

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 innocence itself would be ashamed to own? Have your lives, in every part, been as strict and holy, as the law of God commands them to be? If not, it is in vain to plead, for heaven, that your conversations have been honest, civil, and harmless; or that you have been religious, and maintained a constant course of holy duties and good works.

I would not here be mistaken by any, as if I were preaching against morality, or condemning civility and common honesty. No, by no means: they are excellent things, and the practice of them very commendable; and I heartily wish there were more of them to be found in the lives of those, that call themselves Christians. But, if this be all you can say for yourselves, believe it, the guilt but of one of your least sins will outweigh all these; and you, and all this your righteousness, must sink down together into hell. If this be all men have to plead for happiness, a civil, fair, and honest conversation: this may be; and yet men may indulge themselves in little sins, which will most certainly ruin and destroy them.

iii. If there be so great evil and danger in little sins, hence learn *what absolute need we stand in of Christ*: not only those among us, whose lives are openly gross and scandalous; but even those, who are most 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.