

DISCOURSES CONCERNING SIN.

THE FOLLY OF SINNERS IN MAKING A MOCK AT SIN.

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 reprover 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 fleeing 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; wouldst thou think this a pleasant spectacle? Wouldst 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 forsworn 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 reproving of their sins; not in a jocular and sportive merriment.

There are two things in sin, *impiety* 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, sottish 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, uncleannesses, 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 unbowed; 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 innocence 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, tetrical 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 sinher, 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.

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 breaks 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 wouldst 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 wouldst, 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 liyed

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 sorer 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 nowhere 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 nowhere, 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 sorer 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 damation, 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 innocency 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 circum-spect 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.

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 prophesyings;" 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, *because 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 no where 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 appearances 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 mis-persuasion 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 misinformed 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. 23. " 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-block 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, froward, 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 forbad 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.

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 upholdest 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 everlastingly 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 hurryings 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 excess-

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 intellects 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 despise 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 sixpence: 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 rivetted 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 rouse 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 unwearied, 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 likeliest 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 *blazen 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 swearer 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 impudence, 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 concernments 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 condemn 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 befall 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 propension 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 propension 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 propension 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 gain-saying 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 innoecy, 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 propension 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

proneſſe to ſin more or leſs ſtrong; but, becauſe the beſt are but in part renewed, therefore this ſinful proneſſe 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 proneſſe 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 propenſion that is in a child of God to every ſin; but not to deſtroy that propenſion 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 propenſion to any ſin; ſuppoſe what ſin you will, though never ſo foul and horrid: the ſame propenſion 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 proneſſe to ſin. It may be, a Chriſtian is not ſo ſenſible of this propenſion 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 promove 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 conducive 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 propension 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 prevalency 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 propension 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 discords 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 rayelled 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 unbowelled; 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 godhead, 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 Hazeel, "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 reluctancy 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 almightily 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, almightily.

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 almightily.

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 indebted 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, although 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 almightily 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 in 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 martials 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 reluctancy. 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 love 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; abjurers 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.

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 sorer 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 commination. He tells us that they shall be sorer 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 dreadfulfulness 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 dreadfulfulness 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 horror, 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 sensûs,' 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 wouldst 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 wouldst choose to suffer

all these to all eternity; yea, and choose them too as recreations and divertisements, 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 dreadfulfulness 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 flame, 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 unrebated 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. xlii. 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 bleaseth 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 dreadfulfulness 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 fatality 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 dreadful 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 dreadfulfulness 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 dreadfulfulness 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, wouldst 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.

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 frowardly in the ways of his own heart:" Well, says God, "I have seen his ways:" and, what! "With the froward, shall I show myself froward?" 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 dishonour, 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 able 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 fetters 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 mightily 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 innocency 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 relieve 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 freeness 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 foresaw 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. xlv. 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.*

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 upbraidings 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. *Pardoning 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 xlv. 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 acceptance. 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 ; even 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

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.

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