

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.