

2. Let the promises of God be your encouragement. All the sweet thoughts of a christian arise from the ample and gracious thoughts of God, expressed in the promises : Ps. xciv. 19, ' In the multitude of my thoughts within me (saith David) thy comforts delight my soul ; ' when his thoughts were interwoven and intricated like the boughs of a tree. It is good to see that you fetch all your comforts and encouragements from God's promises, and not from carnal hopes : 2 Cor. v. 7, ' We walk by faith, not by sight. ' This is to live by faith, to have recourse to the promises of a better life, when we have any burden upon us. A christian's comforts all lie within the veil ; they are not taken from visible enjoyments or carnal hopes ; the promises of God are his enjoyment.

3. You should make the glory of God your chiefest end, or you will be very irregular, and cannot keep pace with God in a constant course of duty. Look, as a man that hath a nail in his foot may walk in soft ground, but when he comes to hard ground he is soon turned out of the way, so when a man hath a perverse aim, he will soon be discouraged with the inconveniences that will trouble him in religion. The spiritual life is called ' a living to God, ' Gal. ii. 19. The end must be right, otherwise the conversation will be but a vain pretence, that will please men, but not God : Prov. xvi. 2, ' All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits. ' The chiefest thing God puts into the balance is the temper of the mind, the bent of the heart ; what you are moved by, and what sways you. Therefore your chiefest care must be to set the heart right in all actions, those that are of the most trivial concernment ; in the use of our christian liberty, the necessary actions of our life ; in our duties : 1 Cor. x. 31, ' Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. ' This must be the bias upon the christian spirit, that he may be led on with a constant respect to the Lord's glory ; as we act from him, so we should act for him and more to him—a by-end will make you eccentrical in your motions.

SERMON XXIV.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him ; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.—HEB. xi. 6.

THE Apostle had spoken of Enoch's translation as a consequent of his pleasing God, and upon the supposition of his pleasing God he proves his faith. The reason is rendered in this verse, because ' Without faith, it is impossible to please God ; for he that cometh to God, ' &c. In the words there are two general parts—

1. A proposition—*Without faith it is impossible to please God.*
2. The reason of it—*For he that cometh to God must believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

To begin with the proposition—‘Without faith it is impossible to please God,’ which, being a formal doctrine of itself, I shall use this method—

1. Explain the words.

2. Give the necessary inferences and corollaries, both doctrinal and practical, that may be gathered hence.

First, For the explication, ‘without faith;’ that is, without saving and justifying faith, without faith in the Messiah. I prove it, because that is the faith spoken of in the context; it is the drift of the apostle to prove that the elders, the fathers of the old testament, were saved by the same faith that we are. Again, this kind of faith is expressed in the following words—in ‘coming’ and ‘seeking;’ he that ‘cometh to God,’ and that diligently ‘seeks him.’ Again, we cannot conceive God to be a rewarder out of Christ; guilty nature presageth nothing but evil. The apostle speaks of the gentiles, Rom. i. 32, ‘That they know the judgment of God, that they that commit such things are worthy of death.’ You can look for nothing but death by God’s justice without a Christ and a mediator; but because this is a weighty matter, and the apostle seemeth to make the catechism or summary of necessary points very short; for he mentions only two articles—God’s being and God’s bounty—his essence and his reward, without any mention of Christ, as if this were enough to please God, or enough for acceptance to salvation; therefore I shall discuss and examine the matter. Many in these last times of the gospel are weary of the christian profession, and are ready to revolt into libertinism and atheism, as if nothing was necessary to please God but a general faith in his being; and therefore I shall

1. Prove that this general faith is not enough.

2. Show what is the scope of the apostle, and why he mentions only God’s being and bounty.

3. Show how the place is to be explained.

1. That this general faith is not enough; for two reasons—

[1.] Partly because more is elsewhere required: John xvii. 3, ‘This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.’ This and nothing else is eternal life; that is, the means or way to life eternal.

The knowledge of Christ is every way made as necessary to salvation as the knowledge of God, for indeed without Christ we can never come to enjoy God. There is a great gulf betwixt him and us; all gracious commerce is broken off between God and the fallen creature, and therefore, John xiv. 6, ‘No man can come to the Father but by me.’ In the fallen estate of man there is need of a mediator. Man in innocency might immediately converse with God; God loved his own image in Adam; and what could a just and holy man fear from a just and holy God? But now of God’s creatures we are made his prisoners; we can expect nothing from his mercy, because he is just; and therefore if the creature would have comfort, another principle must be taken in; we must not only know God to be the true God, but Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. The great inquiry of the whole world is, wherewith shall I please God? Micah vi. 8, ‘Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?’ How shall he give his justice content and satisfaction? Solomon saith, that when man had lost his

innocency, he was full of inventions : Eecl. vii. 29, ‘ God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.’ Man at first had wisdom and light enough to guide him to happiness, but ever since we have been given to roving and fond counsels, and we seek here and there how to return to that happiness we had lost. But among all the inventions of man he never found out a sufficient ransom to expiate sin, to reconcile us to God, to sanctify human nature, that we may again hold commerce with heaven ; so that there is somewhat more required than a sight of a divine essence, and a general belief of his rewards ; even the knowledge of Christ, without whom there is no salvation.

[2.] Partly because many that never pleased God may go so far ; as the devils that are condemned to everlasting chains of darkness, and the heathens that are altogether ignorant of Christ, and carnal christians that never felt the saving efficacy of his grace. The devils believe God’s essence and his everlasting recompenses. His essence : James ii. 19, ‘ Thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well ; the devils also believe and tremble.’ The devils themselves are under the awe and dread of this truth. There may be atheists in the world, but there are none in hell ; the devils believe there is a God, and they could never exempt and free themselves from the horror and thought of it. So they believe his recompenses : Mat. viii. 29, ‘ What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of God ? art thou come hither to torment us before the time ?’ The devils have some sense of the day of judgment, though they cannot hope for any release, and can look for nothing but an increase of torment ; yet they know there is a time coming, and they tremble for the present at the thought of it. So for heathens ; they believe that God is, and that there are some rewards ; though their belief of these things be very weak and imperfect, and mingled with falsities and absurd conceits of their own, yet they had some knowledge of the reward of virtue. Epictetus requireth two things that are necessary to piety—*ὁρθὰς ὑπολήψεις περὶ Θεῶν ἔχειν, ὡς ὄντων, καὶ δικούντων τὰ ὅλα καλῶς καὶ δικαίως*—That we should conceive of the gods, first as being, then as guiding all things with goodness and justice. So Ælian saith, That the very barbarians did affirm that there was a God, and that he had a care of all human affairs, to reward what was good, and to punish what was evil. And Seneca—*Primus est deorum cultus deos credere, deinde reddere illis majestatem suam, et reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla majestas.*—The first thing that we must do is to believe there are gods, then acknowledge their majesty and power, then their goodness, without which all religion would perish. And Plutarch—*οὐ γὰρ ἀθάνατον καὶ μακάριον μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ φιάνθρωπον καὶ ὠφέλιμον ἀναγνώσκειν χρὴ τὸν Θεόν.* It is necessary, if we would begodly, that we should not only believe there is a God, immortal and happy, but that he is a lover of men, if we exercise ourselves in virtuous things. I might produce many instances in this kind ; but I forbear, lest it should seem to savour of affection and blustering in an unknown language. So for carnal men, where the sound of the gospel hath come, those that have not a dram of grace, they have this general faith, that God is, and that God is a rewarder ; therefore this cannot be enough to please God, and to be accepted to salvation to have such apprehensions. A man is not saved by holding a right opinion of God. A man may be a christian in opinion,

and a pagan in life and practice ; we must make a particular application of those things, that so our own interest may be sure. When a man is ready to perish and drown, it is not enough to see land, but he must reach to it, and stand upon it, if he would be safe ; so we must get an interest in God. The apostle requires ‘ coming and seeking ’ in this place ; ‘ coming ’ implies desire of communion with him, and ‘ seeking,’ a diligent use of the means that we may enjoy him. There must be an application of those things to a practical end, else the general notion and opinion will do us no good.

2. The scope of the apostle is not to set down the whole object of faith, but the first foundation—namely, what faith is absolutely necessary, and previous either to the seeking of the favour of God or any act of obedience ; for unless we do believe that there is a divine power, and that there are recompenses appointed to encourage the duty of the creature, all religion would be but a dead custom, and would be soon abolished. Therefore, I suppose, the apostle, to prove his argument with more advantage, proceedeth, *ex concessis*, from things that common reason will grant to be necessary to every good action. He instanceth in the principal radical truths, which are the foundation of all religion, that there is a God, and that this God will reward all virtue ; there is a God all-sufficient, and he will be good to the creature.

3. These two articles must be enlarged and explained according to the analogy of faith and the declaration which God hath made of his will in the gospel ; all brevities, wherein religion is reduced to a few heads, must still be explained according to the extent of the rule of faith. Look, as in the commandments, where all moral duties are reduced to ten words ; so in the summaries of the gospel, those things must be explained by the extent of the rule of faith ; for instance, in the first article, ‘ He that cometh to God must believe that he is ; ’ that is, he is as he hath revealed himself, one in three persons ; for otherwise we worship an idol, and not that which is God. We form an idol when we think of God out of the trinity ; therefore we must believe that he is in that manner as he hath revealed himself in the scripture. So for the other article, ‘ That God is a rewarder ; ’ that is in the way that God hath revealed himself according to the tenor of the covenant of grace ; that he is a rewarder in and through Christ as mediator ; that he will give us all the blessings of the covenant, justification and remission of sins, as the pawn of glory, and sanctification as the beginning of glory ; and then glory itself as the perfection of all ; and all these things in and through Christ. It is true, in innocency there were but two things to be believed ; that God is, and that God is a rewarder. But now, after the fall, both before and after the law, the catechism was enlarged, and we have to look not only to our creator, but to our saviour, the mediator ; but after Christ’s coming the will of God is more explained, and our belief is required to be more explicit.

‘ It is impossible ; ’ not in regard of the absolute dominion and sovereignty of God—he might have taken another course of salvation—but in regard to his will, and the course into which our salvation is stated and disposed. God can save a man without faith, as, saith Mr Perkins, he can enlighten the world without the sun ; but this is the way which, in wisdom and justice, he hath found out. God’s will is the supreme

rule ; and as God hath ordered the way by which he will bring creatures to happiness, so *ex hypothesi*, it is impossible ever to be accepted of God without Christ.

‘To please God ;’ what is that ? In the former verse I told you what is in Gen. v. 24, ‘ Enoch walked with God ; ’ it is in the Septuagint, Enoch pleased God. Walking with God notes obedience, and pleasing of God the success of obedience. To please God here is to be accepted in any act of duty and obedience ; to be accepted to life as conformable to God’s will. Now it is impossible we should be thus accepted without faith in Jesus Christ. Thus I have opened the propositions.

Secondly, I come to the inferences that may be drawn from hence ; some are doctrinal, some of practical consideration.

First, It is impossible to be saved without true faith in Jesus Christ ; or, that there is no religion but that which teacheth rightly to believe in Christ, that can be looked upon as a way of salvation. Jews and Turks and infidels can never please God, nor be accepted to life, because they have no faith. There are many that say that every man shall be saved in his own religion—Turks, Jews, heathens—if they be true to their principles—and devout in their own religion. Synmachus, a wicked heathen pleading for paganism against the christians, and for the ancient worship of the gods, saith thus, *Æquum est quicquid omnes colunt, unum putetur, eadem spectamus astra, commune cælum est, idem nos mundus involvat ; quid interest quod quisque sua prudentia verum inquirat ? Uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum.*—It is but equal, that though we take several ways, yet we should live together, as those that agree in the same worship. We behold the same stars, and we hope for the same heaven, and we live upon the same earth, what matter in what kind of way we seek out the truth. This opinion layeth a foundation for atheism and libertinism, and doth much take off from our thankfulness that we owe to God for that excellent treasure which he hath opened to the church in the scriptures ; so that they which plead for the heathens had need look to themselves, lest they themselves are not found christians. Clear it is, if we will hearken to what is revealed, that there is no salvation in any other but in Christ, Acts iv. 12. God hath acquainted the creature with no other way how we may come to life. Now, the heathens had no knowledge of Christ ; they had only some general knowledge of a divine power, they had τὸ γνωστὸν Θεοῦ—‘ That which may be known of God,’ Rom. i. 19 : some general notice of a divine being, which served to leave them without excuse, but not to save them. It is true, they might by the creation understand God’s eternity and power—attributes that are obvious, but more terrible than comfortable to sinners—but for any knowledge of Christ, they could have none. Sun and moon could not preach Christ, though they might preach a God ; but the way of salvation by Christ, the very angels come to know by the church : Eph. iii. 10, ‘ To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God.’ Christ, then, they knew not ; and without Christ there is no salvation.

Many objections are against this—

Obj. 1. Say they, it is true ; they cannot be saved without Christ ;

but they are saved by Christ, though they have no knowledge of him ; as Peter was delivered by the angel out of prison before he wist who it was, Acts xii. 9. 10 ; so they feel themselves to be saved before they know their saviour.

Ans. The apostle saith, ' Without faith it is impossible to please God.' He doth not only say without Christ, but without faith ; so that not only the benefit of Christ is established in this doctrine, but the necessity of faith : so John xvii. 3. ' This is life eternal to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. As none can be saved without Christ, so none can have benefit by Christ, but those that know him, and that believe in him.

Obj. 2. But say they, by some extraordinary ways God might reveal himself and discover Jesus Christ to them.

Ans. This we cannot judge ; we are to keep to the rule. Only let me hint that the ground of this conceit is naught ; that because the heathens had many moral virtues, therefore they think God was bound to reveal Christ to them, they having so far improved nature. This is again a falsehood, because those things which do not come from faith, and were not done for the glory of God, were not accepted with God ; they were but sins set off with the fairer lustre and varnish ; and the only privilege they could have by that was *ut mitius ardeant*, that they may have a cooler hell.

Obj. 3. It is said of divers, they were persons devout and feared God before ever they had any knowledge of Christ ; as Acts xvi. 14, ' A certain woman which worshipped God, heard us ; ' so it is said, Acts ii. 5, ' There were dwelling at Jerusalem devout men, out of every nation under heaven,' that were not as yet christians ; but they repented, and were converted by the sermon of Peter. So Acts x. 2, ' Cornelius was a devout man that feared God with all his house ; and ver. 34, 35, it is said, ' God is not a respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.'

Ans. These places do either speak of a natural devotion, which may arise merely from the instinct of conscience, therefore our translation useth the expression ' devout,' not ' religious ; ' or, they speak of proselytes that did actually profess the Jewish worship, or were acquainted with it, though they did not join with them, as many of the Romans did, though they were not actually circumcised. In Acts, chap. xvi., where Lydia is said ' to worship God,' it is meant only out of blind instinct of conscience ; in the second of the Acts, it is spoken there of Jewish proselytes that came up to Jerusalem to worship at the feast. Concerning Cornelius, though he were not a professed proselyte, yet he was acquainted with the doctrine of the Jews, and had some knowledge of God. Such an one was the eunuch, Acts viii. They knew and feared the true and living God, and had faith in the Messiah to come, though they had not faith concerning the person of Christ ; they expected the redemption of Israel, upon which faith, being drawn out into acts of obedience, they were accepted of God, as the patriarchs were that did believe in the Messiah to come. As to Cornelius, it is clear he was exactly religious ; he was already converted by being acquainted with the Jewish doctrine concerning God and the Messiah ; his prayers and alms came up before God. Now God heareth not sin-

ners ; and for that general conclusion in Acts x. 34, ' Whosoever feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.' I answer, righteousness is there taken for any conformity to the will of God, revealed either in the law or gospel. He that renounceth his own righteousness, and casteth himself upon the merits of Christ in the sense of the gospel, is a worker of righteousness, and God will accept of him of whatever nation he be. The expression sheweth that all distinctions are taken away, and the pale of grace is enlarged.

Obj. 4. If God will not accept the gentiles without faith in Christ, then he requires that which is impossible ; there being no revelation of Christ made to them, and they having in Adam not so much as a power to believe in Christ ; for if he had not sinned he had no need of a mediator ; and, therefore, how can the Lord require faith of them for their acceptation to life ?

Ans. 1. At the last day the gentiles shall not be responsible for want of faith in Christ, but for not keeping the moral law which was written upon their hearts, and for not obeying the dictates of their own consciences, as the apostle proves at large : Rom. ii. 12.-14, ' As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law,' &c ; for God deals with men according to the measure of their light, and in the process of the last day he will call the heathens to an account for not living according to the dictates of reason and conscience : God will exact no more than he gives. It is true, he doth not give them further means ; but that is not their sin, but their infelicity and punishment for their sin, though they can never be accepted without Christ.

2. For what we received in Adam, I answer, Though Adam was not bound to believe in Christ, yet he had a power of believing all that was revealed of God, as he that is fallen blind had a power of seeing the house afterward built.

Use. To apply this first inference. If there be no way of life, no doctrine of salvation but only the christian religion, that which holds forth God in Christ, then—

1. It presseth us to bless God for the knowledge of the gospel. Oh, how many thousands in the world are there that are as sheep, whom no man taketh up, but are spilt upon the great common of the world, and left to the process of divine justice. Let us bless God for our privileges, that we have such fair advantages ; certainly if we look to the hole of the pit out of which we were digged, we were as bad as others. The old Britons worshipped the most monstrous and misshapen idols ; this was our original in the day that God looked upon us. If we abuse our privileges, and be unthankful for the light of the gospel, he may return us again to our old barbarism. The Lord threatened Israel : Hosea ii. 3, ' I will strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born.' The Lord may strip us naked, and take away all our spiritual favours ; and while we run after new lights, the Lord may remove the old light from us. We are afraid of popery ; this is not altogether so bad as atheism ; therefore let us be thankful and careful to improve those advantages God hath put into our hands. We cannot be thankful enough for the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, it is a great mystery, not only pleasing to the thoughts, but healing to the soul. The Lord is angry with the gentiles, and hath brought many judgments on them for putting the finger in nature's

eye. Oh, what will be our misery for quenching or slighting the light of the gospel, and the excellent revelation God hath made to us of Christ. The heathens had some obscure knowledge of God, but we have the revelation of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. By their own consciences they knew the moral law; God offered terms of duty to them, but he offers terms of salvation and grace to us.

2. It presseth us to prize orthodoxism, and, above all things, look to this, to be right in point of belief. Every man shall not be saved in every persuasion, nay, though they do in general acknowledge Christ. There are a sort of libertines risen up, that think the differences and controversies in Christendom with Socinians and Arminians are but vain and frivolous, and that a loose belief of God and Christ is enough. If this general faith be enough, then why hath God revealed so many things to us, and given us a more ample rule, if with safety to salvation we may be ignorant of them? Why hath he appointed us to contend for the faith of the saints, and for the truth that is revealed in the scripture? as whether you are redeemed with a satisfaction, or whether you are justified by his righteousness or works? It is no matter, say they, for these lesser explications. Such men seem to tax the scriptures, that they have redundancies and superfluous doctrines, and they seem to tax the holy apostles of rash zeal, when they disputed so earnestly for the faith of the saints; as Paul against justiciaries for the righteousness of faith, and James against antinomians and libertines for care of good works. And they tax the holy martyrs of folly, that they would shed their blood for less concerning articles; so all be resolved into Christ. Men think this is enough. Men need not inquire into the manner of the application of his righteousness, the efficacy of his price, the merit of his passion, as if it were enough to hold a few generals, and the more implicit our faith is the better; whereas, the Lord would have us to abound in knowledge, and to have the word dwell in us richly.

What articles are absolutely necessary to salvation will be hard to define and determine, and what that measure of faith is without which we cannot please God. And I know not by what rule to proceed; if we should make it too large, it would be a ground of ignorance and laziness; if we make it too strict, it would be a ground of uncharitableness to them that labour under invincible prejudices. Only that you may not be loose in this matter, take a few rules.

[1.] The foundations of religion are God and Christ, and they must be held with great certainty: John xvii. 3, 'This is life eternal to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' We cannot be saved unless we hold one God in three persons, and Jesus Christ as mediator. These are the supreme truths that are clearly revealed and propounded to our faith. But now for practical truths; for the way of enjoying God and Christ, they are revealed in other texts: John xvi. 8, 'When the comforter shall come, he shall convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.' This is the doctrine the Spirit teacheth in the church, to convince of sin, and the curse that remains upon man while he is under the power of nature; of 'righteousness,' of the sufficient satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ, of judgment and holiness. It is very dangerous to hearken to

those that lessen the misery of nature, or the merit and satisfaction of Christ, or the care of good works; all such opinions are irreconcilable to the covenant of grace, and overturn the main pillars upon which salvation stands. When men advance nature or depress Christ, or decry good works, as long as they live according to their principles, they can never be saved.

[2.] We must be earnest concerning the particular explication of those truths, as they are delivered in scripture. Every piece and parcel of truth is precious, and a little leaven of error is dangerous. The apostle, speaking of error, saith, Gal. v. 9, 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' He speaks there of errors in matters of justification, which of all matters of religion is most nice and delicate; error fretteth like a gangrene, till it cateth out the heart of religion. Men think it is enough to be careful of fundamentals and that all other knowledge is *scientia oblectans*; only a knowledge for delight, and not safety. Oh! consider it is very dangerous to err in the particular explication of those doctrines; to stain the understanding, though we do not wound it. I confess there are some truths of lesser importance; there are *maculæ et vulnera intellectus*—the spots of the understanding as well as the wounds of it. Now it is dangerous to be wanton in opinions that seem to be of a smaller concernment. Men that play with truth, they run themselves into a snare; and though they err but in a small matter, yet they are liable to more insinuations. Some say fundamentals are few; believe them and live well, and then you shall be saved. This is as if a man in a building should be only careful to lay a good foundation, no matter for the roof, windows, or walls. If a man should come and untile your house, and tell you—Friend, I have left the foundation standing, the main buttresses are safe; you would not take it well. Why should we be more careless in spiritual things?

[3.] No lesser error, be it never so small, is to be held and kept up out of interest, and against the conviction of conscience, because we can plead there is salvation in that way. This is some men's first inquiry, Is there salvation in such a way? therefore let us not stay in lesser errors. If they are held up against conscience, they are damnable; for then they come under the notion of allowed known sins. To hold up any lesser way merely out of interest, and not out of conscience, it is very dangerous; and it is an argument of an unsubdued will, or that the heart is wedded to secular interest; and it is a preferring the favour of men before the favour of God, as our Lord saith, John xii. 43, 'They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God;' for though there may be salvation in both those ways, yet you are to own God in all his truths. Phil. iii. 15, the apostle speaks in the case of circumcision and uncircumcision—'Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.' Circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing in themselves, but much if they are held up for the preservation of our interest, and merely that we may cleave to such a party. And mark, it is all one whether there be a plenary conviction or a secret fear or suspicion; and we do not search, as many men are afraid to search, lest truth should make against their interest. These

are those that Christ describes : John iii. 20. ' They will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd ; ' and ' they are willingly ignorant, ' 2 Peter iii. 5 ; when men labour for distinctions to daub over the matter, and to hide the truth from conscience ; or when they are unwilling to search, being afraid lest they should find it too soon. As in practicals, a man is not willing to be informed what he should do for good uses, and how strict he should be in his conversation, that he may please himself in his carelessness ; this is a sign of an unsubdued heart ; so in these cases, a man is willing to be ignorant ; they are loath to be informed, and will not sift truth to the bottom, lest it may intrench on his worldly conveniences ; usually in truths of the present age, interests make the heart thus doubtful and suspensive. This is the first instance which concerned heathens and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. You have seen there is no salvation in any way, but only in that way which holds forth faith in Jesus Christ.

SERMON XXV.

But without faith, it is impossible to please him ; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.—HEB. xi. 6.

SECONDLY. The second inference concerneth the children of believing parents. If without faith it be impossible to please God, then children must have some kind of faith, else they can never be accepted to life. I know that the apostle doth principally speak of adult or grown persons, men of age, such as come to God, and seek him : but though, however, the rule is general, there is no salvation but by Christ, and there is no way of salvation by Christ but by faith ; and by the analogy of faith it concerns all that are accepted to salvation ; so that infants come under the rule, therefore some kind of faith they must have. It were uncharitable and contrary to the rich grace of the covenant to deny salvation and eternal glory to infants. The scripture sheweth, that ' they are holy, ' and dedicated to God, 1 Cor. vii. 14 ; and Christ says, ' of such is the kingdom of God, ' Mat. xix. 14. Now this faith of infants is a matter very intricate and difficult. Several opinions there have been about it. Origen held that infants were saved by virtue of those good works, the faith and obedience which they yielded to God in the bodies of other men before they were born, when their souls animated other bodies. The Pelagians, against whom Austin disputes hard, that infants were saved out of the foresight of those good works which they would have performed, if God had suffered them to continue in the world. Against this Austin disputes, proving every man is to be judged, not according to what he would do, or might have done, but ' According to what he hath done in the body, whether good or bad, ' 2 Cor. v. 10. And if this pretence were allowable, and a ground of salvation, then the men of Tyre and Sidon would be in a capacity of

life without repentance ; for if they had had the means, saith Christ, ' They would have repented long since,' Mat. xi. 21. Ambrose saith, They are saved by the faith of the church : Mark ii. 5, when Jesus saw ' their faith,' that is, the faith of the sick man that was healed of the palsy, and of those that brought him. But that seemeth improper by their being in the church ; they have a right to visible ordinances ; but grace is God's gift, and must be dispensed in his way. Beza saith, They are saved by the faith of their parents imputed to them. As they were infected by the sin of Adam by natural generation ; so by virtue of the covenant of grace they are saved by the faith of their parents, but the child is not concerned in the acts of the father.

It is true, the faith of the parents makes way for the interest of the children in the covenant ; but every one is saved by his own faith—' The just shall live by his own faith,' Rom. i. 17. It is not in the power of another to damn or save me ; for the immediate parents are not representatives and common persons, as Adam was. Though Adam be a means to transfuse and bring sin, yet the faith of the parents could not involve and put into a state of salvation and acceptance with God. The Lutherans, they say, that children have an actual faith, though, say they, the act be to us unconceivable. But this were to offer violence not only to our reason, but our very senses. Children are everywhere described to be those in scripture that ' Know not their right hand from their left,' Jonah iv. ult. We see they have not the use of reason, therefore they have no knowledge of Christ and the mysteries of religion, and cannot have such an actual faith.

What faith, then, is left for infants, by virtue of which we may establish their acceptation with God ? Some think that this question is altogether unnecessary, and say, that the scriptures are so sparing in this matter, that grown persons may be more careful of their own faith rather than of the faith of infants, who must be left, say they, to the free grace and pleasure of God. For my part I should think so too, and should not start this controversy were it not already agitated ; and were not the comfort of parents very much concerned in it, I should leave them to the grace of God. But upon those reasons, I think it necessary to be determined ; and I doubt not but it will make much for the glory of God and your own consolation. What is then to be said in this matter ?

1. Let it be premised, that the question is concerning the infants of believing parents ; as for others, we leave them to the judgment of God. Some indeed think that all infants, as they perished in Adam, without knowledge of him, so they are redeemed by Christ without knowledge of Christ. As the Arminians say, that of infants there is neither election nor reprobation, and that no infant can be condemned for original sin ; both which assertions are false. For we find that the predestination of God hath plainly made a difference between infant and infant : Rom. ix. 11–13, ' The children being not yet born, and having done neither good nor evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, it was said, the elder shall serve the younger, as it is said, Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.' Jacob in his mother's womb was in a state of election ; and it is notable, that in many other places the scripture speaks as if God's decrees were

dated from the womb and from the conception; as Jer. i. 5, 'Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and ordained thee a prophet to the nations;' partly, because to sense that was the first time of our existence; and partly, because God's decrees do then begin to operate and to bring forth. God doth, as it were, then say, 'This is a birth I must look after; this is an instrument whom I have pre-ordained to make use of for special purpose. Man's ordination is at grown years, but God's from all eternity. And because of the special care of providence, it is said to begin then when the child is in the womb, Gal. i. 15, 16, 'When it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.' The apostle mentions three things as the ground of his ministry: God's pleasure, or everlasting counsel, his separation from his mother's womb and actual calling. First, God determines from everlasting, and then the decree begins to break forth; and there is a special care of God about the birth, and afterward there is actual calling. All this is brought to prove that even children before they are born do not only fall under the care of providence, but under the special notice of God's decrees; and that other opinion, that none is condemned for original sin, is also groundless and contrary to the scripture; for we read, Eph. ii. 3, 'That we were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.' It is mercy, that God will say to any that are in their blood and filthiness, Live. Who can quarrel with his justice that he should damn any, though he see nothing but original pollution in them? Among men we crush the serpent's eggs before the serpents be grown; and might not God destroy us for our birth-sin? I confess some among the orthodox think, that all infants that die in infancy belong to God's election; so Junius, and so Mr Fox, upon Rev. vii. 9, where there is a distinction between the sealed and unsealed, which he applies to unbaptized infants both in or out of the church. But I answer, as for those that are born out of the church, we have no warrant to judge them, as the apostle saith, in somewhat a like case. 1 Cor. v. 12, 'What have I to do to judge them that are without?' So what have we to do with them that are without? God's judgments are to be adored rather than curiously searched into: yet this is manifest by the whole current and drift of scripture, that there is a great deal of difference between those that are born in and those that are born out of the covenant. It is said to believing parents, 'The promise is unto you, and unto your children,' Acts ii. 39. I cannot apply that comfort to infidels. And those that are born within the pale are called 'children of the covenant,' Acts iii. 25. Those that are born without the pale of grace, are counted unclean; but others, holy, dedicated to God: 1 Cor. vii. 14, 'Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy;' so that there is a difference between infant and infant. The children of unbelieving parents are plainly asserted by the apostle to be unclean; we cannot have such comfortable hopes of them, and cannot say they are saved; therefore we must leave them to God's judgment. The question at present is of the children of the covenant, and those that are born within the pale of grace. And therefore—

2. Of those children dying in infancy, I assert, that they have faith, not actual faith, but the seed of faith, by virtue of God's election and his grace issuing out to them through Christ in the covenant, which I shall confirm by showing—(1.) That it may be so; (2.) That it must be so; (3.) That it is even so; (4.) How it is so, or what kind of faith they have: which things being cleared, the way to application will be easy.

[1.] That it may be so, because the only prejudice against this opinion seemeth to arise from the impossibility of the thing; and the Socinians that bring down all things to the line and rule of corrupt reason, count the faith of infants a thing so impossible, that they say it is a greater dotage than the dream of a man in a fever; therefore my first work is to prove that they are capable of faith. Certainly, totally incapable they are not, like stocks and stones, and things without life; and yet out of these God can raise up children to Abraham. Nor altogether as incapable as the younglings of beasts, because the perfection of their life is only sense and natural instinct, whereas children have reason. Now reason is in a nearer propinquity to grace than sense, therefore utterly incapable they are not, as stones, or as brute creatures are.

But to come more closely. The only reason why they are said to be incapable of faith is, because they cannot exercise it. Now, that they are not incapable of faith, though they cannot exercise it, I shall prove by several instances. This supposition will seem to infer that it may be so. If infants had been born of Adam in innocency, they had been capable of original purity and of the principle and root of all faith, and assent to the word of God would naturally have been in them, which in time, and according to the degrees of age, would have put forth itself. Infants in their measure should have been as Christ was. As soon as he was born, he was filled with the Holy Ghost, yet he grew in wisdom and knowledge, Luke ii. 40-52. The graces of the Holy Ghost did exert and put forth themselves in Christ by degrees. Now this, according to their measure, would have been the condition of infants born of Adam, if he had stood in innocency; therefore there is no repugnancy, but that by a supernatural work the seed and root of grace may be in them. I say, it is no more inconceivable than the original purity of infants, if they had stood in Adam. And I shall show you by another instance. Take nature as it is now corrupted; if they are capable of sin by nature, why not of grace, by a work of the Spirit of God above nature? Now we see that they are capable of the root of sin, which lies hid in infants, and bewrayeth itself in time; and if they are capable of sin, which is one habit, why are they not capable of grace, if the Spirit of God will work it, which is another habit? They are sinners not by any act of their own, but by an hereditary habit, or vicious nature received from Adam, though not exerting and putting forth itself by any act. So they may have grace, though not exerting and discovering itself by any acts yet lying hid and shut up in the habitual principle of grace. As they are defiled by the sin of Adam, though they be not capable to understand it, so they may be sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, though they be not sensible of the merit of Christ, nor capable of understanding the way and the work

of redemption. To take off the prejudice of incapacity, take some resemblances of it in common things. We see that infants are capable of reason, though not of discourse; they are rational creatures. Infants have reason and understanding, though it lie hid for a while. The whelp of the wolf has a principle of rapacity, which discovers itself afterward. The vital and vegetative force in any plant lies hid in the seed and root, which to appearance is dead and dry, and afterwards plainly discovers and puts it forth; so infants, though they have no actual sense and knowledge of the redemption of Christ, yet they may have some impressions of the divine image upon their souls, which in time shows itself by light in the understanding, by purity in the heart, and by conformity in the life to the law of God. Again, that it is not impossible appears by those expressions in scripture, where some are said to be sanctified from the womb; as of John Baptist, it is said, 'He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb,' Luke i. 15. Grant it to be a peculiar privilege of John, but it is not so in all elect infants; yet it may be so. So those expressions of trusting God from the mother's womb, David speaks it of his own person, as a type of Christ: Ps. xxii. 9, 'Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts;' and Job saith, chap. xxxi. 18, 'From my youth he was brought up with me as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;' meaning, he had an *indoles*, or disposition of pity, put into him at his nativity. So also, why may not a principle of faith be put into us in the womb, if God will work it?

2. I shall prove that it must be so; how else should infants be saved? There is no salvation without the covenant, and in the covenant there is no salvation but by faith in Christ. By their natural birth, all children are children of wrath, enemies to God, guilty before God. As we read it, the word is *ὑπόδικος*, liable to the process of divine justice: Rom. iii. 19, 'All the world is become guilty before God,' and so are infants; there is no reason to exempt them. They are all dead in sin; and the scripture saith expressly, 'He that believeth not, is condemned already,' John iii. 18; that is, liable to the sentence of condemnation; so that believers they must be, or else they must be damned; and regenerate they must be, or else we know there is no way of entering into the kingdom of God. Let any one show us any way or pleasing God without faith, or of entering into heaven without regeneration. John iii. 3, Christ hath expressly said, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' In the first commission of the apostles, when they went forth to preach the word of life, this was the tenor of the gospel: Mark xvi. 16, 'He that believeth shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned.' Let men show any ground in scripture of a middle sort of men, between believers and unbelievers, or any other way of salvation but by Christ; and in Christ, but by faith in Christ. If men say, All those places belong to grown persons, or those that are of age; by this shift you may elude any scripture; and where then shall we have a rule whereby to judge of infants? which, how comfortless it will be to parents, and how derogatory to the grace of the covenant, anyone cannot choose but see.

[3.] That it is so I shall prove from the promise of God ; for God being faithful and true, his promise is as good as a positive assertion : God promiseth grace and glory to infants. Grace, Isa. xlv. 3, ‘ I will pour out my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thy offspring.’ In the original, upon thy ‘ buds ;’ where the Spirit is promised to be poured out upon infants, not only on their seed in general, as implying persons of age, but on their ‘ buds,’ ere they come to grow up to stalk and flower. Then for glory, Christ saith, Mat. xix. 14, ‘ Suffer little children to come to me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven ;’ heaven is theirs by grant and promise. Elect infants in general have *jus ad rem*, a right to heaven ; but there is no *jus in re*, no actual right or interest, but by faith. But what need we argue, when we have a plain assertion ? Luke xviii. 17, ‘ Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein ;’ they have not only a right to the kingdom of God, but they receive the kingdom of God ‘ as a little child receiveth it.’ The sense carrieth it so : that is, receiveth it by faith, accompanied with humility. But more plainly yet : Mat. xviii. 6, ‘ Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me,’ &c. ; there is the very word — ‘ which believe in me ; these little ones.’ Christ speaks not metaphorically, but literally ; ‘ these,’ such as were then before him, and of them he saith, ‘ which believe in me.’ Some make exception against this, and say, The child to which Christ alluded was then grown. I answer, that cannot be : for in Luke it is called *βρέφος*, an ‘ infant.’ Luke xviii. 15 ; in Matthew *παιδιον*, a ‘ little child ;’ and Mark ix. 36, it is said, ‘ Christ took him in his arms.’ And besides, in children that are more grown, pride, fierceness, and other ill qualities are bewrayed ; therefore such an one would not have been so fit for Christ’s purpose to be propounded to the apostles for a pattern of meekness and humility. As they are called rational before they had the use of reason, so we have found that infants may, must, and have a principle of faith, from whence they may be said to be believers.

[4.] How is it so. What is the faith which children have ? I proved before that actual faith they have not, which begins in knowledge and ends in affiance. It remains therefore that they have the seed of faith, or some principle of grace conveyed into their souls by the hidden operation of the Spirit of God, which gives them an interest in Christ, and so a right to his merit for their salvation. I confess among the orthodox there are different expressions about this matter, but they all agree in the thing. Some call it a habit of faith, some a principle, some an inclination, some the first-fruits of the Spirit, others the gift of the Spirit, which answers to actual faith. All agree in this, that it is some work of the Holy Ghost, which gives them a relation to Christ, and by virtue of this relation, they have an interest in his merit for the remission of sins and acceptance with God. The more usual terms are principle and habit. Some dislike the word habit, because the word is not scriptural, and because it seems more proper to faith that is grown and actually exercised, and because the habit of grace is not the condition of the covenant. More properly, it may be called the principle, or the seed of faith ; for so the work of the Holy Ghost is expressed, 1 John iii. 9, ‘ Whosoever is born of God doth not commit

sin ; for his seed remaineth in him : and he cannot sin, because he is born of God ;' where the grace of regeneration is called the seed of God, which is cast into their hearts by the Spirit of God in a way unknown to us. In short, it is the work of grace, whereby the heart is quickened with spiritual life, and made a sanctified vessel to receive Christ. By the sanctifying Spirit all outward means are supplied, and infants are enabled unto that, which Dr Ames calls 'a passive reception,' by which they are in Christ, and united to him. It is not altogether without act, though it be such an act as is proper to their age.

Obj. But you will say, Do all elect infants receive this sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, or seed of faith? We see many infants of believers, whom in charity we judge to be elect, because the promise is made to them and their seed ; yet, when they are grown up we see they show themselves to be never regenerated in their infancy.

I answer, in this case we do not speak universally, but indefinitely : we do not say that all infants do believe in Christ, but infants—and in the judgment of charity we presume it of all infants, that die in their infancy. We must leave God to the liberty of his counsels, lest the freedom of grace should seem to be prejudiced by the merit of any family. God will take one and leave another, take Jacob and leave Esau ; only we say this in the general, that we have more cause to hope well of all the children of believing parents. Why? because the grace of election runs and flows most kindly in the channel of the covenant, and therefore there is greater hope of such. Rom. xi. 24, the apostle calls them, 'The natural branches,' so as that they were more easily grafted in. The apostle puts a 'how much more,' upon them ; 'How much more shall the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?' God may suffer the branches of the covenant to grow wild, and may graft in a strange slip, but it is most kindly to the natural branches ; they have a greater sufficiency of means, an external right, as soon as born. Certainly it is a great advantage to be born of parents within the covenant ; they have an excellent inheritance, till they disinherit themselves by their own unthankfulness and rebellion. Look, as we judge of the graft by the stock from whence it is taken, until it bring forth other fruit, by which it may be discerned ; so for children, we judge of them by their parents until they come to years of discretion and choose their own way, and so do actually choose or refuse the grace of God.

Use. 1. To press parents to bless God for the rich grace of the covenant. Ah, consider not only your persons are accepted with God, but also your seed, by virtue of which the merit of Christ is applied, and the Spirit of Christ infused into them, leaving God to the liberty of his counsel. Oh, how greatly doth the Lord love those that fear him ! He cannot satisfy himself in doing good, only to other persons, but will do good to their children and posterity for their sakes. So that though they are broken off by their positive unbelief and apostasy, yet as the Jews were hated for their own sake, yet they are beloved for their fathers' sake, and therefore they shall be again grafted into the stock ; so they are under the care of providence until they are converted. Oh, how should we entertain the grace of the covenant with humility and reverence, and stand and wonder that God should not only accept our

worthless persons, but also graft our seed into the stock of grace. When God came to tender the covenant to Abraham, Gen. xvii. 3, it is said, 'Abraham fell upon his face,' a posture of humble reverence, as wondering at the large and diffusive mercy of God; and David, 2 Sam. vii. 18, 19, when God had taken him into covenant and his children, 'O Lord God, what am I? and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?' that thou hast heaped so many privileges upon me. 'And yet this was a small matter in thy sight, O Lord God; for thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come, and is this the manner of man?' He stands wondering at grace. Natural love like a river is descending: it runs downward. All our care next to our souls is for our children; for in them our life is multiplied and continued in the world. Children are the parent multiplied; therefore one saith of children, They are 'a knotty eternity;' when the thread of life is run out, there is a knot knit, and it is continued in the child. Therefore what a mercy is it that God hath not only provided from eternity for our souls, but hath spoken a good word concerning our house for a great while yet to come, that he will continue his grace in our line.

Use 2. It should encourage parents to found a covenant interest in their own persons. Oh, lay the foundation of it in yourselves! Ps. ciii. 17, 'The mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children.' Oh, it is much that it is from everlasting to everlasting; that we may go from one eternity to another; that we may look backward and see purposes of eternal grace, and look forwards to see possessions of eternal glory. But this is not all his righteousness unto children's children! Learn to fear God; that is the best way of providing for your children. We all seek the welfare of our children. You may heap up riches and honour upon them, and leave a curse with it; you may entail them an estate, and wrath with it; but leave them a covenant interest, that is an excellent inheritance. Wicked parents do as it were stop the way of God's mercy from descending upon their posterity; at least, they do not open a passage and channel, that grace may run down freely and with an uninterrupted course. God often threatens, that 'The posterity of the wicked shall be cut off,' Ps. cix. 13. You may not only injure your own souls, but your posterity. Oh, for your poor babes' sake, learn to fear God, that you may not leave them to the wrath and displeasure of God! It is said to Cain, Gen. iv. 10, 'Thy brother's blood crieth to me from the ground.' Some commentators infer that Cain was accountable not only for the murder of Abel himself, but for the murder of all the holy seed that should come of his loins. God will require not only the neglect of your own souls at your hands, but visit you for neglecting your children; that you have not taken a course to open a passage, that grace may descend to them.

Use 3. Here is comfort to believing parents concerning their children dying in infancy. We should not doubt of their salvation, unless we should wrong the covenant of grace. To what end doth God say, I am your God, and the God of your seed? Consider, Jesus Christ himself was the advocate of children, and would plead their right against his own apostles, when they thought Christ would have nothing to do with children: Mat. xix. 14, 'Suffer little children to come unto

me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven—suffer them to come; I have provided heaven for them, as well as for others. And Christ that hath said, ‘Of such is the kingdom of heaven,’ certainly will find out a way how to settle the title upon them, and to enstate them into the kingdom of heaven. David, when his child died, comforted himself in this: 2 Sam. xii. 23, ‘But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.’ It is not only meant of the state of the dead, that were a brutish argument, but ‘I shall go to him;’ the meaning is, to the glory of the everlasting state; nay, though they die without the seal of the covenant. The Hebrew children were murdered as soon as born, Exod. i. 22; and Mat. ii. 16. The children of Bethlehem shed their blood by martyrdom, before they shed their blood by circumcision, and therefore leave them in Christ’s arms.

Use 4. To teach us confidence in the power of divine grace. God can shine into the dark hearts of children, therefore certainly there is no heart so dark but God can enlighten it. Our trouble at our first conversion doth not arise out of the doubting of God’s love, so much as of his power. This hard heart will never be softened; these rebellious affections will never be subdued to the discipline of the Spirit; this blind mind will never be enlightened. If once they could glorify the power of his converting grace, comfort would sooner be settled in their heart. Aye, but the Lord can shine into the hearts of infants, therefore do not doubt of it. You see what he can do in those that have not the use of reason. God can give the principle of grace: Isa. lxxv. 20, ‘The child shall die an hundred years old, but a sinner, being an hundred years old, shall be accursed;’ speaking of the grace of the gospel. There are many expositions of that place. Some carry it this way, that a child in the christian state shall be as perfect and as ripe for heaven as if he were a hundred years old. This is the power of divine grace, therefore wait upon God.

Use 5. Here is encouragement to the neglected duty of education. Many times we neglect our little children, think we can do no good upon them. Oh, water the seed of grace, for aught you know they may be sanctified from the womb. It is said of John the Baptist, Luke i. 15. ‘He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb.’ Oh, this will make them exert and put forth those hidden operations of grace which God worketh upon their souls: therefore water the seed of grace with the dew of education. God will call you to account for the education of your children: Ezek. xvi. 20, ‘Moreover, thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast born unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured: is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, that thou hast slain my children?’ that is, dedicated to me by circumcision. Consider, they are God’s children, and you are only entrusted with them that you may bring them up. Let us, that have been instruments to convey an evil nature to them, assist them in the work of grace. Many have been converted by private education before they have been called by the ministry of the gospel. You cannot do your children worse hurt than to let them run wild. Consider they are the natural branches of the covenant, and you should bestow culture upon them. Dionysius, the

tyrant, to be revenged of his adversary, brought up his child to riot and wantonness. You cannot do yourselves a worse injury, nor yourselves a greater revenge, than to let your children run wild.

SERMON XXVI.

But without faith it is impossible to please God.—HEB. xi. 6.

THIRDLY. The third inference is concerning carnal and unregenerate men. 'Without faith,' the apostle saith, 'it is impossible to please God;' therefore, certainly a man in his natural condition can do nothing that may be accepted with God. I shall confirm this with other places of scripture: Rom. viii. 8, 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God;' 'in the flesh,' that is, in a carnal state; it is opposed to 'them that are in Christ,' ver. 1. There is an utter impossibility that anything of theirs should be accepted with the Lord; which ariseth partly from the state of the person, and partly from the quality of the service which natural men perform.

1. From the state of the person. Unregenerate men are enemies to God, and therefore he will not accept of a gift at their hands. There is no reconciliation till an interest in Christ; for God will not be appeased with duties; the honour of appeasing and satisfying his justice is left alone for Jesus Christ. So it is proclaimed from heaven, Mat. iii. 17, 'This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased;' so Eph. i. 6, 'He hath made us accepted in the beloved.' Jesus Christ is the favourite of heaven; he must mediate for us. As, when 'Herod was displeased with the men of Tyre and Sidon, they made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, and desired peace,' Acts xii. 20; so if ever we would find acceptance with God, we must have a friend and favourite in heaven that must plead our cause. Now, till you have an interest in his merit and intercession, God will not accept an offering at your hands; and therefore you shall find it is God's method in the covenant of grace, to begin first with the interest of the person, and then to accept of the work. See with what scorn God rejects the offering and the best services of wicked men, however accommodated: Prov. xv. 8, 9, 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord, but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.' Many things are notable in these two verses. First, he saith, The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; God is so far from accepting their choicest duties that he hates them. It is grievous that God should not accept: ay, but he doth abominate them. And mark the antithesis—'The sacrifice of the wicked,' and the 'prayer of the upright.' Sacrifice was the more outward and costly part of worship. Wicked men may do more in the outward rite than the godly themselves, to recompense the defects of inward piety; but though they come with sacrifices, yet the single prayer of the upright

is more accepted with the Lord. And mark, he saith, ver. 6, 'The way of the wicked is an abomination,' not only their sacrifice or their exercises of religion, which may be counterfeited, but their way, their second-table duties, which, because of the benefit that men receive by them, are more pleasing and plausible; yet their way, that is an abomination. They may do much; they may build colleges, promote learning, relieve the poor; yet all is an abomination, because the person is wicked. Solomon doth not say their adultery is an abomination, but their charity, their civility. But saith he, 'They that follow after righteousness,' that is, that make it their sincere aim, though they cannot always be masters of their own desires and perform their intentions, yet God loves them that follow after righteousness, their hearts are set right. But the wicked, those that are in an unjustified estate, do whatever they will, they are an abomination to the Lord; they are punished for their sins, and are not accepted for their duties. Now, lest you should think that all this doth arise from some gross defect that is in the service itself, you shall see that it is from the hatred God bears to their persons, until they be reconciled to him in Christ. I shall prove that out of Prov. xxi. 27. 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?' Suppose a wicked man should do his best, yet the person is not reconciled to God; and so at best it is but a wicked man's offering; therefore till we change our copy this will be our case; it will be an abomination to the Lord. Thus you see, from the interest and quality of the person, they are in an unjustified and unreconciled estate, therefore nothing of theirs can please God.

2. Consider the defect of the service. A natural man can never do or perform an act of pure obedience. It is true, his works are materially good: but it is not the matter which makes a work good. Velvet is good matter to make a garment of, yet it may be marred in the cutting: pieces of timber are good matter for a house, but it must be judiciously framed; so these actions are for the matter good in themselves, yet they are not pleasing to God, because they are faulty in the most necessary circumstances. Whatsoever is well done must come from a principle of faith and love; and it must be done to God's glory, otherwise it is not reckoned among duties, but sins. Now here a wicked man is always culpable; he can neither act out of faith, which he hath not; nor to God's glory, he cannot make that his aim, therefore still he sins. It is true, he sins more in things that are evil in themselves; as in theft and in lying, than in sacrifice; in adultery than in prayer, because the act itself is sinful: but in those duties that he doth perform, the matter of them is conducive to the good of human society. But it is all one as to their acceptance with God; for it is not enough that a thing be good in itself, but it must be done to a good end; that is a necessary circumstance, in which a wicked man is defective. Prov. xxi. 27, 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more (saith the Spirit of God) when he bringeth it with an evil mind?' Usually wicked men have an evil mind in all that they do; they have a carnal, or a natural, or, at best but a legal end.

[1.] A carnal end. Usually they make a market of religion, and their righteousness is set to sale. Whatever they do, they do it to please men rather than God; and how can they expect their reward of God?

So our Saviour, when he speaks of the hypocrisy of those that pray, fast, and give alms, he saith, Mat. vi. 2-16, 'They have their reward;' they give God an acquittance and a discharge, for all that they do is to please men and not to please God; therefore they have their reward, that is, that they look after. By a vile submission, they make the service of God to stoop to their secular interests. Mat. xxiii. 14, the Pharisees 'made long prayers to devour widows' houses;' that is, to get a fame and a repute to themselves, that they might be entrusted with widow's estates. Thus the apostle speaks of some, Phil. i. 15, 'That preached Christ out of envy and strife, not of good will.' They may preach and pray to show their gifts; and the end is carnal, to provide for their secular interest. Now this is a vile scorn put upon God, when religion is made a cover for an unclean intent; it is as if you should take a cup of gold, made for the king to drink in, and make it a vessel to hold dung and excrements. Or else—

[2.] Their end in all they do is natural. It is grace that sublimates the intentions of the creature. A carnal man can go no higher than self, as water cannot ascend beyond its fountain. All that a carnal man do this for self-interest. If they eat and drink it is for self, to gratify appetite, not that they might be more cheerful in the service of God. If they pray, it is for self: Hosea vii. 14, 'They have not cried unto me with their heart (saith the Lord) when they howled upon their beds; they assemble themselves for corn and wine.' All their prayers do arise from a brutish instinct after their own ease and welfare; 'Not unto me,' saith the Lord; God is neither at the beginning nor at the end of the action. If they spend their strength in holy services, as a wicked man may do, it is but to feed their own bellies; it is still to make a god of themselves, and they lay aside the Lord, Phil. iii. 19. The apostle speaks there of false teachers, who spent their strength in the work of the gospel, out of a selfish principle, to flow in an abundance of wealth and worldly pleasures; therefore he saith, 'Their god is their belly.' Always observe, a man makes a god of that which he makes his utmost end, and accounts to be his chiefest good. Thus do all natural men set up self instead of God. Now, how can God accept an action, when his majesty is laid aside and self is set up in his stead?

[3.] Take wicked men at the best, it is but a legal end. When wicked men are most devout, it is but to quiet conscience and to satisfy God for their sins by their duties. They would fain buy out their peace with heaven at any rate; as appears by the inquiry mentioned by the prophet: Micah vi. 6-8, 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old; will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' What shall I give for the sin of my soul? and wherewith will God be appeased? If peace of conscience were to be purchased with money, men would part with anything rather than their sins, for nothing is dearer to men than their sins; not their children, not their estate, not their first-born. Thus carnal men, by an excess of charity, seek to expiate the offences of a carnal life, and would be liberal, so they may be sinful. Now this is that which makes men hated and

more abominable to God ; while they think to purchase their own pardon, and hire God to be gracious ; when they do things that carry a fair show in the world, they think God is bound to forgive them their sins ; and so they cause the Lord to hate them so much the more, since they neglect Christ, ‘ In whom alone he is well pleased.’

Use 1. This serves to represent to us the misery of natural men. This should amaze them to think that all they do is abominable in God’s sight. They are debtors to the whole law, and yet they can do nothing that can be pleasing to God. Their duties cannot quit old scores, if they perform them never so exactly ; they can never come up to such a pitch of duty and such a pure act of obedience as God requires ; there is a vast debt upon them, and they are not able to pay one farthing. To enforce the consideration, reflect upon your own misery and the opposite happiness of the children of God.

1. Your own misery. Of all men, you are in a miserable condition, and God will take nothing in good part from you. How will you do to please him ? No condition, no duty of yours, no enjoyment of yours, can render you acceptable to God ; no outward condition can endear you to God. Wealth and authority in the world will nothing avail you against the process of divine justice. Men are taken with pomp and high places. We are apt to favour the rich in their cause, but divine justice will not be bribed ; all those things are but fuel to kindle the fire of hell. As a stone that falls from a high place is the more bruised and broken, so the greater your advantages are in the world of authority and place, the greater the judgment ; the mighty shall be mightily tormented ; no excellency of gifts, learning, wit, and such like things. God is not taken with parts ; all those qualities and endowments are but like a jewel in a toad’s head—the person is displeasing to God. What pity is it to see that old complaint verified—*Surgunt indocti et rapiunt calum, dum nos cum doctrinâ detrudimur in Gehennam* : the unlearned may arise and take heaven by violence, when you with all your learning are thrust down to hell. So for moral honesty ; it is but sin dressed up more handsomely, and set off with a fairer varnish. Whatever doth not come from a pure fountain of faith and obedience, and is not done to God’s glory, it is but like a spiced carcase—it is but sin and nature perfumed. To instance in things that are more commendable—liberality to learning, giving of alms, building of churches, civility of life ; these are good in themselves, and glorious in men’s eyes, but they are abomination before God. Mark the emphasis of our Saviour’s words : Luke xvi. 15, ‘ That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God ;’ not only that which ‘ pleaseth’ men, but is ‘ highly esteemed ;’ and he saith it is not only ‘ not accepted,’ but it is *βδέλυγμα*—an ‘ abomination to God ;’ that which is a rose to us, is a nettle to him. Carnal ends are as odious to God as gross sins are to men. Nay, go to religious duties ; a wicked carnal man may pray, but his prayer is turned into sin, as a jewel in a dead man’s mouth. Your prayers, because they come from dead men, ‘ men dead in trespasses and sins,’ lose all their worth and efficacy, how good soever the action be in itself ; so that when a man comes to please God, he grieveth him more. A carnal man may be employed in the offices of the church : Mat. vii. 22, ‘ We have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many

wonderful works;' and yet Christ saith, 'I know you not; depart from me, ye that work iniquity,' ver. 23. A man may spend his strength and his spirits in the ministry; yet after all this may be a castaway. Christ will not take acquaintance with them that are in such a nearness of office and ministration—'I know you not.' It is strange that Christ should not know them, when they can challenge acquaintance with him by such a good token; We had such gifts and such offices. Some men have only gifts for others; and after they have wasted themselves and swaled away like a candle in the work of the ministry, they may go out in a snuff. Gifts and employments are for the body. No doubt, in Noah's time, some that built an ark for others perished in the waters, so after we have built an ark for others, and represented Christ to them, if we do not get an interest in him ourselves, we are cast away; or like the clouds that moisten the earth, but are themselves scattered by the winds, we may moisten and convey the influences of heaven to others, but are scattered, as those that Christ refuseth, by the breath and fury of the Lord; or like the water of purification, under the law, that cleansed the leper, but was itself unclean, so men that are employed as instruments in the cleansing of others, may themselves be unclean and disallowed by God. They may deserve well of the church, and yet be unthankful to God and unfaithful to their own souls; nay, you may be orthodox, and side with the better part, and yet all this will not render you acceptable to God: Gal. v. 6, 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith that works by love.' That was the controversy among the believers of that time, whether circumcision were to be kept up. Christ doth not love men for their opinion, but for their obedience. Some that are orthodox may go down to hell. The devils themselves have great skill in many points of faith; nay, which is more, men may suffer for religion for that which they call their conscience, yet all this in vain: 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 'If I give my body to be burnt, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing;' without faith all this is nothing. The suffering of a wicked man, it is but like the cutting off a swine's head, or offering of a dog in sacrifice: as, under the law, the priest was to make inquiry if the sacrifice were sound, if it were not scabby or lame. God doth not love a scabby sacrifice; and when men are tainted with enormous lives and conversations, their sufferings will not endear them to God; nay, whatever you do in your lawful employment, in your calling, it is all sin. The whole trade and course of a wicked man's life is nothing but sin, because all those actions are not elevated by grace to a supernatural intention: Prov. xxi. 4, 'The ploughing of the wicked is sin;' whatever they do—their speaking, eating, drinking, trading—all is sin, because there is no grace. How should this take us off from our vain confidences! I have nothing but sin, I can do nothing but sin; and how should this bring the soul to lie at God's foot for mercy!

2. Consider the opposite happiness of the children of God, this will aggravate your misery. The smallest works of a man that is reconciled to God in Christ are rewarded. A cup of cold water shall not want its reward, Mat. x. 42. If a carnal man offers rivers of oil, ten thousands of sacrifices, yet they are nothing; whereas the weakest and poorest services on the other side are accepted. They that are in a state of grace have liberty of constant access to God, and God hath

promised to take notice of their persons and prayers : Ps. xxxiv. 15, 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry ;' God is ready to receive and entertain them whenever they come to the throne of grace, but, as it follows in the next verse, 'The face of the Lord is against them that do evil ;' as by a frown we discourage a supplicant. Certainly, it is a great mercy that we have an access to God, and the liberty to stand before him daily ; nay, the weakness of their duties shall be dispensed withal. A child of God is guilty of many failings, *Partus sequitur ventrem*, the birth hath more of the mother in it than of the father ; so, though the Spirit of God help them in their services, yet there is much of their own weaknesses mixed with it ; yet God will accept it : Cant. v. 1, 'I have eaten my honey-comb with my honey ;' the honeycomb is bitter, but Christ will eat it for the honey's sake. We serve Christ in our duties as he was served on the cross, we offer him wine mingled with myrrh, but he will dispense with imperfections : then their sins of life shall be pardoned. It is true, the children of God have not a dispensation to sin : yet God will handle them with much indulgence when they are through the prevalency of corruption and infirmity drawn to sin. A hireling is soon dismissed when he doth not give content : but a child is not cast out of doors for every offence : saith God, 'I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him,' Mal. iii. 17.

Use 2. To represent to us the necessity of being in a state of faith, or else neither person nor work can please God ; there must be a change of our state, as well as doing our duties. It is in vain to persuade people to change their actions, while their state is unchanged. If the person be not in favour, the works are hated ; duties may further our delusion, but cannot further our happiness. Many heap up duty upon duty, as if they thought to please God that way. I do not blame men for using means, but for neglecting an interest in Christ. Who will look for grapes upon thorns ? No man can offer a sacrifice to God till he be first made a priest ; first, there must be a consecration of their persons : Mal. iii. 3, 'He shall purify the sons of Levi, then they shall offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness ;' Heb. ix. 14, 'How much more shall the blood of Christ purge your consciences from dead works, to serve the living God.' First, the christian must be consecrated before he can minister before the Lord in holy things : 1 Peter i. 2-5, 'Ye are a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.' Men must be kings and priests to God before they offer sacrifice to God. A natural man is a bad priest, and his own evil heart is an ill altar. Our persons must be reconciled to God, and under grace by Christ, and received into the number of those God approves, and whom he delights to be worshipped by. Under the law, the priests, when they went to sacrifice, were washed in the great laver of water, Exod. xxix. 4 ; so must a christian in the laver of regeneration, Tit. iii. 5, and then come and worship ; they must change their state, then the Lord will accept of their offering in Christ.

Use 3. We learn hence, that the opinion which makes God to bestow grace upon the preceding works and merit of man is false. We have not only to do with the Papists here, but Arminians, who establish an

infallible attendance of grace on natural endeavours. They say, if a man do use well his natural strength and abilities; if he do as much as he can, God will certainly help him to supernatural grace. If they stir themselves in good earnest to seek the grace of conversion, they shall infallibly and without miscarrying find it made good to them; so Arminius, *Faciunt quod in se est, dantur a deo infallibiliter, et ex certâ lege auxilia prævenientis gratiæ*. It is true, we hold that it is the ordinary practice of free grace. God is seldom wanting to them that are not wanting to themselves; but to hold such an infallibility, and to lay an obligation upon God, this is a falsehood, contrary to the canon of the apostle—‘Without faith it is impossible to please God;’ without faith all our actions are sins, therefore they cannot oblige God to give more grace. But say they, Without faith it is impossible to please him, so as their persons should be accepted to life and salvation; but it is not impossible to please him, and so to be accepted as to receive more grace. But I answer, that the text excludes both; it is impossible to please God in any sense. Besides, pleasing God is all one with walking with God; for what is in the original?—‘Enoch walked with God’—is in the Septuagint, ‘Enoch pleased God;’ and it signifies an established communion of comfort and grace between God and the creature; it is meant of acceptation to grace as well as glory. But to handle the argument more fully, I shall show—

1. The inconveniency and falsehood of this doctrine.

2. Handle some objections.

First, The inconvenience of this doctrine, that if men would do their utmost, God will necessarily come in with grace.

1. That never a natural man did his utmost.

2. If they did so, God is not obliged to come in infallibly with supplies of grace.

[1.] Never a natural man did his utmost. See the character of such kind of men, that they do not act their abilities—‘But what they know naturally, in those things they corrupt themselves,’ Jude ver. 10. It is but a fancy to suppose that any do improve nature to the uttermost. The scripture generally sets out natural men as unfaithful. He that had but one talent hid it in the earth, Mat. xxv. 18; and God seems to plead against them upon this issue, that they are unfaithful in common gifts: Luke xvi. 11, ‘If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?’ Earnestness in the use of means is the first impression of the efficacy of the Holy Ghost, and proceeds from the seed of grace, which God hath cast into the heart.

[2.] If he did do his utmost, yet God is not bound; for if God be obliged and bound, it must either be by the merit of the creature, or by some promise he hath made: there is no other obligation upon God. Now, no man can engage the grace of Christ, and there is no promise on God’s part.

(1.) No man can engage God to give him converting grace; this would tie grace to works, and then man would make himself to differ; and our debt to grace would be taken off, and the difference that is between us and others did arise from ourselves: this would make men sacrifice to their own net. Now this is contrary to scripture. No man

can earn anything of God: Rom. ix. 16, 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy;' not upon the motion of our will, nor by virtue of our endeavours, but God merely acts out of the freedom of his own grace; not by our desires, which is implied in 'willing;' nor by virtue of our endeavours, which is implied in 'running;' so 2 Tim. i. 9, 'Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.' God's liberty is not abridged by any act of the creature, neither is he necessitated to have mercy upon us rather than upon others. Many inconveniences would follow according to this doctrine; as that the creature must bid and buy and engage Christ before they have an interest in Christ. It is against reason: all those foregoing endeavours cannot please God, being void of faith and mixed with sins; and that which deserves wrath cannot prepare for grace. It is against experience: many shall endeavour, but not obtain, because all works that are done in the state of nature cannot make us a whit more accepted with God. Therefore God, to show that his grace runs freely, and is not drawn out by our endeavours, saith—'Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able,' Luke xiii. 24. Then again, this would make the creature to come and to plead with God; whereas the Lord will have us to lie at the foot of his sovereignty; the Lord will be the disposer of his own mercy. It crosseth the order of God in the dispensation of his grace, which is to bring the creature upon his knees, to be willing to refer all to his sovereignty—'Lord, thou hast mercy on whom thou wilt have mercy, and whom thou wilt thou hardenest.' This would cross the work of humiliation, by which the Lord would bring the creature to absolute submission to his own sovereignty. When we have done all, God is not our debtor; he oweth us nothing but vengeance.

(2.) There is no shadow of any engagement, by promise on God's part, whereby he should undertake to any of us; there is no such promise as this—Do this by the strength of nature, and thou shalt have supernatural grace, but because they urge many things.

Secondly, I shall come to some objections.

SERMON XXVII.

But without faith, it is impossible to please him.—HEB. xi. 6.

Obj. 1. 'For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath,' Mat. xiii. 13, and Mat. xxv. 29. They say, God is obliged by promise to him that hath many acts of nature, to give acts of grace; but I answer, that place speaks of those that have grace already. It is the reason Christ assigns, why it was given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and the reason is taken from the course God keeps in dispensation of his grace; such as have found grace in God's eyes, they have the fountain gift,

and they shall have others to perfect their salvation. *Deus donando se facit debitorem*—God, by giving them grace already, hath made himself a debtor to them for new influences and all outward means, whereby they shall increase in grace and strength. In Mark iv. 24, it is said, ‘Take heed what you hear, for with what measure you mete it shall be measured to you again, and unto you that hear shall more be given.’ I answer, this still implies not a bare use of means while we are in a state of nature, but faith in hearing, without which the word never profiteth: so Prov. viii. 34, ‘Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the post of my doors;’ that is, that waits in faith; those that have grace by waiting upon the means, grace in the same kind shall be increased in them. We must not invert the method of the covenant. Another place is, Acts x. 34, 35, ‘Of a truth I perceive (saith Peter) that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him:’ from whence they argue, that if a man have a natural reverence of God, and do the works of righteousness, he shall be accepted of God to further grace.

But I answer, it is clear that the place speaks of God’s consequent love to the work of his own grace; for it is impossible that ever a man can fear God and work righteousness until he hath some grace wrought in him; those things are not the effect of nature, but of grace. That place only shows that Peter was convinced of his error; he thought none could be saved, but either a Jew, or a proselyte—one converted to the Jewish religion. Now I see my mistake, that of a truth, wherever there is real grace in any, God will accept of him. Take the sentence either in a legal or evangelical sense. If you take it evangelically, the sense is—whoever worketh righteousness, that obeyeth the gospel, and renounceth his own righteousness, and seeks the favour of God in Christ, he shall be accepted with God; or if you take it in a legal sense, those things are not the fruits of mere nature, it is to be expounded by way of evidence—whoever thus worketh righteousness it is a sign he is accepted with God; and he that fears God, it is a visible sign and testimony by which the favour of God towards him may be cleared up.

Obj. 2. Again, Christ is said to love the young man that was of a civil life: Mark x. 21, ‘Jesus, beholding him, loved him.’ I answer, this was but a human affection, which our Lord manifested in all cases out of respect to human society; ‘Christ loved him,’ that is, showed some outward signs of favour and respect to him; as we pity a man that is in a dangerous course: it is pity such courteous persons should go to hell. Our Saviour ‘loved him,’ certainly he could not approve of his hypocrisy, vanity, and self-confidence; but pitied him as one that with so much care kept the law, which others did not, and yet deceived himself with a vain opinion of righteousness. Christ, as man, was to have all human affections; but as lord and judge of the creature, so he hated him, as will be manifested at the last day.

Again, they say, God rewards wicked men for their natural actions; as Ahab’s humiliation was rewarded with a suspension from wrath, 1 Kings xxi. 29, and Jehu’s obedience was rewarded with the reign of his posterity to the fourth generation, 2 Kings x. 30.

I answer, This God may do out of his own bounty. Wicked men can look for nothing; it is his grace to reward wicked men's actions; and he may do it to make them more culpable, and to encourage the godly, as many times a general will reward the valour of an enemy to encourage his own soldiers. It is a document of God's bounty to the world, to prize true grace the better; and it is notable, all those blessings were but temporal, and salted with a curse: dogs may have temporals, the offals of providence.

Obj. 3. Again, what ground have we to persuade men to the use of means, if all their endeavours be in vain, and if God will not accept them? I answer—

[1.] We have ground to press them to duty, that wicked men may be more sensible of their own weakness. Men think it is easy to believe till they put themselves upon the trial, action, and endeavour; as the lameness of the arm is found by exercise. Solomon saith, Prov. ii. 2, 3, 'Apply thine heart to understanding;' then saith he, 'If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;' &c., 'then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.' Certainly, he that seeks knowledge will be driven to cry for it to free grace; and they that attempt the duties and exercises of religion, will see the necessity of divine help, and will be forced to lie at God's feet. Were there no other end but this, that wicked men may be certainly convinced that all their sufficiency is in God, to bring them to cry to God, Lord, help me against my unbelief, this were enough. When we look to towns in a map, we think the way to them easy, as if our foot were as nimble as our thoughts, but we are soon discouraged and tired, when we meet with dangerous and craggy passages, and come to learn the difference between glancing and serious endeavours. So in matters of religion, he that endeavours to bring Christ and his soul together, before he hath done, will be forced to sit down and cry, Lord, help me! As in the matters of the world, young men have strong hopes, therefore think it is nothing to live in the world; but when they are engaged in the cares of a family, they are soon crushed. So in the spiritual life; nothing doth rebuke sudden and easy hopes so much as trial and experience; then men find their hearts are hardly brought to apply themselves to the means whereby they may draw nigh to God, and see that no man can come to God without an attractive force, and unless the Father draw him.

[2.] Another reason why we press wicked men to do duty, is that they may manifest their obedience to God by meeting him in his own way. This is the way of God's working, by antecedaneous acts to fit us for grace, therefore the act must be done; for though we have lost our power, God hath not lost his right. It is true, we can never do anything with acceptance, yet still we are bound to be doing; as a drunken servant is obliged to do his master's work, though he hath disabled himself for it. So our nature had a power, though our persons were never invested with it; our disability will not disoblige us; so, though there be no hope of succeeding, yet we are bound to do. So Peter, though there were no fish come to hand, yet howbeit at thy command we will cast out the net. Wait at the pool; impotency can be no excuse for neglect.

[3.] That they may manifest their desires, men say usually they

have no power when they have no heart. He that hath a mind to the pearl of price, he will be doing, though he can do nothing acceptable; his desires being the vigorous bent of the soul will put him upon endeavours. It is a usual way to pretend impotency, as a cover of laziness; but now neglect of means shows that the impossibility is voluntary; when we do not what we are able, it is a sign that we love our bondage. A carnal man cannot please God; why? because he minds earthly things; the heart is carried out that way, and will not be subject to God, Rom. viii. 7, 8. Men prefer the world before God, and content themselves with some lazy wishes, and then think to cast the blame upon God. A wicked man is to be doing to show his desires are real: Prov. xxi. 25, 'The desire of the slothful killeth him: for his hands refuse to labour;' he hath but some sluggish wishes, that serve only unprofitably to vex the soul.

[4.] We put wicked men upon doing, because our endeavours are the condition *sine qua non*; without this the Lord seldom meets with the creature: Rom. x. 14, 'How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?' If ever I find Christ, I must find him in this way of hearing and praying. Though the means have no effective influence, yet without these I cannot come to Christ: Acts xiii. 46, 'Since ye put away the word from you, and judge ourselves unworthy of eternal life;' it is meant there of a refusal and neglect of the means; they save God the labour, and pass sentence upon themselves. There is no having of children but in a state of marriage. Now men marry, though the rational soul be infused by God; and so there is no having of grace but in the use of means, therefore we should use them, though still grace be the gift of God. We do not say it is in vain to marry, because man cannot beget the soul; so it is not in vain to hear and pray, though these things have no effectual influence: these are the means, without which God will not give it.

[5.] If men do not do something, they will grow worse and worse; standing pools are apt to putrify. Man is of an active nature, never at a stay, but either growing better or worse; and when we do not improve nature, we deprave it—'They corrupt themselves in what they know,' Jude 10. Voluntary neglects draw on penal hardness; and so our natural disability is increased. Much sin and hardness would be prevented by the use of means—'Thou wicked and slothful servant,' Mat. xxv. 26. A slothful servant soon becomes an evil servant, and barren trees will soon become rotten trees, Jude 12; where ordinances are neglected, we draw penal hardness upon ourselves.

[6.] It is good to make trial upon a common hope; it may be, you may meet with God. The apostle puts Simon Magus upon prayer out of a bare probability: Acts viii. 22, 'Pray to God, if perhaps the thoughts of thy heart may be forgiven thee;' though it be great uncertainty, a peradventure, and a thousand to one; yet pray, it is the safest course. As the lepers, 2 Kings vii. 3, 4, 'They said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we sit, still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall to the host of the Syrians; if they save us alive we shall live, and if they kill us we shall but die.' Such reasoning there usually is when God brings sinners home; if we do nothing, we are sure to die; if we pray

and read and meditate, we can but die; but there is some common hope; it may be we may live. All God's children are thus brought in; the soul is willing to acts of obedience, though it knows not what will come of it; as Abraham obeyed God, not knowing whither he went. I am to do what God commands, let God do what he will; it may be there may be life; I cannot do worse, I may do better. All saints are at first carried on by such a common hope; the first essay of their faith is but dark resolution; but blind peradventure, Who knows what God may do?

[7.] It is God's usual way to meet those that seek him, and to give the Spirit to them that ask him: we do not know what importunity will do. This is the usual practice of God's free grace; sometimes he doth, sometimes he doth not; but it is good to wait at wisdom's gate. God is not bound, but it is his ordinary practice. Obey the Lord, and sue out the blessings upon common hope; when there is no absolute assurance, those things will prosper. Why should we fall a disputing? we are in great danger, and this is God's usual way. We are to do what we can; God is wont to meet his people in this way. Though he hath nowhere said, Do this by the power of nature, and thou shalt have grace; yet it is good to wait upon God, for he usually meets with them that seek him in his way, and blesseth them that are followers in all christian endeavours.

[8.] The neglect of means out of a carnal principle, either out of an averseness to grace, or an ill-conceit of God, proves very pernicious. Nature is backward and shy, and then we would justify it by wrong thoughts and groundless jealousies of God: Mat. xxv. 24, 'I knew that thou wert a hard master, and therefore I hid my talent.' We think that God hath shut us up under a fatal impossibility, so we pretend we can do nothing; as they that heard Christ say—'No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him,' John vi. 44—murmured and drew back at that saying; so we have wrong thoughts of God, and are jealous without cause. We are loath to use the means, and then blame God for not giving the power. It is a jealous fancy of God without warrant; you are under an obligation, and that must be regarded.

[9.] This is no small encouragement, that Jesus Christ, that hath the grant of the elect, is to see the promises to be made good to them. The new heart, and the infusion of converting grace is a thing promised to natural men that are elect before they are in Christ, and Christ will see to the accomplishment. Whatever Christ's intent is towards you, certainly his will will be no hindrance to our duty; therefore upon all these grounds we might press men to wait upon God in the use of means, that so, if it be his gracious will, they might receive mercy for their souls.

Fourthly, We may infer hence the necessity and excellency of faith.

1. We may gather from hence the excellency of faith; he nameth no other graces. Whatever glorious virtues are found in God's children, none of them can make them acceptable with God but faith; how? not for any excellency that is in faith itself, because of all graces it hath least of worth, but in regard of its object. Though faith in itself be a needy grace, yet it hath a worthy object; it receiveth Christ and all the blessings of the covenant. Therefore the apostle calls it 'precious'

faith, 2 Peter i. 4, because it is conversant about a precious Christ, and precious promises, and precious righteousness.

Obj. But you will say, Charity or love is elsewhere preferred before faith, therefore how can faith be accounted the most excellent grace? 1 Cor. xiii. 13, 'Now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.' It is true, before he compares gifts and graces, but here he compares grace and grace, and he judgeth the crown and pre-eminence to charity. When extraordinary gifts cease in the church, these shall be perpetually had in esteem; these three abide, and that which is greatest is charity.

Ans. It is true, in some kind of operations other graces may have the pre-eminence, but in the matter of pleasing of God the pre-eminence is put upon faith. Love seems to have an advantage of faith in this, that we give by love, and we receive by faith; now, it is more blessed to give than to receive. The chiefest answer is, when extraordinary gifts cease, these three abide, and the chiefest of these three is charity, which is most abiding; for when faith and hope are turned into fruition, love then abideth, it is the grace of heaven; but for matter of acceptance, it is faith that is the chief grace.

2. The necessity of faith. There is as much necessity of faith as of Christ. What good will a deep well do us without a bucket? and an able saviour, if we have not faith to take hold of him? Look, as on God's part, there is need of the intervention of Christ's merit to satisfy justice; so on man's part, that the sinner may have an actual interest herein, there is need of faith: you can neither work without it, nor please God without it.

Not work without it. There is as great a necessity of faith as of life—'I live by the faith of the Son of God,' Gal. ii. 20. And you cannot 'please God' without it; for always you shall see all the blessings of the covenant are granted us upon this condition, Rom. x. 9, 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved;' he puts it upon that issue. The gospel is not only a charter of grace and precious promises, but it is a law of faith; that is the condition upon which they are dispensed; so Acts xvi. 31, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved:' it is the condition of the covenant. The Lord neither will nor can save you without faith; he cannot, because he will not, as his pleasure is now stated. God cannot lie, he hath stated the course and order of our salvation. Now, unless the Lord should reverse the great law and institution of heaven, by which he will govern the world, we may say he cannot save without faith. So the scripture speaks: Mark vi. 5, 'He could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief;' he could not, because of God's settled course, that he will not dispense blessings without faith. Therefore it is notable, that it is the great thing we must preach, and the great duty you must practise: 1 John iii. 23, 'This is his commandment that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.' And when we receive our commission as ministers of the gospel, this is the sum of all: Mark xvi. 16, 'He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.' And this is the great work which you must practise: John vi. 28, 29, 'What shall we do that we might work the works of God?' What work shall

we do? say they, speaking according to the tenor of the covenant of works: saith Christ, 'This is the work of God that you should believe on him whom he hath sent:' all other things are but your by-works, but this is your main work, that you bring your hearts to close with me.

Now if you ask me the reasons why God hath put so much honour upon this grace, why it is impossible without faith to please him? you may as well ask me, Why God will give light to the world by the sun or water by the fountain? The Lord's own will and designation is the supreme reason, both in nature and grace; but because God is a God of judgment, and doth all things with advice and wisdom, because there is a sweet conveniency and congruity in all divine appointments, therefore I shall give you some reasons why the Lord hath put so much honour upon the grace of faith. The great design of God is to humble the creature, but exalt Jesus Christ and promote holiness. Now there is nothing so serviceable for such uses and purposes as the grace of faith.

[1.] It is faith that humbles the creature, and sends us out of ourselves to look for all in Christ; one of God's designs in the way of salvation is to humble the creature. Now of all graces, faith strips a man naked of his own worth, and sends him to God's mercy in a mediator, so the apostle argueth: Rom. iv. 16, 'It is of faith, that it might be of grace, that the promise might be sure to all the seed;' therefore God hath stated the way of salvation in the way of faith, that it might be of grace. Faith is the only virtue that can stand with the free grace of God; for it doth not work by procuring and meriting, but by expecting and receiving what God will bestow upon us; it brings nothing to God of our own, and can offer nothing by way of exchange for the mercy we expect. It receiveth a gift, but it bringeth no price; it deals not by way of exchange as with justice, but by way of supplication and reception as with grace. If we were to deal with justice, then certainly the honour of it would be put upon other graces; as love that might give somewhat by way of exchange. All that faith doth is to send the creature as needy and destitute to the throne of grace: Eph. ii. 8, 'By grace ye are saved through faith;' justice gives what is due, but mercy gives what is promised; the original cause is grace, the means is faith, and the end is salvation. Faith doth not come to God, as claiming acceptance for what we have done, but comes with an empty hand to receive what grace and mercy is willing to bestow upon us in Christ.

[2.] God puts this crown of honour upon the head of faith, because it unites us to Christ, out of whom there is no pleasing of God. This reason stands upon two propositions—there is no pleasing God out of Christ and no interest in Christ, but by faith.

(1.) There is no pleasing of God out of Christ. We are all by nature children of wrath until we are reconciled to God by his Son. God is a holy and a just God, and so he cannot be at peace with sinners; as God is a holy God, so he hates us, because of the contrariety that is between his nature and ours: as he is a just God, so he is obliged to punish us. God in himself is a consuming fire; he cannot endure us, nor we him. God will never gratify the creature, so as to violate the notions by which his own essence is represented; therefore

naked mercy can do nothing for us till there be satisfaction to justice. Holiness awakens justice, and justice awakens wrath, and wrath consumes the creature; and therefore unless there be a screen drawn betwixt us and wrath, what shall we do? Saith the apostle, Eph. i. 6, 'He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.' In the original it is *ἐχαρίστωσεν*—he hath ingratiated us in Christ. As a favourite in court makes terms for the rebel, and endears him to the king, so we are returned by grace to Christ. This is that which the Lord hath proclaimed from heaven, that all creatures should take notice of it: Mat. iii. 17, 'This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased,' in him, and in no other. This voice came from God not only to show his love to Christ but to give satisfaction to the world—to reveal the pleasure of the Lord to the world, how he will be appeased and satisfied towards us. It is notable, in the Gospel of Luke, these words are spoken to Christ himself: Luke iii. 22, 'Thou art my beloved son, in thee I am well pleased.' But in Matthew they are directed to the world—In him you shall be accepted. God did as it were proclaim to the whole world, if ever you will return to grace and favour to me it must be by my Son. When God looks upon men as they are in themselves, he seeth nothing but a mere abomination: Ps. xiv. 2, 3, 'The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy, there is none that doeth good, no, not one.' In the original it is, they are altogether become stinking: God can see nothing but objects that provoke his hatred and aversation. This is the condition of every natural man. So the Lord utters that sorrowful speech concerning man, Gen. vi. 6, 'It repented the Lord that he had made man, and it grieved him at his heart;' he cannot look upon man with any pleasure. But when he looks upon man in Christ, then he is well pleased; he doth as it were say, World, take notice, in him I will be appeased toward you. I have read of an emperor that had a great emerald, in which he would view the bloody fights of the gladiators with pleasure, though they were cruel and detestable in themselves; yet, as they were represented and reflected upon the emerald, so they yielded pleasure and delight. So it is here, God looks upon men in Christ; though we are detestable and abominable objects of his loathing and aversation in ourselves, yet in him he will accept us and do us good. It is notable, what is spoken of Christ, Isa. xlii. 1, 'Behold my servant whom I uphold, my elect in whom my soul delighteth,' is spoken of the church; Isa. lxii. 4, 'Thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah, for the Lord delighteth in thee.' God delights in them, because he delights in Christ: in and through him he is well pleased with our persons, which otherwise are stinking and abominable.

(2.) There is no receiving of Christ but by faith, and therefore it is said, John i. 12, 'To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.' Faith is expressed by receiving; it is the hand of the soul by which we receive and take home Christ to our own souls: 2 Cor. xiii. 5, 'Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves, know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' Mark there, 'in the faith, and Christ in us,' are made parallel expressions. Our being in the faith is the only means of our union

with Christ, that makes Christ to be in us ; it is the bond that fastens the soul and Christ together : Eph. iii. 17, ' That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; ' as a workman makes his house, and then dwells in it, so by faith the soul is fitted for the reception of Christ. Unbelief rejects Christ, and puts him away ; Christ stands at the door and knocks, and men will not open to him ; but faith is an opening to Christ, a consent of will to take him for ours.

[3.] Faith, it is the mother of obedience, therefore there is good reason to exalt it. Now holiness is effectually promoted by no grace so much as by faith ; partly, because faith receives all supplies from heaven. Faith that receiveth Christ, receiveth all his benefits and graces : Gal. iii. 14, ' That the blessing of Abraham might come on the gentiles through Jesus Christ : that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith ; ' that is, the Spirit of God, by whose assistance the holy life is managed and carried on : Gal. ii. 20, ' I live by the faith of the Son of God. ' Faith looks up to Christ as distributing grace ; and so the strength and power of the inward man is much increased, and a man is enabled for all the offices of holiness. Partly by its own effective influence. There are two powerful affections by which the spiritual life is acted and improved : they are fear and love. Now faith is the mother of both : no faith, no love nor fear. Fear, by which we are fenced against the delights of the world ; and love, by which we are steeled against the difficulties of the world ; for fear puts on the spectacles of faith, and so seeth him that is invisible. We fear God because we believe that he is. A carnal man looks upon God as an idol and fancy, therefore doth not stand in any awe. So love is strengthened by faith. The apostle saith, ' We love him because he loved us first, ' 1 John iv. 19. Our love to God riseth according to the proportion of the assurance we have of God's love to us ; then our love is carried out with a greater height and fervour after him. Now there is nothing adds such constraint and force to love as faith : 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, ' The love of Christ constrains us ; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead : and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again. ' When we have apprehended the love of God in Christ, and what great things God hath done for us, then it puts the soul upon answerable returns. The more certainty we have of the love of God, the stronger impulses of love shall we feel in our souls to God again. Shall not I love him much that hath done so much for me ? that hath forgiven me much ? that hath been so gracious to me in Christ, and provided such ample recompenses in heaven ? We find it in outward matters : jealousy and suspicion is the bane of love. So in divine matters it is true, the more we doubt of God's love, the more faint, and cold, and weak will our love be to God. There are no such motives and incentives to duty as the apprehension of God's love to us in Christ.

SERMON XXVIII.

But without faith it is impossible to please him.—HEB. xi. 6.

LET us now inquire what this faith is. There are three acts of it : knowledge, assent, and affiance. The two former do respect the word, and the last respects Christ offered in the word. The former acts respect *id quod verum est*, that which is true ; the last, *id quod bonum est*, that which is good. All are necessary ; there is a receiving of the word, and a receiving of Christ in the word. Sometimes we read of receiving of the word : Acts ii. 41, ‘ They received the word gladly ; ’ that notes only knowledge and assent. But at other times we read of receiving of Christ : John i. 12, ‘ To as many as received him,’ the act of faith is directed to Christ’s person.

1. There must be knowledge, for this is a necessary part of faith : we must see the stay and prop before we rest on it ; there is an impression of truth upon the understanding. See the expression of the prophet, Isa. liii. 11, ‘ By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.’ The first and radical act of faith is there put for the essence of it ; now without this we can neither please God nor be satisfied in ourselves. We cannot please God : Prov. xix. 2, ‘ Also that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good : ’ or, as in the original—‘ The heart without knowledge can never be good.’ All that we do in an ignorant state is but superstitious formality, not an act of religion. Look, as the fruit that hath but little of the sun is never concocted, and comes not to full maturity and ripeness ; so those acts that are done in a state of ignorance are outward formalities that God will not accept. Nor can we be satisfied in ourselves. How shall we be able to plead with Satan, and answer the doubts of our own consciences, unless we have a distinct knowledge of the mysteries of salvation, and of the contrivance of the gospel ? He that is impleaded in a court, and doth not know the law, how shall he be able to stand in his own defence ? So how shall we be able to answer Satan and our own fears without knowledge ? Look, as we fear usually in the dark, so ignorant souls are always full of doubts and surmises ; and it is a long time ere the Lord comes and settles the conscience.

Now every kind of knowledge will not serve the turn. There is a form of knowledge as well as a form of godliness : Rom. ii. 20, ‘ Which hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law.’ The apostle means a naked model of truth, to be able to teach others : but they want a new light put into their hearts by the Spirit of God. It must not only be a formal apprehension, but a serious and considerate knowledge. For faith is a spiritual prudence ; it is opposed to folly as well as to ignorance : Luke xxiv. 25, ‘ O ye fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken ! ’—*ἀνόητοι*, ye mindless men. When men never mind, they do not consider the use and fruit of knowledge ; when they do not draw out the principle of knowledge for their private advantage, they are fools. Everything in faith draws to practice ; it is not a speculative knowledge, but a knowledge with consideration, a wise light : Eph. i. 17, he calls it ‘ A spirit of wisdom and

revelation in the knowledge of him.' It differs from a traditional and disciplinary knowledge, a literal instruction which we convey from one to another. By this men may be made knowing, but they are not prudent for the advantage of the spiritual life.

2. Next to knowledge there must be assent. Believing is somewhat more than knowledge; we may know more than we do believe, and therefore there must be an assent to the truth of the word: 1 Thes. i. 5, 'For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.' There is some assurance that doth not concern the state of a believer but the word of God, receiving it above the cavils and contradiction of the privy atheism that is in our own mind. Now, concerning this assent, I shall speak to two things: it must be to the whole word of God and with the whole heart.

[1.] It must be to the whole word; it must be a receiving of the word indefinitely, all that God hath revealed. God prescribeth the conditions which he requireth, and offereth promises; we must consent to the whole. In the word of God there are doctrines, promises, threatenings, precepts—all these must be entertained by faith before we come to the act of affiance. The doctrines of faith concerning God and Christ, the union of the two natures, the mystery of redemption, we must receive them as 'faithful sayings,' 1 Tim. i. 15. Usually there is some privy atheism: we look upon the gospel as a golden dream, and a well-devised fable. Saith Luther, 'Carnal men hear these things as if the mystery of the gospel were but like a dream or shower of rubies fallen out of the clouds;' therefore there must be a chief care to settle the heart in the belief of these things as faithful and true sayings. Christians would not find the work of their particular faith so irksome if they had but 'the assurance of understanding,' Col. ii. 2; if their hearts were rooted in the truths of the gospel. Then there are threatenings of the word, to show how abominable the creature is to God in a natural condition, and to what punishments we are subject and liable. Now these must be applied with reverence and fear, that we may be roused out of our carnal estate, and chased like the hart to the refreshing streams of grace. There must be a firm belief of all the threatenings and curses of God. Then the promises of the word, these are principally calculated for faith, and these must be applied to the soul: John iii. 33, 'He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.' We must come and set to our seal, and say, Lord, thou wilt never fail thy creatures, if they should venture their souls upon the warrant of such as these are. Then there is believing of the commands, not only that they come from the Lord, that they are laws established and enacted by the supreme ruler of heaven and earth; but we must believe they are just, good, holy and true. So David, Ps. cxix. 66, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I have believed thy commandments.' When we believe the commandments are of divine original, and that they are holy, and good, and fit to be obeyed, this is that which the apostle calls a 'consenting to the law, that it is good,' Rom. vii. 16. Such an assent must there be to the whole word.

[2.] It must be with the whole heart. For this the intellectual assent is not enough, unless it be accompanied with some motion of the heart; there is somewhat besides understanding, not only knowledge and

acknowledgment, but there must be consent of the will. We must not only reflect upon the things that are propounded as true, but as good and worthy of all acceptation : Acts viii. 37, 'If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest be baptized.' We must assent to the threatenings of the word with trembling and reverence, to the promises of the word with delight and esteem : Acts ii. 41, 'They received the word gladly,' to the commandments of the word with some anxious care of strictness and obedience, to the doctrines of the word with consideration.

3. There is affiance, which is an act which doth immediately respect the person of Jesus Christ. For we are not saved by giving credence to any axiom or maxim of religion, but by casting the soul upon Christ. Faith is thus described by resting upon God, 2 Chron. xiv. 11 ; by staying upon God, Isa. xxvi. 3 ; by trusting in Christ, Mat. xii. 21, Ps. ii. 12. There must be some carrying out of the soul to the person of Christ himself. The devils may have knowledge—'I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God,' Luke iv. 34. And the devil may have some assent too ; there are no atheists in hell. Nay, they assent with some kind of affection—'They believe and tremble,' James. ii. 19. Therefore there must be an act of faith that carrieth out the soul to Christ himself. Believing in Christ noteth a recumbency—'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' Acts xvi. 31 ; it is Paul's counsel to the gaoler. It is an allusion to a man that is ready to fall, that stays himself by some prop and support ; so it is staying our souls upon Christ when we are ready to sink under the burden of divine displeasure, or are overwhelmed with terrors of conscience. Now let us a little consider this act in its progress and growth.

[1.] This act of affiance must arise from a brokenness of spirit. The soul must be broken and dejected with a sense of God's wrath, or else it can never come and lean upon Christ. It is the work of God to comfort those that are cast down. There is no dependence upon God for comfort till we are cast down and dejected with the sense of his wrath. This casting our souls upon Christ doth suppose a being possessed with the fear of death ; then we take hold of the horns of the altar with Adonijah. Till there be a due sense and conviction of conscience, it is not faith, but carnal security. It is a great mistake to think God requires faith immediately of any. He requires faith of none immediately but those that are broken and contrite, that are dejected with a sense of their own wretched condition out of Christ. Therefore when Christ invites persons to grace, still he directs his speech to them that are thirsty, hungry, weary, because they are in the next capacity of believing : Mat. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' Those are invited to Christ that groan under the heavy load upon their consciences : Isa. lv. 1, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come to the waters,' &c. Christ speaks to those that are dejected with the sense of their natural condition. It is in vain to boast of peace of conscience when we were never troubled. Believing is a swimming to the rock. Now he that stands upon the firm land cannot swim ; that is not a work for him, but for those that are in the midst of the waves, ready to perish in the tempestuous waters. Men of an untroubled and unmoved conscience, their next duty is not to believe in Christ ; but those that are ready to despair, they are called to swim

to the rock, and run to Christ, the rock of ages, that they may not be swallowed up of divine displeasure.

[2.] This act is put forth with much difficulty and struggling. It is a hard matter to bring Christ and the soul together. There is a great deal of struggle ere we can cast our souls upon Christ. We must reason with our own fears, plead and dispute with ourselves and with God, and cry long and loud many times at the throne of grace. As when the prodigal began to be in want, then he deliberates with himself—In my father's house there is bread enough and to spare. The case of a soul in coming to Christ is much like the case of Peter in coming to Christ upon the waves: Mat. xiv. 28–30, Peter, when he saw Christ, he acknowledged him for his lord and saviour 'Peter said unto him, Lord, if it be thou, bid me to come on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked upon the water to go to Jesus; but when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.' Peter left his ship, and resolved to venture on Christ's call; but he found difficulty. So it is in our coming to Christ, when by an undoubted assent to the truth of the word we are convinced in conscience that Christ is the alone saviour, that he is a rock for shelter in the midst of waves; by the impulses of grace the soul begins to make out to Christ. Christ saith, Come, come, and the soul is even overwhelmed with the tempests of wrath and waves of divine displeasure; therefore we had need encourage our hearts in God, and cry, Lord, arise and save us. After we have left the ship of our carnal confidence, after the soul is in its progress to Christ, there is a great deal of difficulty to bring God and the soul together. God doth not meet every soul as the father of the prodigal, half way; but there is a long suspension of comfort that may cast us upon difficulties, that we may struggle with our own unbelieving thoughts.

[3.] Though there be no certainty, yet there is an obstinate purpose to follow after Christ. It is true, the aim and end of all faith is to draw the soul to certainty and particular application, to assurance of pardon, that we may say, My God and My rock. But though the soul meets with many difficulties, yet there is an obstinate purpose; the soul will not let go his hold on Christ. When we can plead with our own objections and fears, and say, Lord I will not give over; and with Jacob, 'I will not let thee go till thou bless me,' Gen. xxxii. 26, and with Job, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' Job xiii. 15. Whatever displeasure the Lord seems to manifest against them, yet they will follow on in a way of trust: Phil. iii. 12, 'I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus,' &c. Christ hath touched my heart, and I cannot be quiet till I have got him. This is a right disposition of heart. When Christ hath apprehended us, the soul follows on with an obstinate resolution, until it can apprehend Christ and take hold of the skirt of his garment.

Use 1. To put us upon the trial, Have we true faith? there is no acceptance with God without it. The great object of trial and search is faith: 2 Cor. xiii. 5, 'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith,' or in a believing state. Conviction mainly respects faith: John xvi. 9, 'He shall convince the world of sin, because they believe not in me,'

without it, we are liable to the power and curse of the law against sinners. Faith makes the difference among men before God: Gal. v. 6, 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.' When God proceedeth to judgment against sinners, he doth not ask, Is he baptized? is he civil? but doth he believe? there is the most important question in christianity.

Now there are different degrees of faith: Mark xvii. 20, 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed;' Mark viii. 26, 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?' All the trees of God's garden are not of the same growth and stature, there are cedars and shrubs. The least degree of faith is faith, as a drop of dew is water as well as a flood; and the lowest measure and grain of saving faith is grace; the motion of a child newly formed in the belly is an act of life, as well as the walking of a man. Some, like John Baptist, can only 'spring in the womb;' they have a seed of grace, though they be not grown up into a tree. In Christ's family there are 'little children,' as well as 'fathers,' 1 John ii. 12-14. Christ himself was once a little stone, though he grew a great mountain, that filled the whole earth. All plants in Christ's garden are growing when they are young and weak. We must not despise the day of small things; we must look indeed chiefly after truth, not growth. It is well if we endure the touchstone, though not the balance: 2 Tim. i. 5, 'When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee;' the question will be resolved into that at last. There is a counterfeit faith that is not profitable. Simon Magus believed, Acts viii. 13; and many believed in Christ's name, to whom he would not commit himself, John ii. 23, 24. When the devil destroyeth men, he doth not forbid them to believe; he changeth himself into an angel of light. Presumption is rather of means than of end; most deceive themselves with a false faith. There is nothing but the devil can counterfeit it—Felix trembled, Esau wept, Ahab humbled himself, Simon Magus believed, Judas repented, Pharaoh prayed, Saul confessed, Balaam desired, the Pharisee reformed—we had need to look to ourselves. But how shall we state the marks by which men may come to the knowledge of their state? especially, how shall we discern what is true faith? In the first times of the gospel the difficulty lay without; the gospel was a novel doctrine, opposed by worldly powers; bleak winds that blow in our backs blew in their faces. The gospel, as a novel doctrine, was represented with prejudices, opposed with scorn and extremity of violence; there was more in assent than now in affiance. Now the gospel by long prescription and the veneration of ages hath gotten a just title to our belief; there is nothing in a literal and unfeigned assent. Every man pretendeth to esteem Christ, and acknowledge Christ for saviour of the world; how shall we disprove them? The scriptures are rather a treasury of doctrines than a register of experiences. But yet we are not wholly left in the dark; by the light of the Spirit the doctrines of the word may be suited to all cases. The scripture is not such a dark rule but that it will discover the thoughts of the heart; and what is this faith unfeigned, the *minimum quod sic*, the least degree of faith, without which we are not accepted?

I might answer generally, that the least degree of true faith beginneth in contrition, and endeth in a care of obedience. But because there may be in the wicked some occasional doubtings, such as arise by starts out of the trouble of an evil conscience and some smooth moralities, that may look like gospel reformation, we must go more particularly to work. I do again return the question, What is the lowest degree of true saving faith? By way of answer—

1. I shall show that the question is necessary to be determined, partly for the comfort of troubled consciences. God's children are many times persuaded they have not faith, when indeed they have. It would be a great settlement if we could clear up the work of Christ: Mat. xvii. 20, 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed,' &c. Though you have mountains of guilt, it is a great peevishness not to acknowledge the crumbs; we think we are dogs, but we have crumbs. To deny that you are Christ's is not self-denial, but grace-denial, to belie God's bounty: Cant. i. 5, 'I am black, but comely;' and ver. 2, 'I sleep, but my heart waketh;' Mark ix. 24, 'Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.' And it is a ground of unthankfulness: Zech. iv. 10, 'Who hath despised the day of small things?' God will be acknowledged in the low beginnings of grace. Partly as it is a ground of hope: Phil. i. 6, 'Being confident of this very thing, that he, which hath begun a good work in you, will also perform it until the day of Jesus Christ;' it is the bud of glory, a seed of everlasting life. The Spirit never forsaketh us, something is to be done till the day of judgment; the soul is exactly purified at death, and the body will be raised at the great day. It is an advantage to be able to urge deliverance from the lion and bear; the great Philistine shall also be overcome, only we must not rest in those beginnings. Initial grace is but counterfeit, unless it receive growth and access; things that are nipped in the bud show that the plant is not right.

2. It is possible to find out the least and lowest degree of faith. Scriptures show that there is a beginning, upon which we may conclude an interest in Christ: Heb. iii. 14, 'For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold *την ἀρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως*, the beginning of our confidence, stedfast unto the end,' if we retain the first principles and encouragements to believe; if we can hold it out, we are safe. There are some grains and initials of faith; and the scripture discovereth what they are, for it layeth down the essentials of faith, we are not left in the dark.

Having premised these things, let me come now to show what it is, because faith is a capacious word, and involveth the whole progress of the soul to Christ. It is hard to state this matter in one word, unless it were as ambiguous as the question itself; therefore I shall take liberty to dilate and enlarge myself, by showing you what is most necessary, and what are the lowest and most infant workings of faith.

[1.] There must be out of a deep conviction a removing of our own righteousness. Affiance beginneth in self-diffidence. Faith implieth that we are touched in conscience, and that the heart is elevated above self, utterly abhorring our own merits: Ps. cxlvii. 3, 'He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. Faith is a seed of heaven, not found in unploughed or fallow ground—a sound conviction

of self-nothingness, especially if joined with addresses to grace, is a good evidence of it. The soul looketh upon all that it hath or can do, like a ship without a bottom, to be a hindrance, not a gain; and unless Christ help they are utterly and eternally lost: Phil. iii. 7-9; 'What things were gain to me, those I counted lost for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. And be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith.' The soul in this condition is between life and death; it is a twilight in the soul, neither perfect day nor perfect night, like a child in the place of breaking forth of children; if we be not still-born we are in a fair way of faith; if we run to mercy, there is hope. 'The publican, that smote his hand upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner, went down to his house justified rather than the other,' Luke xviii. 13, 14. The parable is spoken against those that trusted in themselves, that they were righteous. Discovering of an ill condition may be sometimes in the wicked, but the soul is not purged from carnal confidence and set to work upon the mere warrant of God's grace.

[2.] An esteem of Christ. In faith there is not only a conviction of the understanding, but some motion of the will; all motions of the will are founded in esteem. This is a low fruit of faith: 1 Peter ii. 7, 'To them that believe he is precious.' To an hungry conscience Christ is more precious than all the world besides; he seeth the truth and preciousness of the rich offers of grace in the Lord Jesus Christ, the sweetest happiest tidings that ever sounded in his ears, and entertaineth it with the best and dearest welcomes of his heart, it is better than life. This is the same with 'tasting the good word of God,' Heb. vi. 5, only it is more constant. Carnal men may have a vanishing and fleeting glance, but these are serious and spiritual motions and affections of the heart towards Christ. Wicked men soon lose their relish and taste, like those that cheapen things, and taste them, but do not like the price. This maketh us part with all: Mat. xiii. 44, 'The kingdom of heaven is like to a treasure hid in a field, the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field.' This esteem begetteth self-denial; estate, credit, friends, all shall go, so I may enjoy Christ. Wicked men have some relish; they prize Christ in pangs of conscience. All apostasy cometh from a low estimation of Christ after a taste; it is the highest profaneness: Heb. xii. 16, 'Profane Esau, for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright.' Well then, is Christ precious? Dost thou embrace the reconciliation that he hath purchased with all thy heart?

There is but one objection against this act and disposition of faith; this prizing of Christ seemeth but a natural act. Esteem is pure when it is drawn forth upon religious reasons; these acts are not gracious, because the ground is carnal—viz., offers of nature after ease. How will you do to comfort a troubled conscience that maketh this reply? It is but a natural motion after ease; we look on Christ for comfort?

I Answer, (1.) By setting before him the indulgence of God. We

may make use of God's motives; he suffereth us to begin in the flesh, that we may end in the spirit: Mat. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' There is faith when we trust Christ upon his own word. If a prince should offer a general pardon to rebels, with a promise that he would restore their blood, and now they lay down their arms and submit to mercy, it is counted an act of obedience. If Christ maketh proclamation, Come, and I will ease you, do you think it is a wrong faith to take him at his word, and to love him for his condescension?

(2.) To press him to perfect these acts. It is good to be doing rather than censuring. Idle complaints do but vex the soul. Those rebels that submit to a prince because of his pardon may afterwards enter into an entire friendship. Christ is lovely in himself; by acquaintance our affections grow more pure. We first esteem him out of hope, and then out of gratitude. Love to his person is the fruit of experience. In a treaty of marriage, the first proposals are estate and conveniences of life; conjugal affection groweth by society and commerce. It is a good advantage to love Christ upon any terms.

(3.) By discovering the mistake. There is some spirituality of esteem when we can prize a pardon and acceptance with God. Bastard motives are fame, and ease, and worldly honour, and the sunshine of worldly countenance. Besides, this esteem of Christ ariseth from a spiritual reason, because we are unsatisfied in our own righteousness: Phil. iii. 7, 8, 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ.' Because we have a low esteem of ourselves, therefore we have a high esteem of Christ. Now it is an effect of grace to prize Christ for his righteousness, which is the esteem that groweth out of sound conviction.

[3.] Another act which ariseth out of this is a resolution to cast ourselves upon Christ; then faith is budded and formed. Rolling upon Christ is the formal, vital act of faith; and a sound purpose of acknowledging him for a saviour is the lowest degree of that act. And therefore if, out of a sight of thy own lost condition and an esteem of Christ, thou resolvest to cast thyself upon him, thou dost truly believe. Partly because in this resolution there is a compliance with the decrees of heaven, of setting up Christ as the alone saviour of the world; this decree is ratified in the court of conscience. There is another decree passed and ratified with the consent of my will, that Christ shall be my saviour: Ps. lxxiii. 28, 'It is good for me to draw nigh to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works.' There is recumbency or sincere adherence, which is the formal nature of faith, expressed by a believing on him. This resolution is always accompanied with a great confidence of the ableness of Christ to do us good: Mat. ix. 21, 'If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.' Paul after experience had no more: 2 Tim. i. 12, 'I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.' Partly because such an act findeth a sweeter welcome than it can expect. David received comfort upon it: Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said,

I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' 'I will arise and go to my father,' saith the prodigal, in Luke xv. 18; 'but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him,' ver. 20. Therefore, when a poor soul casts himself upon Christ with a purpose never to forsake him through God's grace, I do not doubt to pronounce him a believer, though there be much doubts and uncertainty about the success of such addresses. As a man falling into a river, espieth a bough of a tree, and catcheth at it with all his might, as soon as he hath fast hold of it, he is safe, though troubles and fears do not presently vanish out of his mind; so the soul, espying Christ as the only means to save him, and reaching out the hand to him, is safe, though it be not presently quieted and pacified.

Now this act discovereth itself by three things.

SERMON XXIX.

For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.—HEB. xi. 6.

(1.) By desires, a constant and earnest desire to go to Christ: Mat. v. 6, 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.' Now no work of nature hath God made a promise of grace to. There may be velleities; Balaam and others had wishes, but not real desires. In these constant serious desires the soul cannot be quiet without Christ: Ps. xlii. 1, 'As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.' The soul earnestly desires to be a partaker of Christ and his merits. These desires are drawn out in prayer. In the want of an expected good we sally out after it by passionate desires, earnest sighs and groans.

(2.) By pursuits. Whosoever is moved to make after Christ as the only means of his acceptance with God, truly believeth; who make this their work, John vi. 27, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.'

(3.) By rejoicing in hope when we have nothing in fruition: Heb. iii. 6, 'If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.'

To sum up all: the lowest act of faith we have found to be the resolution of a humbled sinner to cast himself on Christ. Recumbency is the formal vital act of faith, and a purpose of recumbency the lowest degree of that act. Well then, if, out of a sight of thy lost condition and a high esteem of Christ, thou resolvest to cast thy soul upon him, thou dost truly believe. Now this purpose is bewrayed to be serious and real by desire, by pursuit, and sometimes as faith receiveth strength and growth by rejoicing in our future hopes when we have nothing in actual feeling and fruition.

Though I suppose nothing of moment can be objected against the decision of this question, yet because some desire to clear this recumbency from that leaning on the Lord which is spoken of, Micah iii. 11, 'The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money; yet will they lean upon the Lord and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us.' Whence they infer there may be a leaning and recumbency where there is no grace.

I answer by a *κατάχρησις*. Leaning is put for a vain trust; the prophet speaketh according to their presumption; they thought it leaning or staying on the Lord when it was but a foolish confidence built upon an ill ground, the presence of God in the outward ordinances and services of the temple, as if this would secure them against all dangers, and God would be for them, though in their persons they were never so wicked and unreformed.

But to clear it more fully: in all recumbency we must not only regard the act and the object; it is not enough that there be confidence or strength of resolution, and that this confidence be in pretence placed on God and Christ; as carnal men will say, I pitch all my hopes on Christ for salvation. A wicked man may make a bold and daring adventure, and lean upon the Lord, though at length the Lord will jostle him off. But there are other circumstances which must be considered, as (1.) The necessary method and order of this recumbency; (2.) The warrant or ground of it; (3.) The fruits and effects of it.

1st. The method and order of it. It is the resolution of a humbled sinner to cast himself upon Christ. We still run to Christ out of a sense of our own misery. The heart must be touched by the word. When conscience is drowsy, it is but a presumptuous act; and the devil, to delude them in an imaginary faith, suffereth them to hold out Christ in a naked pretence. The end and use of faith is to lift up that which is cast down; therefore it is sometimes expressed by a catching or taking hold of Christ, as those that are ready to perish in the waters catch hold of a bough; as Adonijah, when guilty of death, took hold of the horns of the altar: Isa. lvi. 4, 'Thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant.' So the heirs of promise are described to be those 'who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them,' Heb. vi. 18; it is an allusion to those that fly from the avenger of blood. Wrath maketh pursuit, and the believer runneth to the city of refuge. Whosoever sets his face to Christ when chased out of himself by his own fears, and tremblingly flieth to undeserved grace,—whosoever, I say, findeth himself in truth to be thus affected, need not doubt of his interest in Christ; he is driven from sin and wrath, and drawn to Christ to seek salvation alone in him. Certainly he is an heir of promise, and God hath sworn to him. So in the metaphor of leaning on Christ, it supposeth a falling unless Christ did bear us up. This is the sure method of grace; God comforteth those that are cast down, Christ hath a napkin for the wet face of sinners. This is not only true at first conversion, but every time we renew our access to him, it is either out of new troubles, or out of a constant tenderness of conscience. Therefore in heaven there is no faith, because

there is no contrition, but a perfect oblivion of misery; the soul being full of joy, faith hath no place and use. Therefore it is in vain to boast of quiet of conscience and leaning on the Lord, as wicked men do, when the soul was never troubled. We must consider the method and order of grace. A wicked man is never reconciled to God, because he never saw there was need to seek reconciliation, his conscience is sleepy and drowsy. Here is the constant trial then; all acts of faith at first conversion and afterwards begin at conviction, and a sense of our vileness and nothingness. But you will say, Then a believer's life must be a bondage; are we always to put ourselves into scruples and fears? And if the terrors of the Lord do still chase us to Christ, this would prejudice the comfort and assurance of grace. I answer, There is a great deal of difference between a troubled stormy conscience and a tender awakened conscience; the one is a dispensation, the other a duty. Though there be not a fear that is contrary to faith, a legal dejection; yet there is a constant conviction and deep sense of our own vileness and nothingness. We have all cause to be continually humble and nothing in our own eyes, as Paul groaned sorely when yet he blesseth God for Christ: Rom. vii. 24, 25, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' He had such a real confidence as produced thanksgiving. So that this is the necessary order of grace, without which we shall not prize Christ. This is wanting in carnal men; a bare supposition would destroy their peace.

2dly. The warrant or ground of it. He casteth himself upon Christ that goeth to work considerably, and understanding what he doth; as Paul saith, 2 Tim. i. 12, 'I know whom I have believed.' True confidence is an advised act, it is built on the offer of God and the ability of Christ. They go and show God his own handwriting, and modestly challenge him on his promise: Ps. cxix. 49, 'Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.' They know Christ is so able they may trust in him. Now this resolution in wicked men is but a blind adventure, like a leap in the dark, they do not weigh the danger. Look to the ground of your trust. The two builders, Mat. vii. the wise and the foolish builder, are not commended or discommended for the structure, but for the foundation—the one built on the rock, the other on the sand. Natural conscience is crafty, and pretendeth fair; they say they trust in Christ, as those that leaned on the Lord but upon an ill warrant, external privileges; they rest not on God, but on the temple. Therefore they are said to trust in lying words: Jer. vii. 4, 'Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these!' So carnal men have a few ignorant hopes, and trust in their baptism and good meanings, and Christ beareth the name; they are borne up with the bladders of their own confidence, a few windy, empty hopes.

3dly. The effects and fruits of it. Affiance cannot consist with a purpose of sinning, with the purpose of casting ourselves on Christ. There is an unfeigned purpose of obedience; he that trusteth in the Lord hateth sin. Can a man be an enemy to him that saveth him? Now, wicked men cast away their souls, and then trust Christ shall save them; it is, as if a man should plunge himself in the deep, upon

presumption that he shall find a bough to take hold of. God in mercy hath provided faith for the fallen creature as a remedy ; it is an abuse of it to plunge ourselves again into sin. Look, as it is a vanity to cast ourselves into straits, and then to see how God will help us ; so here, we tempt free grace to our loss. Wicked men embrace Christ with treacherous embraces, like Judas' kiss to betray him ; as Joab took Abner aside to smite him under the fifth rib : Heb. x. 22, ' Let us draw nigh (*μετὰ ἀληθινῆς καρδίας*) with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water ;' if not without sin, yet without guile ; there must be an upright and unfeigned purpose to walk in new obedience. There is a notable place : Jer. vii. 9, 10, ' Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not ; and come and stand before me in the house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations ?'—we are delivered, all these are expiated by sacrifice ; Christ died for me as well as you, we shall do well enough. What ! will ye be worldly, sensual, neglect duty, be drunk, be careless in the course of your conversations, and say, We are delivered, Christ died for us ? And will he discharge you from the guilt of these sins when you turn again to the practice of them ? It is true, there is a bath for uncleanness, and there will be continual failings, but certainly they that continue in the constant practice of iniquity have no comfort and benefit by it : John xiii. 10, ' He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.' There will be some fleshly adherences and failings after we are washed in the laver of Christ's blood, as a man that goeth from the bath, when he hath washed his body, may defile his feet ; but when you make it your constant practice to commit iniquity, it is in vain to pretend to rest on Christ.

Use 2. Exhortation to press us to faith. It is the commandment which we must teach : 1 John iii. 23, ' This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ ;' and it is the work which you must practise : John vi. 29, ' This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent ;' this is your *ἔργον* ; it is but waste time that you spend on pleasures and worldly businesses. Men think they are only to follow their callings, they make their temporal and worldly business their work, and so do not apply their minds to believe in Christ. Oh, consider, when there was an invitation, business would not suffer them to regard it ! Mat. xxii. 5, ' They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.' It is not whoredom, drunkenness, and extortion, but an immoderate following of their lawful profits and pleasures—a farm, a marriage, a yoke of oxen—things plausible in their kind, and one would think necessary : Luke x. 42, ' Mary hath chosen the better part, which shall not be taken away from her :' these things ought not to be undone. How can men sleep or work till they have cleared up their interest in Christ ? nay, in spiritual employments, closing with Christ ; the pre-eminent duty is not your work so much as your faith. The disciples in their converse with Christ bewrayed many weaknesses, but Christ was never angry with them so much as he was for their want of faith :

Luke xxiv. 25, 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!' and Mat. viii. 26, 'Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?' Oh, consider, to quicken you, it is the grace that bringeth God most glory, and doth you most good. Some cry up charity, because they mistake the nature of faith—they depress it, they omit what is chiefest in faith, and they speak of it as if it were nothing worth. And so others make faith a pendulous hope, and therefore cry up obedience and love.

1. It bringeth God most glory. It is notable that faith doth that to God in a way of duty, which God doth to the creature in a way of grace—it justifieth, sanctifieth, glorifieth. It justifieth, and that is a relative word, against the slanders and contempts of the world. So it is said, Luke vii. 29, 'And all the people heard him, and the publicans justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John;' it defendeth his honour and the truth of his grace. The pharisees said, It was a foolish doctrine. How a believer justifieth God against the contempt of the world and the suspicions of his own heart! Whatever conscience saith to the contrary, the Lord is just, gracious, merciful. Unbelief slighteth God and Christ, as if he were not worth the taking; the truth of the gospel, as if it were not worth credit; his worth, as if he did not deserve respect; his power, as if he were not able to save a sinking soul; it putteth a lie upon the whole contrivance of grace. Oh, how sweet were it if we could justify God against the prejudices of our own hearts! they make the blood of Christ a base thing, the Spirit of Christ a weak instrument. So it sanctifieth God: Num. xx. 12, 'Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel.' To sanctify, is to set apart for special uses and purposes; so we are said to sanctify God when we give him a separate and distinct excellency from all the powers in the world. He is not a common help and saviour, none so holy and gracious; it setteth the Lord with admiration above all created powers, for trust, fear, and dependence: Isa. viii. 13, 'Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.' When we see man is not to be trusted nor feared, but God, we set him on the highest point of eminency, aloof from the creatures. Is there any like him for pardon, for power, for holiness? So it glorifieth God: Rom. iv. 20, 'He was strong in faith, giving glory to God.' God doth as it were receive a new being from faith; though he be infinitely glorious in himself, yet he counteth himself glorified by the faith of the creature; he hath a second heaven in the heart of a believer, there he dwelleth by faith, and displayeth the pomp of all his excellences. Now unbelief dethroneth God, it will not let him set up a new heaven or place of residence in the conscience.

2. It doth you most good; your life, your peace, your glory, all hangeth upon it. Your life: Gal. ii. 20, 'I live by the faith of the Son of God;' you may be as well without life as without faith. So for peace, would not a man be friends with God, and live at amity with heaven? Rom. v. 1, 'Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;' and for glory, 1 Peter i. 9, 'Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.' Faith beginneth salvation, and heaven is but faith perfect and believing

turned into fruition. You are in the suburbs of heaven as soon as you close with Christ; it putteth you above the clouds, and in the midst of glory to come. All the blessings of the covenant are made over to faith. It is God's acquittance which he sheweth to Christ; as when men are obliged to pay great sums of money, they receive an acquittance, as an acknowledgment that the money is received: John iii. 33, 'He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal, that God is true.' We give it under our hand and seal, that God is as good as his word.

But how shall we do to get faith? I answer—

[1.] The habit of faith is freely given and wrought by God himself: Phil. i. 29, 'To you it is given on the behalf of Christ to believe on him;' Eph. ii. 8, 'By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;' Heb. xii. 2, 'Looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.' And therefore the general means are waiting upon the word and prayer; commend thy case to God by prayer, and wait for an answer in the word. Hearing there must be: Rom. x. 14, 'How shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard?' God will not infuse faith when asleep; you must lie under the authority of the word. God's seasons are not at our beck; if the first stroke of the flint doth not bring forth the fire, you must strike again; it is good to be constant. And then if God suspend the influences of his grace, pray remember the promise of giving the Holy Spirit: Luke xi. 13, 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' Knock once more; a holy importunity argueth some presence of the Spirit, though we are not sensible of it; it is good to be earnest, and to follow God with renewed requests and expectations.

[2.] I answer, Because we are required to believe; though it be his gift, God requireth it of the creature. It is good to be doing; let us use the means, and leave the blessing to God; he may come ere we are aware, and though we can do nothing spiritually, yet it is good to be doing rationally. It is true, faith is not a work of nature, but this is the way of God's working. There are secret elapses of the Spirit of God, as Samuel thought Eli called, when it was the Lord; there may be a spiritual work where we think it merely rational: besides, we are under a law; God respecteth not what we can do, but what we ought to do. Three things are to be done—(1.) Something to humble the soul and fit it for faith; (2.) Something to further the immediate working and actings of faith towards Christ; (3.) Something for the regulating of these actings.

First, To fit the soul for faith, it is good to offer humbling matter. God was angry with Pharaoh: Exod. x. 3, 'How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?' Certainly we might do something.

(1.) Reflect on your present condition, and think of changes. It will not be ever with thee as it is now. I must die, and must come to judgment. Draw it to a short issue: Mark xvi. 16, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.' Do I believe? upon what terms do I stand with God? what

assurance have I of his love? Especially do it, when God giveth thee a hint in his providence: 1 Kings viii. 47, 'If they shall bethink themselves in the land, whither they were carried captives, and repent and make supplication unto thee in the land, of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness,' &c. Retirement gave them an opportunity to converse with themselves. It is good for us and our consciences to be together sometimes and enter parley, What am I? how do matters stand between God and me? Man has a conscience—a power to talk with himself: Ps. iv. 4, 'Commune with your own heart on your bed, and be still;' he can look inwardly to ask himself what he hath done: Prov. xx. 27, 'The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly:' it is God's deputy, it sets up a tribunal within a man's self.

(2.) Examine yourselves by the law of God. A daily view of sins doth much conduce to humbling. Conscience is blind in many cases, therefore take the law along with you, and look into the purity of it: Rom. iii. 20, 'By the law is the knowledge of sin;' not only *quoad naturam peccati*, but *quoad inherentiam in subjecto*. To man fallen, that is the nature and office of it: Rom. vii. 9, 'For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' Paul was never troubled till the law was brought home to his conscience.

(3.) Aggravate thy sins from the consideration of God's love. Two things very much humble the soul, light and love. So it was in Saul's case: 1 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17, 'And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.' There is a natural ingenuity in the sourest nature to make us relent, when we have done wrong to a kind person. Take the same course with your souls; all this is done against a merciful God, and against special offers of love. Surely you have very hard hearts, if they will not be melted with offers of grace.

(4.) Do not skin over the wounds of conscience: Jer. vi. 14, 'They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace;' they put it off, rather than put it away; stop the flux of humours, rather than cure the distemper. Better keep conscience raw than let it fester into an ulcerate sore: Ps. li. 3, 'I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.' This must be the disposition of your hearts, otherwise, your iniquities will find you out; we must have a care of quenching the Spirit, when a ray of conviction is darted into our bosoms.

(5.) Propound the encouragements of a common faith. Observe that mercy is made an argument to draw men to the highest pungent afflictive sorrow: Joel ii. 13, 'Rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful;' it noteth a deep and heightened sorrow upon the motive of God's goodness. The apostle tells them of a promise, Acts ii. 39; after they were pricked in hearts, ver. 37; Mat. iii. 2, 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;' that is, the whole gracious administration

of Christ. Partly because else there would be a despondency and despair, it is a dangerous temptation to say there is no hope. Jer. xviii. 12, 'And they said, There is no hope; but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart:' it is the nature of man to be led by hope, much more in a duty so distasteful to flesh and blood as humiliation is. Partly because greatness of sins should increase our repentance, but not diminish our faith. Rend your hearts, be deeply humble, but still remember God is merciful.

(6.) Compare thy own want with the blessed condition of those that enjoy grace. As the prodigal: Luke xv. 17, 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger!' Christ cannot want a people, but I may want a saviour: blessed are they that are at peace with God through Christ, but I am an alien and stranger to those joys. Emulation is a means to humble us; the meanest of God's family abound in spiritual comforts.

Secondly, Do something to further the immediate workings and actings of faith; that is your work when the heart is humble and sensible.

1. Consider God's gracious invitation. God hath fully opened his mind concerning the receiving of sinners that come to Christ. He prays us to come, makes public proclamation: Isa. lv. 1, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.' God by his ministers goes a begging to poor creatures: 2 Cor. v. 20, 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.' He pitieth those that do not come to him, Ps. lxxxi. 13, 'Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!' so Luke xix. 41, 42, 'When he was come near he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!' He professeth his loathness that any should perish: Ezek. xxxiii. 11, 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?' he reasoneth with them—'Why will you die?' So Ezek. xviii. 31. He chideth them for not coming, John v. 40, 'Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.' He promiseth and offereth to them all the favour that may be: John vi. 27, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you;' Mat. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Ye need not fear an entertainment. Now it is a great advantage to faith to consider these passionate forms. Show yourselves men by a literal revolution of the promises; though it be but an act of understanding and memory, yet God may bless it. Constant thoughts have a natural efficacy; when God is in them, and giveth his blessing, they work much.

2. Season the heart with gracious maxims and discourses, such as these. The more angry you conceive God to be, the more need you

have to fly to his mercy. Use a point of gospel logic, and make advantage of the temptation. Satan saith, Thou art a grievous sinner, and conscience can witness the accusation; though you take the principle, yet beware of the devil's inferences; the principle may be true, yet the inference a lie. I am a dog, yet there are crumbs for dogs: Mat. xv. 27, 'Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs, which fall from their master's table.' It is an excellent wisdom to turn discouragements into motives of believing; to make that an argument to draw us to Christ which would seem to drive us from him. Therefore I ought to come to Christ. Again, God's mercy is as infinite as his wrath; I fear his wrath, why should I not hope in his mercy? Believing is a command as well as a privilege; God is worthy to be obeyed, though I be not worthy to be received to mercy. Sins should not hinder a man from duty, nor sickness from the remedy: look upon thyself as under an obligation. Again, presumers are seldom troubled about their estate; their peace is broken when it is but suspected; there is no fear of presumption when the heart is touched: Ps. lvi. 3, 'What time I am afraid I will trust in thee:' it is good to give duties their due time and season. Again, in this work Christ will help me; if there be anything of faith he will cherish it: Mat. xii. 20, 'A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.' He cherisheth not only the bright torches, but the smoking wick; he hates unbelief as much as you do, and will strengthen you against it, for it is the greatest enemy of his kingdom. God usually appeareth in the creature's humiliation: Ps. li. 17, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise;' if thou canst say he will not accept thee, he will not despise thee. Humiliation is a good beginning, a fruit of Christ's purchase; and Christ did not only purchase the beginnings of grace, but the perfection and increase: you have your souls at a good advantage. When Paul was fasting, God sendeth Ananias, Acts ix. 10; and when Cornelius was fasting, he sendeth him an angel, Acts x. 30, 31, Christ's wounds are like those of a surgeon, not of an executioner; when he wounds and opens the vein, he thinks of binding it up again. Many such reasonings and discourses may we have within ourselves.

3. Make adventures. Faith at first goeth after Christ with a weak and trembling foot, it is a mere trial and essay: Joel ii. 14, 'Who knoweth if he will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?' It is a thousand to one but he doth: Amos v. 15, 'It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph;' Jonah iii. 9, 'Who can tell if God will turn; and repent, and turn away from the fierceness of his anger that we perish not?' It is pride and curiosity to pry into God's purposes; what have you to do with God's counsels? But you have a fair offer. Why should I ascend unto heaven? the word is near me: Rom. x. 6-8, 'Say not, Who shall ascend into heaven to know the mind of God?' he hath declared his will in his offer, why should I dispute it? When Ebedmelech cast a cord to Jeremiah in the dungeon, shall he fall disputing; It may be thou dost not intend to pull me up? It is a vanity to wrong ourselves by affected scruples; there is pride and curiosity in the jealousy, but obedience in the adventure.

4. If, after all, this brings no comfort, run to him, and acknowledge your misery and impotency. *Agnosco debitum, confiteor impotentiam.* 'Turn me, O Lord, and I shall be turned,' Jer. xxxi. 18. *Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis.* Lord, thou hast forbidden despair, and commanded calling for mercy; I cast myself at thy feet, give me grace. Our trials are but to show us our weakness, that we may fall down, and take all at the hands of mercy. If we be not thus affected, we have no cause to complain of God's rigour, but our own penury and sin: Rom. xi. 32, 'God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.'

5. Observe the seasons of God's gracious approaches: Ezek. xvi. 8, 'Thy time was a time of love.' Grace hath its seasons: Isa. lv. 6, 'Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near.' There are seasons of sweet and spiritual refreshings; as Benhadad's servant watched for the word, 'brother.' God will be observed; it is Satan's sport to see us slip our seasons. Observe the sweet motions in the heart when the Father draws you.

Thirdly, To regulate faith, that you may not deceive yourselves with a vain confidence. It is needful to deny ourselves, our interests, or our lusts. Something is to be forsaken. Put cases—Are you come up to God's terms?—What lusts or interests do you stick at? as Christ trieth the young man, Mat. xix. 20, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me.'

SERMON XXX.

For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.—HEB. xi. 6.

For he that cometh to God—I opened this in the former verse. Coming to God principally noteth an aim at communion and fellowship with him. It is the same with faith: John vi. 35, 'He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst;' where coming and believing are all one; it is the lowest degree of faith; the next degree is seeking diligently—it is walking with God here, and living with him for ever. The note is this—

Doct. That it is the nature of faith to make a man come towards God, and to get communion with him through Christ.

I shall show—

(1.) What it is to come to God; (2.) That there is no coming to God but by Christ.

1. What it is to come to God. Coming to God notes three things, for it is a duty always in progress.

[1.] The first address of faith. To come to God is to desire to be in his favour and covenant—to be partakers of his blessings in this life and of salvation in the life to come: Heb. vii. 25, 'He is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him,' that is, those that

in and through him desire to enjoy friendship and communion with God.

[2.] Our constant communion with him in holy duties—coming to him ‘as to a living stone,’ 1 Peter ii. 4. In all exercises of religion we renew our access to Christ, and by Christ to God; in hearing, as a teacher; in prayer, as an advocate for necessary help and supply; in the Lord’s supper, as the master of the feast: Prov. ix. 2, ‘Wisdom hath killed her beasts, she hath mingled her wine, she hath also furnished her table;’ Mat. xxii. 4, ‘I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready.’

[3.] Our entrance into glory: Mat. xxv. 34, ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ We have not complete communion with Christ till we are raised from the dead, and by him presented to the Father; then do we indeed come to God by him.

2. There is no coming to God but by Christ: John x. 9, ‘I am the door;’ there is no entrance but through him: John xiv. 6, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.’ Now we are said to come to God by Christ in a twofold respect,—(1.) By his merit; (2.) By his grace.

[1.] By his merit. As paradise was kept by a flaming sword, so all access to God is fenced and closed up by his justice and wrath; there was no pressing in till Christ opened the way, God became man, drawing near to us by the veil of his flesh: Heb. x. 19, 20, ‘Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;’ so by his sufferings: 1 Peter iii. 18, ‘For Christ also hath once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.’ Now, as in all acts of religion we are coming to God, so we must still hold on by Christ till we come to our journey’s end, and use him as our continual mediator and advocate, carry our petitions in all our addresses, and make our moan to him.

[2.] By his grace. Christ carries us home on his shoulders rejoicing; as a man when he had found his lost sheep, Luke xv. 5. None can come to the Father but by him: John vi. 44, ‘No man can come to me except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him’—none can come without a divine power.

Use. Admire the privilege, that we may come to God. We of ourselves are inclined to stand off. Peter speaketh what is the disposition of all sinners—‘Depart from me;’ we cannot endure God’s company; we lost his image and fellowship with him. If we worship, we would be like the Israelites, every man in his tent-door. But now we have free leave to come to the throne of grace: Heb. x. 19, ‘Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.’ Whilst on earth we have free trade unto heaven; we need not change place, but affections. When thou art dealing with God in prayer, this liberty was purchased for thee by the blood of Jesus. None but the high priest might enter into the *sanctum sanctorum*; but this privilege we have, and it will stand, for it was dearly bought: Heb. iv. 16, ‘Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.’ God hath now laid aside the

terror and rigour of his justice, that we may open our case to God ; oh, let us make use of our liberty !

Must believe that he is, &c. As if the apostle had said, At least, there must be this faith ; he must be persuaded first of the truth of God's being ; secondly, of the certainty of his bounty, and doing good unto those that come to him. Here are two articles mentioned—God's being, and God's bounty ; 'He is,' and 'He is a rewarder,' &c. The apostle saith that this must be believed if we would please God ; he doth not say, This is all that must be believed ; but this certainly must be believed. For these are the general truths which are the foundation of all that which is called religion in the world—that there is a God, and that he takes notice of human affairs. None would seek the favour of God unless he did believe his being and bounty ; and no man will be touched with any care of religion unless he doth assent to these supreme truths ; yet there is a God, and that he hath such respect to human affairs, as that he will reward the obedient and revenge the disobedient. These are principles that are evident by the light of nature ; and they are mentioned, because therein the faith of the patriarchs was most exercised, and because these are the foundations of all religion. The main work of religion is to bring our souls to God, and the main ground and reason is the truth of his being and recompenses. If there is a God, there are everlasting recompenses—rewards for the good, punishments for the wicked. Rewards are only mentioned as suiting more with God's goodness, and as being more proper objects for faith ; the other, for fear. And therefore he that would come to God ; that is, he that would maintain friendship and communion with him, and seek his favour (for he speaks of Enoch's pleasing God), must firmly believe these things ; or, if you take coming to God for our address and approaches to God in holy duties, still these two principles are of use to us. Every time we come to God we must revive this thought upon our hearts,—Surely there is a God, and it will not be in vain to inquire after him ; for this puts life and strength and quickening into our duties,

The point I shall now discuss is this—

Doct. That the first point of faith, if we would have anything to do with God, is to believe that there is a God.

This is the primitive and supreme truth, therefore let me discuss it a little ; the argument is not needless.

1. Partly because the most universal and incurable disease of the world is atheism ; it is disguised under several shapes, but atheism it is that lies at the root, and blasts and destroys all practice and good conscience ; and therefore it is good to deal upon this argument, and to reflect the light of this truth upon our conscience, and to take all occasions to batter down that atheism that is in our hearts. I know to chop logic with a sturdy settled atheist will be to little purpose. General maxims can hardly be proved by truths more clear and evident than themselves, and it is not good to loosen foundation stones. We cannot guard them so much by argument, as they are guarded by their own light and the sense which nature hath of them ; and therefore Aristotle said, That they are rather to be confuted with blows than arguments that will deny there is a God ; as Gideon taught the men

of Succoth with briars and thorns. Protagoras was banished by the Athenians for denying this truth. But it is not for their sakes, but because such kind of surmises are wont to arise in the hearts of men, where they do not grow into settled atheism, even in the hearts of all unrenewed men, that there is no God ; therefore it is good to speak to this argument : Ps. xiv. 1, ‘ The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,’ &c ; and it is quoted by Paul, Rom. iii. 10, to prove the degeneration of all men. Every natural unrenewed man is a kind of atheist ; though he dare not lisp out such conceptions, yet he hath it in his heart ; there is something there that is ever rising up against the being of God ; nay, such a thought may come by fits and glances into the hearts of good men. Privy atheism is in the hearts of all men, and therefore it is good sometimes to settle the belief of this supreme truth, to stand upon our guard, and in defiance of such thoughts, that the heart will ever and anon be casting up, to call to the help of reason.

2. Because supreme truths should be laid up with the greatest certainty and assurance. Christians are mistaken very much, if they think all the difficulty of religion lies in affiance, and taking out their own comfort, and in clearing up their own particular interest. Oh, no ; a great deal of it lies in assent ; there is privy atheism at the root, and therefore doth the work of God go on so untowardly with us—therefore have we such doubtings and so many deformities of life and conversation. If the fire were once well kindled, it would of its own accord burst out into a flame, and burn clear ; so if assent were firmly rooted, if we were once settled under the power and dominion of this truth, confidence would follow of its own accord, and the whole business of religion, both as to comfort and practice, would be far more easy to us. All our doubts come from want of a firm assent to the being of God, and to the word of God. Indeed, at first, while we are learners of religion, it becomes us to drink in these principles and maxims of religion without discussion ; we take them in as men do pills ; we do not chew them, but swallow them ; and it is fit it should be so. *Oportet discitent credere*, a learner must believe, but afterward we must inquire into the reason of these things ; nay, when a man is first converted, and begins to be serious in religion, when a man is touched in conscience, his will is more exercised than his understanding ; he needs Christ, and all the endeavours and resolutions of the soul are to get an interest in him. And he doth not so much debate the mystery of religion as his own particular case ; his heart is carried out after comfort, and he seems mainly to desire some satisfaction ; but he doth not look into the grounds from whence this doth arise. As men in a deep thirst swallow their drink before they know the nature of it, or discern the taste of it ; so when we are under a great thirst, or under great famishment as to spiritual comfort, and have great troubles upon us, we take up with the comfortable notions of Christ and salvation by him, and easily drink in these and other truths ; we catch at them without looking into the grounds or reasons of them, but afterwards we see this needs to be the care and labour of the soul, to strengthen our assent and fortify ourselves against those doubts of mind which shake us, and to settle the heart in those supreme truths which in our necessity we took in without discussion.

3. I would handle this argument—That there is a God, because it is good to detain the heart a little in the view of this truth, and to revive it in our souls. There is a double reading of that place: Ps. x. 4, ‘God is not in all his thoughts;’ or else, all his thoughts are that there is no God; the one makes way for the other. It is a great evil, when we cannot endure to think of God, and to fasten our meditations upon his being and the perfections of his nature, for by degrees his memory is defaced and blotted out of our minds; therefore a forgetfulness of God is a kind of denial of him: Ps. ix. 17, ‘The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.’ Mark, not only they that deny God, but forget God; that is the portion of them that do not mind nor regard him and his judgments; and therefore we should often meditate of God, and think of him, not by starts and sudden glances, but have deliberate thoughts of him. And therefore, that you may have some hints of meditation whereby to enlarge yourselves in the thoughts of God, and to give us some help to hold our minds in the view of it, it is of great use in the spiritual life to prosecute this argument.

Having premised these things concerning the usefulness of such a discourse, I shall speak to this point, to prove that there is a God.

Here we may appeal not only to scripture, but to nature. We say that principles can only be demonstrated *testimoniis, effectis et absurdis*: principles, when we would come to demonstrate them, must be proved by testimonies, by effects, and by showing the absurdities of the contrary; and such kind of arguments I shall produce.

[1.] That there is a God may be proved by conscience, which is as a thousand witnesses. The heathens, which never heard of scripture, yet had a conscience that did accuse and excuse—*μεταξύ ἀλλήλων*—by turns, Rom. ii. 15. There is something within men that will chide them for sin; yea, for secret sins, to which none are privy but themselves. Wicked men seek to blot out these feelings of conscience, but can never wholly extinguish them—‘The sinners in Sion are afraid,’ Isa. xxxiii. 14. Wicked men are without faith, yet they are never without fear. There is a conscience in men that appals the stoutest sinner, after the commitment of any gross evil; though it be secret and beyond the cognisance and vengeance of man, yet conscience will be smiting him, his heart will reproach him for it, therefore surely there is a God. You shall see the Holy Ghost, when he lays down the atheism of men, yet he observes this order, Ps. liii. 1, ‘The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ Now, how doth he prove, there is a God? It follows, ver. 5, ‘There were they in great fear where no fear was;’ that is, where there was no outward cause of fear, where none sought to hurt them, yet were they under a fear; he speaks of those that live most atheistically. This appears by the instance of Joseph’s brethren, accusing themselves when none else could accuse them: Gen. xlii. 21, ‘We are verily guilty concerning our brother’s blood;’ conscience began to accuse them. Though a man should hide himself from all the world, he cannot hide himself from himself; his heart will pursue him, and represent his guilt. Now that there is such a hidden fear in men’s hearts after sinning, that the heart will smite us for evil when the crime is secret, this argues there is a

God; yea, there is a fear to be found in the most obstinate sinners, and those that are of greatest power and place in the world, that can carry on their wickedness without control, as the most powerful princes. Caligula, it is noted of him that he would sometimes counterfeit the thunder, yet when it thundered indeed, how was he terrified and afraid! Those that would study to cast away all conceit of God, yet they have this fear upon them. And it is not a fear that they may be found out by man, and punished by man; for sometimes this fear prevails so far, as they would have counted man's punishment a favour, and therefore have sought it, or else have laid violent hands upon themselves. What should be the reason of all this, but that they have a fear of an avenger and judge that will call them to an account; and therefore they cannot prevent or dissemble their gripes, so greatly have these fears of conscience been increased upon them—'They know the judgment of God,' as the apostle speaks of the heathens, Rom. i. 28; that is, they have a sense that there is a just avenger of sin, and that therefore they are liable to judgment; yea, those that have been professed atheists, yet have been smitten with these horrors of conscience. *Affirmant interdū, noctu tamen dubitant*, saith Seneca—Though they will speak with confidence against God in the day, yet in the darkness of the night they are in doubt. Especially, in distress and trouble, then are these notions revived. As another heathen observes, When it thunders, then they wax pale and are affrighted. Diagoras, an atheist among the heathens, denied there was a God; yet when he was troubled with a strangury, he acknowledged a deity. Calvin, in his comment upon the 115th Psalm, gives us a story of a scoffing atheist, a merry fellow, whom he met with in an inn, that would talk very slightly and contemptuously of God and of religion, and dropping out his atheism upon all occasions, and jeering. When Calvin reprov'd him for it, he would put him off with this, *Cælum cæli Domino*—'The heavens of heavens was the Lord's; God must content himself with heaven, 'but he hath given the earth to the children of men:' here we may do what we please; God was shut up in the heavens, and he had no care nor sense of things below. But before they parted, this man was exceedingly gripped with the colic, and twinged with his pain; then he would be crying out—*O Deus, O Deus*—O God, O God! Now, saith Calvin, the heaven of heavens is the Lord's, and the earth belongeth to the children of men. When God doth awaken conscience by any sickness or trouble, they are arrested by conscience in the name of the great God whom they deny. Belshazzar seemed a jovial fellow, and a man of great confidence and bravery, but when he was besieged by a great army of Persians, and danger was at his doors, he falls a quaffing and carousing, as if he would out-laugh his danger; and not only so, but bids a defiance to the God of heaven, and he doth it in the vessels of the temple. But see how soon God takes off the edge of his spirit! Dan. v.; a trembling doth seize upon him, and a few letters upon the wall make his knees smite one against the other for fear. So how merrily soever these men do carry it for a while, and how much they may seem to smother their fears while they wallow in their sins; yet when the Lord stings them with his hornet, and puts them to pain; when he casts them into sickness, or when they are solitary, then there

is a hidden fear in their heart, and they are haunted with these pangs of conscience, and are sensible of an avenger and a judge. And this proves plainly that there is a God; as they say things written with the juice of a lemon appear not till the paper be brought to the fire, then all is legible; so such characters of a God are there engraven upon the hearts of men, that when they are sick and ready to die, when they are upon the confines of eternity, as they begin to have a sense of the torments of hell for sin, their notions of a God revive, and fear seizeth upon them, and the most sturdy atheists then have been forced to acknowledge a God. Thus you have the testimony of conscience to prove it.

[2.] As conscience shows it, so the consent of all nations. There are none so barbarous, but they worship some God. Aristotle saith, in his book *de Cælo*, 'That all men, how brutish soever they were, yet have a notion of a deity impressed upon them, which they cannot wear out.' All nations rather than they would have no God, will have a false god: some worship the stars, some the stones, some the beasts, or a piece of wood,—anything they met first in the morning. Though they differed concerning the number and nature of their gods, and the manner and rites of worship, yet they all agreed in this, that there was a God, who ought to be worshipped and respected by men. Certainly there is somewhat in this; for either this must come from some instinct of nature, or from tradition; both prove the truth we have in hand. If you refer it to the instinct of nature, that doth not carry us to falsehood, but truth; if to tradition, it must have a beginning, and therefore the very idolatry of the heathens is, saith Calvin, 'A pregnant instance and apparent evidence of this natural truth, that there is a God.' There were none so barbarous but they worshipped some god, as the pagan mariners: Jonah i. 5, 'They cried every one to his god;' yea, those that are most estranged from human society, that have lived in deserts without law or government, yet have been touched with the sense of a deity, which must needs arise from a natural instinct: they would rather worship anything, yea, the very devil, than have no god,—a piece of wood or stone; as the prophet takes notice of such brutishness in those that would burn one piece, and make an idol of the other, and worship it, Isa. xlv. 15–17. Now this general consent of nations cannot be any deceit or imposition of fancy, by virtue of long custom or tradition, because it is found in people most barbarous and free from all traffic and commerce, and because falsehood cannot be so universal and so long-lived as the conceit of a deity. Besides, though they do what they can to blot out these notions and instincts of conscience, yet still they remain with them; an invention so contrary to nature would long ere this have been worn out of the minds of men, therefore this general consent of nations proves that 'there is a God.'

[3.] It may be evident also by the book of the creatures. Surely there is a God, because these things are made in such exactness and order. There is a description of God, Zech. xii. 1, 'Thus saith the Lord, that stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundations of the earth, and formeth the spirit of a man within him.' Should we take this method, the heavens, the earth, the souls of men, which are the work of God, they all proclaim that there is a God! Man could never raise such a roof as heaven, nor lay such a floor as earth, nor

form himself. The world and all those things that are made, must be from some cause; for nothing could make itself, nor can be its own cause; and these things, they could not come together by chance, because of the perfection that is in all things in themselves, and their mutual subserviency and relation to one another, and their inclination to certain ends. There is an order in everything for the beauty and conservation of the whole; all things are under a law and course—‘He appointeth the moon for seasons, the sun knows his going down,’ Ps. civ. 19. The sun and moon keep at a due distance for the use of the world, and still observe the just points of the compass, and set and rise at such an hour; therefore certainly this was not done by chance, and it could not be made by man. He could not make great things, for he cannot make the least; he cannot make a lily, or a pile of grass, and therefore certainly he cannot produce such a beautiful fabric as this is. And, as Tully makes the comparison, a man coming into a house where there are no living creatures but weasels, rats and mice, and seeth a fair structure, he could not conceive the house could make itself, or had no other maker but the creatures he finds there—‘Every house is builded by some man,’ as the apostle reasons, Heb. iii. 4; ‘but he that built all things is God.’ Now when a man considers all things are managed with wisdom, he must needs conclude there must be some cause of all these things—some wise creator of them. Man could not make the world; man cannot form himself; he doth not know the number of his muscles and bones; he cannot restore any one of his joints which are lost; and therefore it must be made by God.

This was that which puzzled the heathens to find out *πρῶτον αἴτιον*—the first cause of the world, and all the order that is therein. Plutarch disputes it, which could be first, the egg before the hen, or the hen before the egg; the acorn before the oak, or the oak before the acorn. Such an uncertainty will there be in all debates till we come to this supreme truth, and to determine upon a first cause, which Anaxagoras and others were necessitated and driven to acknowledge at last; and therefore surely he that looks upon the world, and upon all the order therein, he will see that ‘there is a God.’

The world is sometimes compared to a book, sometimes to a preacher. To a book; the book of the creature is a large volume wherein God would set forth himself; the diversity of creatures are as so many letters out of which we may spell his name; the most excellent creatures are capital letters, and the lower creatures lesser letters; so that a man may plainly see God in all those things that are before his eyes. If you cannot read yourselves, the very beasts will teach you; nay, go to the mute fishes, that can hardly make any sound, yet they have voice enough to proclaim their creator: Job. xii. 7-9, ‘Ask of them and they will tell thee:’ that is, go, look upon them; consider them in their number and in their variety and different kinds; their frame and make, and how they are wonderfully preserved; they all proclaim some wise creator which made them.

Look upon the glorious bodies that are above, the constancy of their motion, their admirable beauty, their variety, their regularity; as to the general ends of their creation, this cannot be from itself, but there must be some supreme and infinite cause. Look upon the sun, that

representative of a God, the brightness of whose beams will speak out an infinite majesty that made it, and the extent of his influence—‘Nothing is hid from the heat thereof,’ Ps. xix. 6. That will speak him omnipresent God, and the indefatigableness of his motion, an infinite God. The sun, moon, and stars in the heavens, they go abroad into all lands, and speak to every people in their own tongue—English to the English; to other nations, in their own tongue—that there is one infinite, eternal power, which made me and all things else. Nay, let man but look upon himself; let him but consider the flights and traverses of reason, the wonderful workings of his own soul, the admirable structure of his body, the symmetry of all the parts, the different faces that are in several sorts of men, though there be so many millions in the world, yet not one like another in the compass of the face—all which proclaims a wise creator, who made all things.

And again, look upon nature, and you will find an order, an ascending proportion still lifting you up to something that is more excellent; for there is always a gradation in the creatures.

In the general, there are elements, metals, plants, living creatures, and then living creatures of a higher and lower rank, still leading to something that is more perfect.

In metals, there are some more base, and others more noble, to lead you higher and higher; there is iron, lead, tin, brass, silver, gold.

In plants, some bear leaves, others flowers, others fruits, others aromatic gums and spices.

There is a progress in nature in all kinds of creatures, to lead up man still to something more excellent; especially in living creatures, there is an ascending proportion which leads them up to God, and more especially in man.

Some creatures have only being; others besides being, have life; others, besides life, have sense; others, besides sense, have reason and understanding; and man is in a lower sphere of understanding than the angels, and the angels than God. And so we may come up to the most perfect and the highest of all beings; for instance, a stone hath not life, that grows not as a plant; a plant hath life, but feels not as a beast who hath sense; a beast who hath sense, discourseth not as a man who hath reason; and man's reason is lower than that of the angels, because it needs the ministry of fancy and imagination; fancy needs outward sense, which an angel needeth not; and an angel he is lower than God, because angels, that they may know anything, need either the presence of the object, or some revelation (if it be to come) concerning it. Therefore they are said to know the wisdom of God by what he hath revealed to the church: Eph. iii. 10, ‘To the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.’ But now, God's understanding is a pure act, who knoweth all things past, present, and to come; who needs nothing without himself; neither organ, imagination, nor presence of the object; he knows all things that may be, or can be, by his own all-sufficiency, and all things that shall be by his wise purpose and decree. Thus the creatures discover a God.¹

[4.] As creation, so also providence discovers a God. All natural

¹ See this head of the Creation more fully handled in the third verse.

things work for an end, and therefore they are governed by the counsel of some wise ruler ; for all things that work for an end, it must either be by their own choice or by the government of another. Many things cannot do so by their own choice, because they have no knowledge, yet they have a clear and certain inclination to some end ; therefore this bespeaks the wise governor of the world, that sways all things. The parts of the world being disposed into such an order, and the sweet harmony and agreement of things, which are of such different and destructive natures, show there is a wise God that guideth all things to a certain end ; all would run into disorder and confusion, if it were not poised with the art and care of providence. Many times, when we are stupid, and do not mind these things, then God discovers the sway of his providence more sensibly. God will awaken us by more notable effects : sometimes by miracles, exceeding the force of all natural causes ; sometimes by sudden and unexpected strokes in the rescue of the good and destruction of the wicked, especially of the atheists, few or none of which have escaped without some remarkable token of divine vengeance : Ps. ix. 16, 'The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth ; the wicked is snared in the works of his own hands ;' and Ps. lviii. 10, 11, 'The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance ; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily, there is a reward for the righteous ; verily, he is a God that judgeth in the earth.' God doth so sensibly interpose in the eyes of men to those that discern his dealings, that they are even forced to say, 'Verily, there is a reward for the righteous,' &c.

[5.] That there is a God, appeareth by several experiences. By the power of his word breaking in upon the consciences of men : 1 Cor. xiv. 25, 'And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest ; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' Surely there is some God guides these men. I might instance, in the prediction of things to come, which could never be foreseen by any created mind hundreds of years before they came to pass. Cyrus was named a hundred years before he was born, Isa. xlv. 1 ; and hundreds of years before Josiah was born, it was prophesied of him, 1 Kings xiii. 2, 'Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places,' &c. And the building of Jericho was foretold five hundred years before it was re-edified, Joshua vi. 26, compared with 1 Kings xvi. 34. There were many prophecies of things long before ever they came to pass, and they had their certain and effectual accomplishment. To instance, in those general prophecies of the rejection and casting off of the Jews and the calling of the gentiles, which were prophesied of long before they were brought about ; but all that was foretold was accomplished. The devils may guess at things, but they cannot certainly and infallibly know them ; God avoucheth it as his own prerogative, and he puts his godhead upon the trial : Isa. xli. 21-23, 'Produce your cause, saith the Lord ; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the king of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen : let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them ; or declare us things for to come. Show the things that are to come

hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods.' God puts it to the decision and trial. These predictions certainly were, and, as certainly, were accomplished, which shows there is a God. There are devils, and they would undo all things, were they not bound up by the chains of an irresistible providence. God suffers them now and then to discover their malice, that we may know by whose goodness we subsist. Plutarch speaketh of some that by seeing of ghosts believed there was a God. There are virtues and vices, therefore there is a God; there is a distinction between good and evil, therefore there is a God. For good is not by the appointment of man's will, for then every thing that man wills would be good; it cannot be out of any eternal reason which is in the things themselves. What should differ the conjugal act from adultery, or the process of a magistrate from that of an assassinate? No, it is from a proportion and conformity to some supreme being, that doth interpose by a law that makes those things good, and these evil. Thus you have the arguments to refresh your souls, with the reviving of the sense of his being upon your hearts.

SERMON XXXI.

For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.—HEB. xi. 6.

I now come to the improvement of this great truth.

Use 1. If there be a God, let us charge this truth then upon our hearts, that we may check those private whispers and suspicions that do arise—too often, the Lord knows—against the being and glory of God. Many times we are apt to think that God is but a fancy, that religion is but a state-curb, and the gospel a cunningly devised fable—a quaint device to please fond and foolish men; and all is but invented to hold men in awe. Oh, but to check these whispers of vanity, consider, in such truths as these, we may appeal not only to scripture, but to nature. You will never be able to recover your consciences out of this dread of the Lord's being. The devils are under the fear of a deity; they believe there is a God, and they tremble at the thought of it—'Thou believest that there is one God, thou dost well; the devils also believe and tremble,' James ii. 19. The devil can never be a flat atheist in judgment; that will not stand with the state of a damned angel, because he hath a sense of the wrath of God tormenting him; he feels that there is a God, and believes there is a God: there may be atheists in the church, but there are none in hell. And therefore charge this truth upon your hearts, that you may more check and humble yourselves for such atheistical thoughts and suggestions as these are, for they should not be passed over without humiliation, they are of so foul a nature. It is irrational to think that there is no God, the creatures confute us. We cannot look abroad but something offers itself to our eye to mind us: surely there is an infinite and eternal

power. Oh, when thoughts rush into your minds, that have a tendency towards atheism, as denying of providence, let them be abhorred and rejected. See how David takes up his heart when his thoughts arose, not against the being of God, but against his providence: Ps. lxxiii. 22, 'So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee;' when he had ill and unworthy thoughts of the providence of God. So take up your hearts—Oh, how brutish and beastly is this! When you go about to ungod God, and put him out of the throne, you do unman yourselves, you are as beasts; common sense and reason will teach you otherwise. Thoughts which strike at the being of God are thoughts of a dangerous importance; therefore you should not smother them, or lightly digest them.

A little to aggravate the sin. Wrath came upon the Jews to the uttermost for killing Christ in his human nature, but these atheistical thoughts strike at God and Christ, and all together. And therefore look upon these suggestions, when they rush in upon your minds, as dangerous; and cry out, O what a foul heart have I, that will cast forth such mire and dirt! Aggravate this sin, and make it odious to the soul, that we should think of him as nothing, who is so glorious in himself, and so gracious to them that know him. Other errors may in part darken the understanding of man, but this, if given way to, will prove a total eclipse of all spiritual light; others may trample on a precept, but this is to strike at God's very essence and being. Consider, too, that thoughts are liable to God's judgment; God hath provided for the safety and majesty of princes: Eccles. x. 20, 'Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber; for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.' Not only seditious and rebellious practices, but disloyal thoughts against magistrates, are liable to judgment; how much more, then, are atheistical thoughts, which strike at the being of God? There is a language in thoughts, and they are heard in heaven; and therefore whenever such thoughts arise in your minds, make them odious, seriously humble yourselves that your hearts should cast up dishonourable thoughts of God.

Use 2. It reproves those that either wish down, or live down, this supreme principle.

1. Some wish it down: Ps. xiv. 1, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God:' the heart is the seat of desires; they are the fool's wishes and desires, rather than his formal and explicit thoughts. 'The fool'—that is the unrenewed man, so the apostle explains it—'hath said in his heart;' that is, it is a pleasing thing for him to imagine and suppose it; so that they are pleased with the supposition, if there were no God, none to call them to an account for their sins; what kind of lives would they live? then they might let loose the reins, and be freed from all those fetters and restraints, and those melancholy and sad thoughts which religion imposeth upon them. Naturally desires and thoughts run that way. This argueth enmity and hatred to God, when we wish that he were not. Look, as it is with a malefactor that is guilty of treason, it would be pleasing to him to think the court rolls should be burnt where his crimes are recorded, and the judge destroyed; so it would be pleasing to carnal men, who are all become

guilty before the great God, that all the memorials of God should be defaced.

2. Some live it down. It is possible there may be some atheists for a while in opinion; but they are but few, if any—that are directly and purely so; but there are more in affection, and most in conversation: Titus i. 16, ‘They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.’ Your assent to this supreme principle will be judged of by your lives. There is a real language in your conversation; that is the best image and the best copy of your thoughts. Works discover what is in the heart, what secret principles lurk there, though they be not explicitly owned. Well then, when a man doth that which manifestly infers this conclusion, there is no God, then he lives down this principle; when he cares not to seek peace with God, to humble himself by repentance, to sue out for grace by Christ, then he is a practical atheist: you that should bring God into respect with others, make others suspect whether there be a God or no. There is not a greater temptation to atheism than the lives of scandalous professors, those that talk much of religion, and do not live up to the power of it. When a heathen had surprised a christian in an act of filthiness, he came to him with this smart question — *Christiane, christiane! ubi Deus tuus?*—Christian, christian! where is thy God? thy God that seeth all things? When you profess to believe an omniscient God, and yet live in filthiness, and allow yourselves in cozenage, oppression, deceit, fraud, and privy sins, and give up yourselves to a course of sin and filthy excess; when you are not ashamed to do that before God which you would blush to do before men, then you live down this principle. ‘The thief is ashamed when he is found,’ saith the prophet, Jer. ii. 26. Why? we are always found of God; God’s eye is upon us. Now, when you have no sense of this, and make no reckoning of his eye and presence, so far you live down this truth. The apostle saith in 3 John, ver. 11, ‘He that doth evil hath not seen God.’ He that goes on in a course of sin, certainly his heart was never touched with a true sight of God; for if a man thought there were a God to call him to an account and punish him, how could he thus freely give up himself to what is contrary to the will of God?

Use 3. If there be a God, then beware of such opinions and practices as strike at the being of God.

First, Opinions. The devil is crafty, he assaults us by degrees, he takes his aim at a distance, he does not directly strike at this, that there is no God; he dares not rise up against this truth, which is written upon the face of all things and upon the heart of man; but he approacheth nearer and nearer towards it, and he seeks by degrees to undermine our assent thereunto. There are many opinions which do conduce towards atheism, and aim at the undermining this supreme truth in our hearts. As—

1. Libertinism—that men of all religions shall be saved. Religion is the actual acknowledgment of God, that which preserves and keeps up his respect in the world; and therefore to make many doors to heaven, is to widen the gates of hell: it is but a pretence to out-face conscience, when it presseth us to the choice and love of truth. They think if men can smoothe their carriage a little, and live a good life—heathens, Turks,

and men of all religions may be saved. No; deceive not yourselves; there is but 'one faith,' but 'one Lord,' Eph. iv. 5. If you do not establish one faith, you will soon deny one Lord; for one doth preserve and establish the other: Micah iv. 5, 'For all people will walk, everyone in the name of his god; and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.' In these latter times of the gospel, some grow weary of the christian religion, and by an excess of charity would betray their faith, and write and plead for the salvation of heathens, Turks, infidels, that, provided they go not against their consciences, they may be saved. The good-fellow gods of the heathens could brook company and partnership, but the true God will be acknowledged and owned alone, or else you can have no true happiness: Mat. iv. 10, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.' As the sun drowneeth the light of the lesser stars, and as there is but one God, so there is but one way to God. Then there are a sort of libertines that prevail among us, that say, It is true, there is some danger if a man be a Turk or an infidel; but among christians, it is no great matter whether a man be a papist or a protestant, of this or that profession, provided he doth act as his country doth. This is to strike at the being of God. It is no small matter of what party you cleave to in religion: Rev. xiv. 13, 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, from henceforth.' The meaning is this, those that fell under pagan superstition, they all cried up them as happy; they were looked upon as saints and martyrs that died by that persecution—ay, but saith the Spirit—'From henceforth write it;' that is, those christians which stood up for the honour of God against anti-christian persecutions they are also happy. Such an indifferency in religion is not to be allowed.

2. The denying of particular providence, and exempting of human actions from God's predetermination and dominion. Many think that the world is but as a great clock, which is set right at first by God, afterwards it is left to its own motion. The heathens had such a sense of God that they counted them atheists that denied providence; and to deny providence is to exempt the creature from subjection and dependence upon God. Therefore take heed of those doctrines that would make God an idle spectator of the world, as if he were shut up within the heavens, and had nothing to do with the affairs of the world. But they fall out, as men will. The scriptures tell you there is not a sparrow that can fall to the ground without your heavenly Father, and that he looks after the young ravens, and feeds them. It was the wicked blasphemy of Vorstius to say, God was not at leisure to tell the gnats, and count the number of your hairs; to feed the ravens, and look after every creature, and so would exempt many things from God's providence; but exempt anything from providence, and you will soon run into all manner of libertinism. If Satan and wicked men may do what they will, and God be only a looker-on, then we may worship the devil lest he hurt us; and fear men, though God be propitious to us. Heathens, though they acknowledged a God, yet, because they exempted evil actions from the dominion of providence, they fell into many mistakes in worship—this was one. The heathens had a conceit there were evil powers, which were first to be pacified;

then good powers, that were afterwards to be invoked—first, they would appease evil powers, sacrifice to evil gods, and then invoke the good ; therefore it is dangerous to exempt anything from God's providence, for it is God that orders all the evil that falls out in the world.

3. Denying the immortality of the soul. Besides that, it cuts off the hopes of the everlasting recompenses, and so destroys the chiefest part of God's providence, it is a stroke at God's being, who is the supreme of spirits. There is an order among spirits ; first, the souls of men, then angels, then God. And look, as God under the law forbade cruelty to the beasts ; as in that law, that birds were not to be killed in breeding time ; that they should not seethe a kid in the mother's milk ; that a good man should be merciful to his beast ; now these laws, as divines well observe, are a rail and fence about the life of man. God would have us at such a distance from cruelty, that he would not have us cruel to our beasts. So say I ; there are orders and degrees of spirits, which are as it were a fence about the sense we have of the being and majesty of God ; so that to deny the immortality of the soul is a stroke at a distance at the eternity and being of God. For one great argument, to prove the being of God is the immortality of the soul. If the soul be not extinguished with the body, there must be some supreme infinite spirit to which it is gathered ; and indeed the sleep of the soul is a step to this opinion. Hearken not to those opinions ; it is good to take the little foxes : Cant. ii. 15, 'Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines.' It is good to resist errors when they come with the most modest appearance.

4. Another thing that tends extremely to atheism, is popery ; for though they have the principles of christian religion among them, yet there are so many superadditions, that it is a dangerous inducement to atheism ; and for matter of experience, this is clear, that where popery has the most absolute command, there atheism most abounds. Now how doth popery tend to atheism ? Upon several accounts ; partly, because it is a pompous formal religion, consisting of many idle and ridiculous ceremonies, which cannot but beget a secret contempt and scorn of religion, in the eyes of wise and considering men ; and partly, because though they have the fundamentals of christianity amongst them, yet take the superstructures of popery, and it is a doctrine calculated for the present world, and fitted for human policy and for temporal ends ; and partly, as it is supported by forged miracles, and lying legends—all which are very apt to beget suspicions in the hearts of men, and make them to question all, when they see religion supported with so many lies and forgeries ; and partly, because these opinions are so monstrous, as that of transubstantiation and others, which are contrary to the nature and being of God ; and from thence have a mighty tendency to breed atheism in the hearts of men.

5. The expectation of new light beyond the scripture—a conceit that possesseth the hearts of many now-a-days. I do not speak of degrees of knowledge—for so certainly we are to expect new light every day ; as long as we are in the world, we grow in knowledge—but I speak of a new revelation. It is possible that future light may disprove many of our present practices ; but when we expect new revelations

beyond the word, it leads to atheism. Fundamental truths should be sure: Deut. xii. 30, 'We should not enquire after their gods.' The Wigelians, who are the same with our familists, expect *seculum Spiritus sancti*—the age of the Holy Ghost; for they imagine God the Father had his time, that was the law; God the Son had his time, that was the gospel; and the Holy Ghost shall have his time, when there shall be new revelations given to the world, and we shall be wiser than the apostles, and have a clearer light. Some expect a time before the resurrection, when we shall live here in the world without ordinances. Ay; but 'This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come,' Mat. xxiv. 14: 'And I am with you alway, even to the end of the world,' Mat. xxviii. 20. No other revelation is to be expected till the Lord come. These are but vain devices to cheat you of your religion, and to keep the soul from a settlement in the present truth, and that way of religion that God hath appointed and set up, to keep up his respects in the world. Thus you need to be skilled in the subtle enterprises of Satan, that lies in wait to deceive.

Secondly, There are practices, which are most contrary to the essence and glory of God; as—

1. Hypocrisy, which is an implicit blasphemy: Rev. ii. 9, 'I know the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and are not;' when a man makes it all his business to hold up a fair pretence in the world, and makes a fair show in the flesh; but he careth not how he be before God, and cherishes noisome lusts in his heart. Do they walk answerably to the belief of a God that have no regard to the eye of God? No, they disbelieve this truth, and it is hereby weakened more and more in their hearts. Hypocrites are the greatest practical atheists in the world; they do in effect say, So we can carry it plausibly and handsomely before men for worldly ends, we need not stand for the eye of God.

2. Epicurism and carnal living, whereby men contemn God. When men are full, and enjoy a great deal of plenty, they spend all their time in eating, drinking, hunting, hawking, sporting, carding, dicing, and wholly give up themselves to carnal pleasures and vain delights; they do not seek after God: Ps. xiv. 1, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works;' and ver. 2, 'The Lord looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.' A dissolute luxury rooted by custom will soon deface the impression and memory of a God. Who would sin if they thought there was a God who knew all, and would punish the sinner? 3 John 11, 'He that doth evil hath not seen God.' When men wallow in all manner of sensual delights and filthiness, this raiseth steams and vapours in the soul. The smoking of fleshly lusts mightily clouds the mind, so that the awe and feelings of conscience are by degrees worn out: Prov. xxx. 9, 'Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?' When men live at ease, and have wholly given up themselves to vain pleasures, and are inordinately set upon liberty, they grow impatient of restraint and strong desires, as men in high places are impatient of contradiction; and because conscience is clamouring, and religion will be interposing and awakening their hearts,

therefore they question the truth and being of God, else they cannot keep all quiet in their souls. Men believe what they desire; none so apt to deny God as those that would be glad if there were no God. When men are willing to sin, and loath to seek quiet in repentance, they seek it in atheism and unbelief—first, they wish there could be no religion: and by little and little they wear out the feelings of it, and silence all the checks they have in their consciences.

3. Scoffers. Scoffing at matters of religion is both an effect and cause of atheism. Apostates are always great scoffers, because they seek to deface and blot out the reverence of those truths and that religion they have forsaken, which otherwise would put them to trouble and horror. Thus Julian the apostate, when he revolted from the christian faith, was a mighty scoffer. Men of a vicious life and frothy wit are of a fit temper for the devil to make atheists of. Every man is under the awe of some religion more or less; they have too much knowledge to be idolaters, and too little grace to be religious; therefore they fall a mocking and scoffing at all things that are sacred; and so they deface the knowledge of God in their souls: 2 Peter iii. 3, 'There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.' And Calvin, in his comment, takes notice of such; that there are certain men of Lucian's spirit, under colour of declaiming against superstition and the fond conceits of popery: they abhor all religion, and cry down all that is holy and sacred. The rabbis have a conceit upon those words—*Diis non maledices*, 'Thou shalt not speak evil of the gods.' Though they are out in the exposition—for it is meant of magistrates—yet they expound it, they should not scoff at the gods of the gentiles, lest, say they, we provoke them to scoff at the true God, and so our reverence and respect to religion be weakened. Many men get a vein at jesting at sermons, and applying scripture to every profane and common matter; they make it as sauce to their meals, and make the word of God and holy things to lackey to their sports and profane mirth; so that by a custom of scoffing at holy matters, and by venting the superfluities of their frothy wit, they blot out a reverence of God, and exceedingly weaken the awe of religion; and this conduceth to eclipse the light that is in our minds concerning this supreme truth that there is a God.

Use 4. If he that cometh to God must believe that God is. It directs us what to do in fierce and boisterous temptations. It is not good to leave the dispute then, in a time of temptation, to the uncertain traverses and debates of reason: foundation-stones must not be loosened. When our hearts are under the cloud of a temptation, the devil will be too hard for us in matter of argument; we must believe that God is. It is a matter not only of science, but of faith: it is revealed in scripture, and therefore say, Though I could not make it good against all those fiery darts the devil casts into my soul, yet I will believe it. Though it be good to see upon what firm footing we stand at other times, yet in a time of temptation it is confutation enough to say to Satan, Thou liest; and hold fast that principle he would wrest from us. In principles, sometimes we must answer Satan with resolution; the world shows, and the creature shows, there is a God; but if the world did not, it is enough that the word of God saith it. And therefore,

though the devil should puzzle reason and put the thoughts to a *non-plus*, yet whatever he should allege to the contrary, say, This is a maxim of God's word, and I will, and do, and must believe it. Doubts, which strike at first principles, are not to be scanned and examined; for when you think to conquer atheism by your own wit and reasoning, the devil will be too subtle for you. Satan is a better disputant than many a poor christian; therefore believe it, though you cannot dispute it out. I commend this, because it hath always been the practice of the saints, that when they have been sorely shaken and assaulted, yet they were resolved to stick to principles, and in the hour of temptation they fixed their resolutions and would not be removed from them. As David, Ps. lxxiii. 1, he was under an atheistical temptation, and had brutish thoughts that there was no providence, because the wicked were exalted, and it went ill with the righteous; yet he holds fast this principle—'Truly God is good to Israel;' I will never be brought off from this. So Jer. xii. 1, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee;' he would lay up this principle, this truth, with great assurance at that time, I take this for a principle that God is righteous, though I cannot answer all my thoughts about his administrations in the world.

Use 5. If this be the first point of faith, to believe that there is a God, then it shows with what care we should maintain this principle. There are certain seasons when it is most assaulted.

1. There is a general season, and that is in the latter times. Atheism will then more abound, though it be more disguised. *Mundus senescens patitur phantasias*—the world, when it grows old, begins to dote, as old men come to dotage. There are many dreams and delusions the old world is subject to; many errors then are set a-foot. Well then, there being a secret cognation and link between truth and truth, therefore all errors do more or less shake the primitive and supreme truth; and also, we had need to fortify ourselves because of the many divisions which are in the church. Divisions in the church breed atheism in the world, therefore Christ prays, John xvii. 21, 'That they all may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me;' that is, that the carnal world may know that I am no impostor. When there are divisions in religion it makes men suspect all, and then they will not believe Christ is the true Messiah. I remember, one observes, that when there is but one main division, that adds zeal of both sides; but when we are crumbled into many divisions and factions, then religion is exceedingly weakened; and men grow cold and indifferent, and begin to lose all awe of religion and all sense of God; therefore you had need to stand your ground, and be fortified against atheistical thoughts because of the scandals of religion. We are told, 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2, 'In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters,' &c. 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,' ver. 5. Now when they see the professors of religion so scandalous, unrighteous, turbulent, and self-seeking, and wallowing in filthy delights, and yet pretend to strictness in religion, and all this is carried on under a form of godliness, men will think that religion itself is nothing else but an empty pretence, or a cover for unclean intents and evil practices, and so cast off all.

And they will be strengthened herein by the world's continuance ; so the apostle Peter : 2 Peter iii. 4, ' All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.' There are no preparations towards the accomplishment of the christian's great hopes and Christ's coming to judgment ; therefore it is the most needful point that can be pressed to fortify your hearts against atheism. These are the general seasons.

2. There are certain particular seasons when we are most in danger of atheism ; usually when the soul is under a passion and yet against providence, and we cavil at God and repine at his dispensations ; for all grievances breed passions, and passions exceedingly cloud the soul, and then we are in danger. There are several seasons when this is like to befall us.

[1.] When we see the holy and pure worshippers of God to be in the worst case, then we fall into a distrust of all religion ; and if there be a God, that he doth neglect his duty to the world. When mischief falls upon the good, it is a shrewd temptation to atheism ; indeed nothing should be out of order to faith, and providence should not work thus on us, but thus it doth. This hath been a wind that hath shaken not only shrubs and reeds, but the tallest cedars in Lebanon ; as David, Jeremiah. Habakkuk, and the holy men of God, they have been questioning, Why doth the way of the wicked prosper ? This hath been their great temptation. God's children must be put to sore trials that their graces may appear ; they will not understand that this is the place of exercise, nor of recompenses, and therefore they take offence against God.

[2.] When our own prayers are not heard, when we have been solicitous at the throne of grace with much earnestness and importunity, and yet speed not, we are apt to be so partial to our own desires, that we fall a questioning the being of God himself, as if we would take a kind of revenge upon him, because he hath not heard our prayers. Fond creatures would have grace at their own beck and command, and if we be disappointed, and God do not come in when we will, then we storm. And thus the devil hath a great advantage against many poor trembling souls that have lain under the terrors of the Lord ; they have been calling for mercy and quietness of conscience, and yet their fears increase. Now the devil abuseth their discontent, and seeks to draw them to atheism. Exod. xvii. 7, when Israel wanted water, then they said—' Is the Lord among us or not ? ' and the prophet, Hab. i. 2, ' O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear ! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save.' He had been calling upon God, and the Lord seemed not to answer. How did this work ? it brought him to this temptation, to question the being of God ; but see how he corrects himself : ver. 12, ' Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine holy one ? O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment.' Thus he doth expostulate with himself, Why should I have these dreadful thoughts ? God is God still ; and then he begins to recover out of the temptation. Pettish desires, that are earnest and solicitous, and finally crossed, do always put us upon murmuring, and murmuring upon doubts and discontent ; and then the devil hath a great advantage, for he works exceedingly upon spleen

and stomach. Therefore when men are in a pet, angry with God, and have not their heart's desire, they are liable to this sin.

[3.] When oppression goes unrevenge, men pervert judgment, and others forswear themselves; and our innocence doth not prevail, but we perish in it: the devil works upon this, and takes advantage of our discontent. Diagoras, a notable atheist among the heathens, became so upon this occasion; he saw a man deeply forswearing himself, and because he was not smitten suddenly with a thunderbolt, he turned atheist, and falls a questioning whether there was a God or no. When we see such oppression, it is a sore temptation, and we cry out, Is there a God? See how the Holy Ghost prevents such kind of thoughts as these are: Eccles. iii. 16, 17, 'I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.' What then? He interposeth timely, for fear lest a temptation should prevent him—'I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose, and for every work;' ver. 18, 'I said in my heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.' God will have a time to judge this matter; he doth recover this great principle out of the hands of the temptation. So Eccles. v. 8, 'If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter.' A man's heart is apt to rise upon such an occasion; he stands trembling—What! is there any divine power, any God that takes notice of human affairs? The Holy Ghost interposeth seasonably—'For he that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they.' There is a God. A man is apt to unravel all religion in his thoughts, and to think that there is none to take cognisance of the matter; therefore when it goes ill with the best, when your prayers are not answered, when oppression goes unrevenge, you should guard your heart with this consideration, There is a higher than the highest.

SERMON XXXII.

For he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.—HEB. xi. 6.

Use 6. Here is a direction to us in our addresses to God. Fix our thoughts on the consideration of his being—'He that cometh to God, must believe that God is'—say, I do not go now to speak to an idol, but to the living God. Every one that comes to God should by actual thoughts revive this principle upon his memory and affections, for this will be of great advantage to him—Why?

1. To avoid customariness; for otherwise we shall be perfunctory and customary. It was the saying of a wretch, speaking of public worship—*Eamus ad communem errorem*—Let us go to the common error. If men do not say so, or think so in opinion, yet this is the

language of their practice ; they do not act as unto a God. The God of a carnal customary worshipper is but an idol. In the duty of prayer, many a man comes and makes a large confession to God, but feels no grief and shame. Let him but speak half so much against himself to his guilty fellow-creature, one that is but despicable dust and ashes, the man would blush and be ashamed ; yet he can speak it to God, and have no remorse. If they are put upon examination before a magistrate, and make such a confession, how would they tremble ! yet they are not humbled at the remembrance of God. Alas ! man hath but a drop of indignation against sin ; the best are made up of mixed principles ; man cannot be so severe as the holy God. Man hates evil, because it is against his interest ; but God hates evil, because it is against his nature. And therefore what is the reason we have not this remorse, shame, and lively sorrow, when we are repeating the sad story of our lives to God ? It cannot be from confidence of God's mercy ; for when conscience is awakened and scourged for those sins, it is the most difficult thing in the world then to get comfort ; but we are customary and careless, and do not weigh the matter ; so for supplication, we do but tell a fair tale, and make it but a matter of talk, and do but fill up a little time with words, and consider not that we are speaking to the living God ; if we did, we would be more reverent and serious when we make mention of him. Put it in a temporal case : Mal. i. 8. 'If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil ?' and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil ? offer it now unto thy governor ; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person ?' If I were admitted into the presence of a great king, and were to make my requests in a matter of great concernment, would I not look after them, and observe how my requests are granted ? But, alas ! we throw away our prayers, as children shoot away their arrows, and never look after them. So for thanksgiving, we would have a more warm sense of the courtesies of men, if a man had but done half so much for us ; but we give the Lord but cold and drowsy thanks.

2. To avoid irreverence. The angels are said to have six wings—'And with twain they covered their faces, and with twain they covered their feet,' &c. Isa. vi. 3. They fear not commutative justice, and are assured of the favour of God ; yet they clap their wings, and cover their faces. Fear is a duty compatible with the blessed estate ; we have more cause, but they have more grace ; we do not see him that is invisible, and visible objects only work upon us.

3. To avoid deadness. I am speaking to the living God, Heb. ix. 14, 'To serve the living God.' Worship must be proportionable to the object of worship. The heathens offered a flying horse to the sun as most suitable, because of the swiftness of his motion. Dead service may become a dead idol, but not a living God. I should raise up myself and deal in good earnest with him.

4. To beget a confidence. God is not a vain help that cannot save us,—'We trust in the living God,' 1 Tim. vi. 18. Baal's priests may draw blood from themselves, but could not get a word of answer from their idol ; but we speak to a God that is at the other end of causes, that hath influence upon all things, one that needs but speak the word, and we shall be whole.

But what thoughts are fittest to fix our hearts on the being of God when we are in prayer? or so to keep our hearts under a sense of God's being in that duty, as that we may conceive of him aright? I shall handle this case—

[1.] For the necessity of it; it is not a curious business, as those requests, Exod. xxxiii. 18, 'Lord, show me thy glory;' and John xiv. 8, 'Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us;' but it is necessary, for without it our services are profane, customary, irreligious. John iv. 22, 'Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship.' Our cogitations do fleet and vanish without some determinate and comprehensible object, whereon to fix and fasten them. As a ball struck in the open air never comes to hand again, so are our thoughts lost and scattered, except we determine and settle them on some notions of God that may be expressive of his being.

[2.] Because it is difficult to determine it for two reasons:—

(1.) Because of the infiniteness and incomprehensibleness of God's essence. God is said sometimes to dwell in light, and sometimes to dwell in darkness. He is said to dwell in light, to show the greatness of his majesty: 1 Tim. vi. 16, 'Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light, which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see.' And he is said to dwell in darkness, to show our weakness and incapacity to apprehend him: Ps. xviii. 11, 'He made darkness his secret place, his pavilion round about him were dark waters, and thick clouds of the sky.' When we come to discourse of God, we are as a man that is born blind, who knows there is light in the world, though he cannot conceive what a kind of thing it is. So reason and conscience will tell us that there is a God; but what God is, and how to form proper thoughts of him, that we cannot tell.

(2.) Because of the danger of erring, lest while we go about to establish a right notion of God, we make way for atheism. Prying too far into his majesty may prove a temptation. We cannot search out the Almighty to perfection: Judges xiii. 18, 'Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?' It is impossible for man to comprehend God.

Now I shall answer the case in some propositions:—

First, That you may conceive aright of the nature of God, above all things, you must renew and revive the act of your faith in God's essence and presence; that he is, and that he is present with us, when we pray to him.

1. That he is. So it is in the text—'He that cometh to God must believe that he is.' Though we cannot conceive what he is, yet we must be sure to fix our hearts in this, that he is. This is the great principle and ground-work of all, and it must be laid as a foundation of our worship and approaches to God. The work of faith is to give us a sight of him that is invisible. When Moses asked God's name, God answereth him—'I am,' Exod. iii. 14, 'I am hath sent me unto you.' God would give him no other name than this—'I am,' which deciphereth his essence. Certainly acts of worship would be managed with more awe and reverence, if this principle were firmly laid up in the heart, that God is. Reason shows that he is, though we know not what he is; faith can only show what he is to us. Vision will show us what

he is in himself ; that is, our happiness and glory in heaven : 1 John iii. 2, ' When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' Now we must actually revive this faith, that God is ; we must see him that is invisible : Heb. xi. 27, ' By faith Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king ; for he endured, as seeing him that is invisible.' It is a great work of faith to believe that God is—that there is an invisible God, that so you may adore a spiritual majesty, which you know to be, though you cannot comprehend him, how he is, and what he is, nor search out the almighty to perfection.

2. That God is present with you in the worship that you are about to perform, that he is an all-seeing Spirit, and that he is intimately acquainted with all the workings of your hearts : John iv. 24, ' God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.' He sees how your spirits and hearts work in all your approaches to his majesty, and you should so regard him as if you did see him with your bodily eyes. All duties are expressed in scripture by drawing nigh to God, for they bring the soul into God's presence. Prayer is but our conference with God : Gen. xviii. 27, ' I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes.' Now all speech is to them that are present, and hearken to us : if we speak to God, we must conceive him to be really present, hearkening to us. And hearing is God's conference with us : Acts x. 33, ' We are all here present before the Lord to hear all things that are commanded thee of God ;' and therefore when you come to pray, say, I have not to do with men, but with God ; when you come to hear, say, I have not to do with the preacher only, but with God : Heb. iv. 12, ' All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to deal.' Certainly, God is, whom I worship this day. I am going to confer with the true God, and to hear him speaking to me ; he is present with me, and therefore to be thought of, as if I could see him with my bodily eyes : Acts xvii. 27, ' God is not far from every one of us.' When we come to worship God, he is not only near us, but within us, more intimately present with us than we are with ourselves. You could not keep your breath in your bodies, nor speak a word, if he were not there ; as, if the sun should withdraw his light, all would be darkness. This is the first thing, if you would rightly conceive of God ; when you come to him you must fix your heart in the apprehension of his essence and presence.

Secondly, You must conceive of him aright, and according as he hath revealed himself ; lest in worshipping God you worship an idol. It is a high contempt of his majesty if we do not conceive of him according to his excellent glory. Now for the conceiving of him aright, which was the difficulty propounded, take these two rules—

1. There must be no carnal conceit and representation in your minds. Though we cannot conceive of him as he is, yet we must take heed that we do not conceive of him as he is not. We are all born idolators, and are naturally prone to fashion God according to some form of our own—to turn the glory of God into the fashion of a corruptible thing. Look, as some have an external idol, so we have a mental idol, when we are transforming the essence of God into fleshly conceits of our own. We must conceive of God, purely, simply, spiritually, as of a spiritual being, without form and without matter ; and as of an infinite being,

without all limits and bounds. It was the saying of a heathen, Those that made images and pictures of God, took away fear and established error. Pictures to represent God do debase the nature of God, and make him contemptible; and images of God are so natural to us, that we can hardly dispossess our minds of them. Imaginations are as bad as images; he that forbiddeth images in the church, doth also forbid them in our mind. A picture or corporeal resemblance of the divine essence is worse in the mind than in the glass windows. By pictures and resemblances of the divine essence, heathen idolatry began: Rom. i. 21, 'They were vain in their imaginations;' and then it follows, ver. 23, 'They changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things;' and ver. 25, 'Who changed the glory of God into a lie, and worshipped the creature more than the creator, who is blessed forever.' We that converse altogether with material and sensible beings, are very prone to conceive of God according to those things about which we are conversant. And that is the reason why there are so many cautions in the word everywhere against it: Deut. iv. 15, 16, 'Take good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude in the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire; lest you corrupt yourselves and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female.' When God discovered himself to his people, there was no image, no outward figure; there was only a voice. Though common awe may restrain us from making an outward image, yet we are very prone to frame inward images, and draw representations of God in our minds. There are secret atheistical thoughts within us, by which we are apt to debase the nature of God to the common likeness, and fancy him according to the shape and fashion of visible substances. Therefore the Lord saith, Isa. xl. 18, 'To whom will you liken God? or what likeness will you compare unto him?' We are apt to liken God to some outward and visible being; but in all your addresses to God, you must conceive of him as a Spirit, without figure and shape. It is true, the scripture doth often use words that are of a corporeal sense and signification concerning God, but that is for the infirmity and weakness of our apprehensions. God lispeneth to us in our own dialect; but whatsoever is spoken to us after the manner of men must be understood after the manner of God. Serapion, dwelling too much on these carnal expressions, fell into the error of the Anthropomorphites, who believed God to have a human shape. Sensible things indeed are of use to us in prayer, but then they should be used by way of argument rather than representation. When we argue *a minori ad majus*, from the lesser to the greater, it is good. As when we would advance God, and exalt his love and care in our thoughts, we may argue from sensible things, and reason from the wisdom of a father, or from the bowels of a mother: Isa. xlix. 15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee;' and Mat. vii. 11, 'If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' There is no father or mother like God; no father so wise, no mother so tender as God is. Again, when we would

shame ourselves when we are but coldly affected with our approaches to God, we may reason—If I were to accuse myself as thus guilty before a common judge, would I not tremble? If I should come in such a cold manner to man, would he regard me? Mal. i. 8, ‘Offer it to thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?’ You must take heed that you conceive of God purely, simply, spiritually.

2. We must conceive of God according to his praises in the word. Hereafter we shall see him as he is, which is our happiness in heaven; now we can only see him as he is pleased to reveal himself to us. This way is most easy and of greatest profit and safety; for though these representations are imperfect notions and conceptions, that are not every way proportionable to the nature and infiniteness of God, yet they are enough to beget reverence. Therefore it is observable, when Moses desired to see God’s glory, the Lord pardoned what was of curiosity in the request, and answered him in what was necessary; and what doth God do? He only proclaims his name: Exod. xxxiv. 6, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious,’ &c. These are the conceptions we must have of God. And so, when we would form a proper notion of God in our addresses to him: 1 Tim. i. 17, ‘Now unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.’ Thus must we conceive of God as a spiritual essence, as the great governor of the world—most wise, most holy, infinitely and eternally good; I might heap up for this many places of scripture. These are names which are given to those things, which we would most magnify and commend; and so, when they are conceived in a spiritual mind, they are most fit to stir up worship and religious affection to God; whereas we draw a snare upon ourselves when we would go higher and see his essence. Face to face is the dispensation of another world, when we shall have other eyes and other hearts; now all we can do, and as much as we can aspire to, is to look upon his back parts, and to consider those praises which the scripture puts upon him. Œcolampadius, when he was preaching a sermon to young men, said, If you would know what God is, you must first know what goodness is, what justice, mercy, bounty, loving-kindness, and truth is; then you shall know God, for God is mercy, goodness, loving-kindness, and truth itself. And you must know that these attributes are in God in an infinite manner, of which finite creatures are no competent judges; and then look upon all these perfections as shining forth, and discovering themselves in the human nature of Christ. He that cannot look upon the sunbeams in its strength at noon-day, may take view of it in the water, or when the moon is at full; so we that cannot behold the glory of the divine majesty as he is in himself, may safely behold his perfections as they shone forth in the man Christ Jesus. This is the way of knowing God, by fixing our minds upon him as the first cause, the creator and governor of all things.

Thirdly, There must be such a representation of God as may make the spirit awful, but not servile; we must have such thoughts of God as may increase our reverence, not weaken our delight; the spirit begets awful, but yet ingenuous thoughts of God. This is a rule, that our affections in our services must be suited to the nature of God. Now, in all the scriptural descriptions of God, there is a mixture and com-

position of God's attributes, to show that there should be a like mixture in our affections. As in God, there is a mixture of justice and mercy, and of power and love; so in us, there should be a mixture of hope and fear, of joy, delight, and reverence, that the excesses of one affection may be corrected by the mixture and exercise of another. That there is such a mixture in God's attributes is clear: Deut. vii. 7-10, 'The Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, keeping covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments, and repayeth them that hate him.' So Exod. xxxiv. 6, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious,' &c.; but then it is added, ver. 7, 'He will by no means clear the guilty.' So Jer. ix. 24, 'I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth;' and Daniel ix. 4, 'O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments'—a dreadful God, and yet full of mercy and sweetness. The like mixture should there be in our affections, when we come to address ourselves to God: Ps. ii. 11, 'Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.' There must be joy, but mixed with a holy trembling: so 1 Peter i. 17, 'If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' There is a mixture in God's appellations and our affections. In God's appellations he is a father and yet a judge; and there must be the like mixture in our affections, and in the temper and disposition of our spirits, 'to call him father,' and yet 'serve him with fear;' there must be a child-like reverence and a child-like confidence. Now, because this is the exact temper of spirit that is fit for duty, I shall a little examine what considerations are most proper and likely to keep the spirit awful, and what considerations are most likely to keep the spirit cheerful in a way of hope and filial confidence.

I. The considerations that are like to keep the spirit awful.

[1.] Consider his wonderful purity and holiness. There is no attribute that drives a creature to astonishment and self-aborrancy so much as God's holiness. We dread him for his wrath, power, and justice; but all these are rooted in his holiness: 1 Sam. vi. 20, 'Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?' This is that which makes the guilty tremble, and the purest creatures are abashed at the presence of God. It is said of the cherubim: Isa. vi. 2, 3, 'they covered their faces, and 'Cried one to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.' This awed the angels—God's holiness, his immaculate and unspotted glory, and they covered their faces as if they were ashamed of those seeds of folly that are in the angelical nature, the changeableness of their nature. Though the angels do not fear the strokes of God's justice, yet they tremble at the purity of his presence. And the children of God dread him for his holiness; so the prophet cries out: Isa. vi. 5, 'Wo is me! for I am undone: because I am a man of polluted lips, and mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.' This is that attribute in which the creatures are most defective, and in which God doth most excel; and therefore it renders God most awful, and affects the creature with shame. Joshua xxiv. 19, 'You cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God.' It is his holiness awakens his justice, which makes him take notice of our failings.

[2.] Reflect upon the majesty of God and the glory of his attendants. Whenever we come to worship him, we worship him in the presence of angels and archangels. The children of God find by experience that not only the presence of God, but the presence of angels is a very moving consideration. We are more apt to conceive of finite essences than of that which is infinite, as coming nearest and bordering more upon our own manner of being, and because we can more securely and without danger form a representation of them. Therefore consider you are standing before God and all his holy angels: Ps. cxxxviii. 1, 'Before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.' The Septuagint reads it—'Before the angels.' The angels are present in the assemblies of the saints, which was deciphered by the pictures of the cherubim which were in the temple; and upon this account, the apostle urgeth reverence in the worship of God, that the women should cover their heads, 'because of the angels.' 1 Cor. xi. 10. They are conscious to all those impurities and indecencies in worship that we are guilty of: and therefore to greaten our reverence of God, it is good to consider that we worship him in the presence of his holy angels. The saints in the old testament trembled at the appearance of an angel. If we should come before an earthly prince sitting on his throne, environed with his nobles, how should we be afraid! Consider, thou standest before God, who is encompassed with cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, angels, archangels: Dan. vii. 10, 'Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.'

[3.] Compare the divine glory and our own vileness: Gen. xviii. 27, 'I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes.' We should think of the frailty of our constitution, and the impurity of our hearts: Eccles. v. 2, 'Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth.' There is not so great a distance between heaven and earth as between God and you. The prophet useth an expression, Isa. xl. 15, 'All nations before thee are but as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance.' If you should put a great weight in one scale, and nothing but dust in the other, this is a small resemblance of the disproportion between God and us. I confess our expressions are many times humble, but the tongue prescribes to the heart, rather than the heart to the tongue; and so they are but a vanity of speech, which the Lord abhors, vain compliments, that do not arise from a deep and inward sense of God's excellences.

2. The considerations that are likely to keep the heart cheerful. There is not only fear required, but such a fear as is consistent with a holy ingenuity and confidence, that is becoming the sweetness of religion. Worship is not the task of slaves, but the duty of children; and God would have you come with an ingenuous liberty and freedom into his presence. To this end—

[1.] Consider the sweet representations that are made of God's mercy in scripture. Luther said, It is the intent of the whole scripture to represent God to be merciful to sinners. This is the attribute he most delights in. See how God proclaimed his name, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiv-

ing iniquity, and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generations.' There is more of mercy; and God begins with mercy, because it is his chiefest attribute; so Micah vii. 18, 'Mercy pleaseth him.' It is the delightful act of God to exercise mercy; the expectation of it is not more pleasing to you than the exercise of it is to God; it is like live honey, that drops of its own accord. Justice and all punitive acts are said to be extorted from him. Though God is necessarily just, as well as necessarily merciful, and vindictive justice be part of his essence, yet that which God delighteth in is mercy, James ii. 13, 'Mercy rejoiceth against judgment.' When in the conflict of the attributes, mercy can be exercised and gets the upper hand, there is a triumph and rejoicing in heaven. Gracious dispensations come freely, but judicial and penal acts are expressed in scripture as if they were forced and drawn from God: Isa. xxviii. 21, 'That he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act;' and Lam. iii. 33, 'He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.' When there is a rod in his hand, there are tears in his eyes. This is the whole design of the scriptures to represent God so, as that we may pitch upon God as merciful, gracious, and willing to do good to the creature.

[2.] Look upon God as he hath revealed himself in Jesus Christ. The gospel is the image of Christ, and Christ is the image of God. There is the likeness and picture of Christ in the gospel, but Jesus Christ is the lively image: 2 Cor. iv. 4, 'Lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them;' that is, lest they know the mercifulness of God's heart in Jesus Christ: the gospel shows how full of mercy Christ is, and Christ shows how full of mercy God is; and ver. 6, 'To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' God hath stamped his image on the gospel, as Cæsar's image is on the coin; but Christ is the image of God, as Cæsar's image is on his son: Col. i. 15, 'Who is the image of the invisible God.' Look into the gospel, and there you read of the condescension of Christ, how he went about doing good, healing the sick and diseased; now, just as Christ was in the days of his flesh, so is God ready and willing to do us good. The whole life of Christ was nothing but mercy and love. Now, Christ is God's lively image and picture; he shows what God is: John i. 14, 'The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' There were many emissions and beamings forth of the divine glory in the life of Christ, but that which chiefly shone out was the divine mercy: Acts x. 38, 'He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.' You should study God in Christ. When Philip said to Christ—'Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us,' Christ chides him upon this account—'Have I been so long with thee, and hast thou not known me? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,' John xiv. 7-9; you need no other discovery than my person. God is best known in Christ, wherein, as in a glass, we may find his wisdom, power, goodness, and mercy; wherein God displays his glory, without

overwhelming the creature. In Christ's transfiguration, the disciples fell down like dead men, Mat. xvii. ; they could not contain themselves. But they that cannot look upon the sun may look upon his image in the water ; so they that cannot look upon God in himself, may look upon God in Christ : the divine perfections working through the human nature of Christ are more intelligible.

Fourthly, We must in prayer form proper thoughts of God, according to those requests that we put up to him. We cannot without great distraction run through all the divine attributes at once ; it is impossible your thoughts can be fixed on so many subjects, and therefore you should single out such thoughts and considerations as will suit with your particular requests to God. Holy men of God everywhere do this ; as the apostle Paul, when he prays for peace, gives God a suitable appellation : 2 Thes. iii. 16, 'The Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means.' So when he prays for patience to bear with the infirmities and differences of others, he gives God a suitable appellation : Rom. xv. 5, 'The God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another ;' God, that hath abundance of patience, bestows it on you, that you may carry it thus. So when he speaks of the comfort that he received in his affliction, he styles God, 2 Cor. vii. 6, 'God that comforteth those that are cast down.' It is a commendable policy, and a great help to our thoughts in prayer, when we pitch upon an attribute that suiteth with our present wants, or doth imply an ability and disposition in God to do us good. When you come to be humbled in the presence of God, you must look upon Christ as a judge ; when you come to have your sins mortified, you must look upon Christ as a physician. In your closet-addresses to God, suit the descriptions of God according to your exigencies and wants. When David begs defence, then God is his 'fortress' and munition of rocks ; when he begs success against enemies, then God is the 'horn of his salvation ;' in a time of peace, God is his 'habitation ;' in a time of war, he is his 'refuge :' Ps. xci. 9, 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is thy refuge, even the most high thy habitation.' alluding to the time of peace and the time of trouble.

Fifthly, Frame fit notions concerning the trinity, that there are three persons in one godhead. Now to direct you, herein take these rules—

1. This mystery is to be believed, not disputed, and committed to the anxious traverses of our own reason. Silence reason, by what is revealed ; anxious inquiries do but distract the mind. We shall never know the full of this mystery till we come to heaven : John xiv. 20, 'At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.' But though we know not how it is, it is enough for us to know that it is so.

2. The real and practical honour of the trinity is best. Then do we honour the trinity in unity, not when we conceive of the mystery, but when we make a religious use of this high advantage—to come to God, in the name of Christ, by the Spirit, and look for all from God in Christ through the Holy Ghost. Direct your prayers to God the Father ; Christ prayed to the Father, Mat. xi. 25, 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth,' &c. So the saints in their addresses : Eph. iii. 14, 'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father

of our Lord Jesus Christ.' In the name of Christ, John xiv. 13, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.' By the Spirit, Jude 20, 'Praying in the Holy Ghost;' Rom. viii. 26, 27, 'Likewise the Spirit itself also helpeth our infirmities,' &c., 'because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.' Christians need not puzzle themselves about conceiving of three in one, and one in three; let them in this manner come to God, and it sufficeth; make God the object, and Christ the means of access, and look for help from the Spirit.

3. If the thoughts be coldly and frigidly affected to any of the persons, you must use a cure. Many times there are many secret thoughts of atheism, which arise in us about the divine essence and subsistences; and you must seek help against them, for when they are smothered they beget a rooted hypocrisy. Thus ignorant persons think altogether of God the Father; they worship God Almighty without distinct reflections on the personal operations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, or the contrivance of salvation. Fond persons honour the Son, but neglect the Father; they carry all their respects to the person of Jesus Christ. Most neglect to glorify the Spirit. In times of knowledge, God would have our thoughts more distinct and explicit. All persons are interested in the work of grace; the love of the Father maketh way for the glory of the Son, and the glory of the Son for the power of the Spirit. No man cometh to the Son but by the Father: John vi. 44, 'No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.' No man can come to the Father but by the Son: John xiv. 6, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh to the Father but by me.' And no man is united to the Son, but by the Holy Ghost: 2 Thes. ii. 13, 'God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through the sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.' The inchoation is by the Father, the dispensation by the Son, and the consummation by the Holy Ghost; it is God's choice, Christ's purchase, and the Spirit's application. More particularly, if you are coldly affected towards God the Father, consider he spared not his own Son: John iii. 16, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.' His love brought Christ to you, and you to Christ, the Father's pure elective love: John xvii. 6, 'Thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word.' His love keepeth you in Christ: John xvi. 27, 'For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.' If you are coldly affected towards Christ, think that 'he loved you, and gave himself for you,' Gal. ii. 20; if towards the Spirit, consider that it is God the Spirit that exhibits, applies, and seals all to us: Eph. iv. 30, 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.' The persons in the trinity glorify one another: John xvi. 14, 'He shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you;' there is the Spirit's glorifying Christ. John xiv. 13, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; there is Christ's glorifying the Father. Phil. ii. 9, 10, 'God hath exalted him, and given him a name above every name: that

at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father; there is the Father's glorifying Christ and an honour and and glory thence redounding to the Father.

SERMON XXXIII.

And that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.—
HEB. xi. 6.

Two principles are necessary to be firmly believed of all that would entertain communion with God—God's being, and God's bounty; God's being 'That he is,' and God's bounty—'That he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' Both these principles give life to all our duties and services: and therefore a man that would please God, and live in his favour and friendship, or that would come to God, that would have anything to do with him in prayer, praise, or any other service, he must be firmly persuaded of these two things.

1. Of the being of God—that God is; otherwise why should we be touched with any sense and care of religion, unless we believe that there were a God to whom this religion is tendered; that God is not a fancy, a nothing, but a true and real being, and that the God whom we serve is he. Without this all worship would be but a foolish custom and empty formality, and a compliance with a common error, for why should we go to him whom we conceive not to be? And therefore he that would have anything to do with God must fix his heart in a belief of this principle, that God whom I now serve is that infinite, that eternal power that made me and all things.

2. The bounty of God—'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,' where observe—(1.) The notion by which his bounty is expressed—'He is a rewarder,' or a giver of rewards, *μισθαπόδοτης*. (2.) The objects or persons to whom—'Of those that diligently seek him.' Where again we may take notice of the act, 'they seek him,' and the manner 'diligently.' Both are folded up in one word in the original, *τοῖς ἐκζητοῦσιν*: the word *ζητεῖν* signifies to seek, and the compound *ἐκζητεῖν*, to seek out till one find. Now God must be sought out; we must do our uttermost to seek him till we find him; therefore our translators fitly render the word by two, 'that diligently seek him.' Now this qualification is to be understood both inclusively and exclusively. [1.] Inclusively: to involve all that would give up themselves in his holy word to inquire after God. The Lord takes a charge upon himself impartially to reward all that seek him: whether rich or poor, bond or free, he is a rewarder to them; indefinitely to all them that seek him. [2.] Exclusively: he rewardeth none but those; they and they only do find and enjoy him. The point of doctrine will be this—

Doct. That the fountain of all obedience, gratitude, and service to God is a firm belief of his being a rewarder of all them that diligently seek him.

I shall (1.) Explain the proposition that is to be believed, and give the sense of it—that God is a rewarder of such ; (2.) Inquire into the nature of this faith, and show how this is to be believed ; (3.) Tell you what influence it has upon our obedience and service to God.

First, Here is the proposition that is to be believed—‘God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.’ The proposition intimateth somewhat to be expected on God’s part, and something to be done on our part.

First, on God’s part. He is *μισθαποδότης*, a reward-giver, which implies these four propositions—(1.) That not only his essence, but his providence is to be believed by us. (2.) In his providence the gracious recompense is only mentioned ; it is not said he is a revenger, which is a notable part of his providence, but he is a rewarder. (3.) To show how fitly this grace is expressed by the term ‘reward.’ (4.) This reward is principally in the next life.

1. We are bound to believe not only his essence, but his providence. For here are two principles—that God is, and that he is a rewarder ; by which last his providence is intimated, namely, that he regardeth human affairs, and will judge accordingly, blessing the good and punishing the evil. It was the conceit of Epicurus and his followers that it would not stand with the happiness of God to trouble himself with the affairs of the world ; and practical atheists, and sinful, secure persons are of his mind : they think that the heavens are drawn as a curtain between us and God, and that he is not at leisure to mind the affairs of this lower world ; so they are brought in speaking, Job xxii. 12–14, ‘Is not God in the height of heaven ? and behold the height of the stars, how high are they ? And thou sayest, How can God know ? can he judge through the dark clouds ? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not, and he walketh in the circuit of heaven.’ Our eyes and perspectives are too short for us to look above the clouds and mists of this lower world, and to understand the affairs of the world above us ; and therefore we muse of God according to the manner of us finite creatures, as if God could not see us, and judge of the state of things here below, because of the great distance between him and us ; or at least that he hath other things to do than to mind the affairs of mankind, or to trouble himself with our actions. Thus vainly do we deceive ourselves, like that foolish creature, the panther ; when it is hunted, it hides its head, and then thinks itself safe, not seen, because it sees not. The clouds and darkness that are about God may hinder our sight of him, but they do not hinder his sight of us. Oh no ; Prov. xv. 3, ‘The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the good and the evil.’ Nothing can be done without his providential assistance, and therefore nothing can be done without his privity and knowledge. He is nearer to us than we are to ourselves, and knows our very thoughts,—not only our meaning before we speak, but our thoughts before they are conceived : Ps. cxxxix. 2, ‘Thou understandest my thoughts afar off.’ The mischief is, we do that which we would not have to be seen, and then would fain believe that God doth not see us. This conceit,

that God doth not mind the affairs of the world, will destroy all worship of God and respect to him. If there be no providence, then no worship, no prayer, no praise. The two first motives that ordinarily induce men to worship are fear and hope; fear that God will avenge their misdeeds, and hope of relief when they lie under straits and necessities. But now if God were mindless of the affairs of this lower world, and had left all things to their own way, we should have nothing to fear and nothing to hope for from his providence, and so God would not be regarded by us. The Epicureans indeed say that God is to be worshipped for the eminency of his dignity, and the excellency and greatness of his nature; but alas! that would breed a faint respect, for who regards those in whom they are not concerned? Here in the world we hear of mighty kings and potentates, but we regard them not unless they govern and protect us; then our peace and safety depends upon them. I say we hear of great emperors and kings abroad in India and China; what doth the interest of their courts, or the vastness of their armies move us? Every mean gentleman that is able to do us either a good or bad turn is more respected than those mighty monarchs. And so God would not be respected if he should only shut up himself within the heavens, and not regard the affairs here below. Well then, God sees. The accurateness of his providence, of his seeing all things, is described to us by many metaphors in scripture. The most solemn and notable is that of a record. He so sees and regards all things as to write them in books to keep them upon record: Mal. iii. 16, 'The Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him.' God hath his registers and books of record, the counterpart of which is our conscience, where all things are written that we do think and say; but this book is in our keeping, and therefore it is often blurred and defaced; but all is clear and legible in the book of God's remembrance. Certainly we would be more advised in our speeches and actions if we knew that there was a secret spy about us to write down all that we do: so Ps. lvi. 8, 'Thou tellest my wanderings; put thou my tears in thy bottle: are they not in thy book?' God hath a bottle for all the tears of his people,—they are not as water spilt upon the ground,—and he has a book wherein he records all their sorrows. Many times books are written in their defence, and the memorials of their innocency here in the world are destroyed; but all is entered in the records and rolls of heaven. Thus does God take notice of all the actions and affairs of the world. You must not think of him as of the Persian monarch living in ease and pleasure, and leaving the care of provinces to his *satrapæ*, his deputies and vicegerents. No, his eyes run to and fro through the whole earth; he observeth all, noteth all that is done here in the world. And—which is the other part of his providence—he judgeth accordingly. He is called: Jer. li. 56, 'The Lord God of recompenses,' because he does reward his friends, and punish his enemies. I say, God is not an idle spectator. Providence doth many times interpose notably now. We find sometimes obedience laden with blessings; and vengeance treadeth upon the heels of sin, especially for some notable excess and disorder: Ps. lviii. 11, 'So that a man may say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.' Many that

knew not what to think of God's providence before, that were at a loss, yet when it is all brought about, they may see there is a reward for the righteous. We often, like ignorant and impatient spectators, will not tarry till the last act of the tragedy, till the way of God hath its course; for if we did, we should soon find that all things are in the hands of a righteous judge. Now and then God will give the world a taste of his recompenses, as he did in the prosperity of Abraham and punishment of Cain, to show there is a providence. But at other times the wicked are prosperous, the godly are afflicted, to show that the last act of providence is yet behind, and that there is a judgment to come. As in the parable of Dives, he was happy till his death, and lived in luxury and pleasure, whilst Lazarus was humbled with poverty, and rough-cast with sores. But the great and solemn day is to come when God will call all the world to an account and general audit, and justice and mercy shall both have their solemn triumph; and as our work hath been, so shall our wages be; that which is good shall be found to praise and honour, and that which is evil lie under its own shame. Well then, he that cometh to God must believe that God is a rewarder, it implies his providence; the Lord takes notice of human actions, and that he will judge accordingly.

2. Among the recompenses of God, that which comes from grace is only mentioned. The great God in recompenses is not only a rewarder of them that seek him, but a revenger of them that hate him; but his vengeance and punishment is not propounded as so necessary to our first faith, to him that comes to God so much as his reward. Why does he instance in this part of providence? Partly, because God delights to manifest himself to the world in acts of grace rather than in acts of judgment—'Mercy pleaseth him,' Micah. vii. 18. Goodness and grace are natural to God. Anger, and wrath, and vindictive justice suppose our sin; they are extorted from him. And therefore if we would have a right notion of God, next to the being of God we must believe his goodness. From the beginning of time until now the usual acts of God's providence are the effluxes and emanations of his goodness. What hath the world been but a great theatre, upon which mercy hath been acting a part almost these six thousand years? His mercy is over all his works, and therefore God is called the 'Father of mercies,' 2 Cor. i. 3, not the Father of justice. When he proclaimeth his name, we hear first of his mercy, and still more of his mercy: Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, 'The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,' and justice is brought in to prevent the abuse of mercy, and to invite men to take hold of it. And then, partly, because this is an encouragement to bring in them to God who else would run away from him because of his terrors and his own natural bondage, as Adam ran into the bushes. Though there be amiable excellences in the nature of God, yet the naked contemplation of these cannot allay our natural fears, nor quench our natural enmity against God, but rather increase them. As good qualities in a judge will never draw the prisoner's heart to affect him; to tell the prisoner that his judge is a grave, comely person, of profound knowledge, of excellent speech, a strict observer of the law; but he is a judge, and so his heart stands off from him. And so it is between us and God:

though we should tell men of the perfections of God's nature, yet as long as the guilty sinner reflects upon him as his judge, he stands aloof from God. The wrath of God is like a flaming sword ready drawn and brandished to keep us from him; his justice makes us stand at a distance: Rom. i. 32, 'Knowing the judgment of God, that they that do such things are worthy of death;' but his goodness, and readiness to reward, that is the motive to draw in our hearts to him. Christians, all this is spoken that we might have a right notion of God in himself. Æcolampadius, when he was preaching to children, first he tells them, There is a God, and then saith he, If you would know what God is, you must not conceive of him by pictures that you have seen. Do you know what mercy, lenity, patience, bountifulness, goodness is?—that is God. You must believe there is a God, and then you must see what he is; he is a God merciful, gracious, ready to reward and do good. This doth draw in the heart of a creature to him. As Luther saith, this is the whole design of the scripture, to represent God in such a manner, as bountiful and ready to do good to his creatures that come to him.

3. This grace is expressed by the word 'reward.' It is a metaphor taken from hired servants: Mat. xx. 8, 'Call the labourers, and give them—μισθόν—their hire.' Now some go upon this word as if here they had a clear foundation for the merit of the creature from the two words μισθός and ἀποδόσις, of which the word in the text is compounded, but vainly; for work and reward are relatives indeed, but not merit and reward. God is a rewarder, but how? out of his own bounty, and the liberality of his grace, not out of our merit and desert. You shall see the word is taken in scripture sometimes for any fruit and issue of our pains, so it be grateful to us, though no way deserved by us, as that vainglory men seek for in the world: Mat. vi. 2. it is said, 'They have their reward.' No man can say they deserve it, but it was the reward aimed at and chosen by them. Anything we look at as the fruit of our pains is called the reward. And sometimes any fruit of the divine grace: as Ps. cxxvii. 3, 'Lo, children are an heritage from the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward,' that is, his gracious gift; and so μισθός and χάρις, reward and grace, are all one, and promiscuously used; as Mat. v. 46, what is there, 'What reward have you?' in Luke vi. 32, it is χάρις, 'What grace, or what thank have you?' So God is said to reward those whom he remembers out of mere mercy and bounty; his reward is worth the seeking after; not that our work is meritorious and worthy of that reward. Well then, the reward of grace is understood; μισθός hath more relation to God's promise than the work. Indeed it stands upon two feet, upon God's promise and upon Christ's merit. We have a reward, which by virtue of Christ's merit, and God's promise we may expect; but as to us, it is freely bestowed upon us. The apostle plainly shows this distinction of a reward of debt and a reward of grace: Rom. iv. 4, 'To him that worketh,' that is, he that will establish his own righteousness or works for justification—to him 'is the reward reckoned, not of grace, but of debt.' He intimates plainly there is a reward κατὰ χάριν, according to grace. Once more it is called, Col. iii. 24, 'The reward of the inheritance; such as proceedeth not from the worth of the work, but from God's free grace. If the reward be a servile work, the inheritance

is for children. But briefly: the recompenses of God's justice and merey are called rewards, partly to note the persons to whom it is given; a reward is not given but to those that labour. Heaven is not for idlers and loiterers; it is a reward, it is given after labour; not as if any did deserve it by their work, as a labourer is worthy of his hire. Among men, he that hires has benefit by the labour of him that is hired; but 'we are unprofitable servants,' Luke xvii. 10; and ordinarily there is a due proportion between the work and the wages; but here there can be none at all, for eternal life, which is that reward, consists in the vision and fruition of God himself; yea, it is God himself, united and conjoined to us by this vision and fruition: Gen. xv. 1, 'I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' Now no works of men can bear a proportion to such a reward. This argument seems of such weight that Vasquez denies this uncreated reward to fall *sub condignis meritis Christi*, to be deserved even by Christ's obedience. But that is false, for the obedience of Christ is of infinite value. Well then, a reward it is, because it is a consequent of labour—*Posito opere recte colligimus certitudinem secuturæ mercedis*; by the gracious constitution and ordination of God, who hath appointed that our good works should have such an issue and event. Again, a reward it is called, because it is not given till our work be ended: 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.' When we have done our work, then we shall receive our wages. Again, reward it is called to note the sureness of it. God in condescension calleth it a reward. We may expect it as a labourer doth his hire at night, for the Lord hath made himself a debtor by his own promise: James i. 12, 'He shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.'

4. This reward is principally in the next life. That suits with Enoch's instance, his translation to heaven, to a place of blessedness; and that is called *κατ' ἐξοχήν*, the reward in scripture: 1 Cor. iii. 14, 'If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward;' Rev. xi. 18, 'The time is come that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets.' Now is the time of God's patience, and hereafter of his recompenses. Now is the time of our exercise and service, hereafter of our enjoyment. Alas! all that we have here, it is not our wages, it is but our vales, the overplus and additional supply that God gives in upon the better portion that we expect from him: as Mat. vi. 33, 'All other things shall be added unto you.' Other things are east in over and above the bargain. A christian does not count this his reward; he does not give God a discharge, though God should bless him with comfort and with increase in this life, that is the spirit of an hypocrite to give God his acquittance for other things. So it is said of the hypocrites, *ἀπέχουσι μισθόν*—'They have their reward,' Mat. vi. 2. The word signifies they give God their discharge. A man loseth nothing by God in the world; God may cast in outward things to commend our portion, and to make it more amiable to us, because we consist of body as well as soul, and have the interest of both to mind; he may add these ciphers to the figure, give

in those things as appurtenances to heaven, but it is heaven they take for their portion. He may increase worldly things upon them as he thinks fit, but they that take up with this as their portion and reward, the honours, pleasures, and treasures of this life, are bastards, not sons; as bastards have means to live upon, though they do not inherit. The scripture everywhere condemns us for fastening upon the world as our portion: Ps. xvii. 14, 'Which have their portion in this life;' and Luke xvi. 25, 'Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things;' and Jer. xvii. 13, 'They that depart from me shall be written in the earth.' Oh, to be condemned to this happiness is the greatest misery, to expect nothing else but this; therefore we must protest against this kind of reward; as Luther tells us, *Valde protestatus sum, me nolle sic a Deo salari*,—I earnestly protested to God that he should not put me off with gold, riches, and the transitory things of the present life. We that are heirs according to the hope of eternal life expect better things in a better state, or else God would not answer the magnificent expressions wherein he hath spoken to us in his covenant. He hath told us, I will be your God, and that he himself, and all that is his, shall be ours. Certainly the magnificence of this expression is not verified and made good unless he hath better things to bestow upon us than what this world yields. Therefore the apostle tells us: Heb. xi. 16, 'He is not ashamed to be called our God, because he hath provided for us a city.' Now that God hath a city and a heavenly inheritance to bestow upon us, he may with honour take that title upon himself to be the God of his people. Neither would it answer the desires of his people, who look after a more perfect enjoyment of God than this life will permit. Therefore whatever here we have in temporal things, and what we have in spiritual things, it is not our reward. These are magnificent, as remission of sins, adoption, righteousness, grace, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost; these are but the beginnings and presignifications of a more blessed estate, these are but the suburbs of heaven; our advance-money before our pay comes; but our great reward is hereafter. Certainly it cannot be otherwise if you consider the being of God as infinite and eternal; God will give like himself. As it was said of Araunah, 2 Sam. xxiii. 24, 'All these things did Araunah as a king give to the king'—he was of the blood-royal of the Jebusites, and he carried it becoming his extraction; so there will be a time when God will give like himself. It does not become a mighty emperor to give pence and shillings, or brass farthings, it is below his greatness; so there will come a time when the Lord, as he is an infinite and eternal being, will give us 'a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,' 2 Cor. iv 17. Now it is very little God discovereth. God doth communicate and discover himself to the rational creature as he is able to bear; Job xxvi. 14, 'Lo, these are part of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him!' There is a time coming when the Lord will communicate himself to reasonable creatures in a fuller latitude than now he doth; therefore there is a more exceeding weight of glory we expect from him. Again, if you consider the largeness of Christ's merit and condescension. No wise man will lay a broad foundation unless he means to build an answerable structure thereupon. Well then, when God hath laid such a notable foundation as the blood of Christ, the death of the Son of

God, I say, certainly he hath some notable worthy blessing to bestow upon us. There was price enough laid down, the blood of God; God would not be at such expense for nothing. What will not that purchase for us? In short, godliness must have a better recompense than is to be had here in the world. Take away rewards and take away religion, these things we enjoy here are but the offals of providence, enjoyed by God's enemies; they have the greatest share of worldly things: Ps. xvii. 14, 'Whose belly thou fillest with thy good treasures.' The more wise any are, the more they condemn these things. And would God put a spirit into a man to condemn his rewards? Would he give us wisdom and grace that we might slight that which he hath appointed for our reward? Therefore certainly this is not the reward.

The afflictions of men good and upright show that 'if we had our hopes only in this life, we were of all men most miserable,' 1 Cor. xv. 19; for here many times the best go to the wall. And therefore out of all we may conclude that there is a reward for the children of God hereafter. Thus I have gone through the first thing that is implied in this proposition, that that is to be believed and embraced by us. If we would have life put into our services—if we would have zeal for God, and delight in communion with him, look upon God as one that takes notice of human affairs, that delights in acts of mercy, that hath by his promise established a sure course of recompenses, and that the full of what is provided for us is in the world to come.

Secondly, There is something to be done on our part. God is a rewarder, but to whom?—'To them that diligently seek him,' and to none but them. Here—(1.) What it is diligently to seek God? (2.) Why is this clause put here, that he is a rewarder of such?

1. What it is to seek God? Sometimes it is taken in a more particular and limited sense for prayer and invocation, for seeking his counsel, help, and blessing; as in Isa. lv. 6, 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.' Seeking the Lord and calling upon him are made parallel expressions. So Exod. xxxiii. 7, 'Every one that sought the Lord,'—that is, that went to ask his counsel,—'went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation.' More largely, it is taken for the whole worship of God, and that duty and obedience we owe to him; as 2 Chron. xiv. 4, 'Asa commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment;' that is, to worship and obey him; so in 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3, it is said of Josiah, when yet young, that 'he began to seek after the Lord God of his father David.' Obedience is called a seeking of God, because it is a means to further our communion with him. But a little to open the formality of the expression.

[1.] Seeking implies some loss or some want, for that which we have we seek not for. Now God may be considered either as to his essence and omnipresence, or as to his favour. As to his essence, so God can never be lost nor found, for he is everywhere present, in heaven, in earth, in hell: Acts xvii. 27, 'He is not far from every one of us;' he is within us, without us, round about us, in the effects of his power and goodness. But with respect to his favour and grace, so we are said to seek after God: Ps. cv. 4, 'Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face evermore;' that is, his powerful and favourable presence,

comforting, quickening, and strengthening our hearts. This is that we want, and this is that we seek after.

[2.] Seeking implies that this must be our aim and scope, and the business of our lives and actions, to enjoy more of God till we come fully to enjoy him in heaven. The whole course of a christian must be a seeking after God, a getting more of God into his heart: Ps. lxiii. 8, 'My soul follows hard after thee.' It is not a slight motion or a cold wish, such as will easily be put off or blunted with discouragement, or satisfied with other things; but such as engages us to an earnest pursuit of him till we find him, and till we enjoy him in the completest way of fruition. Wicked men in a pang would have the favour of God, but they are soon put out of the humour, and take up with other things. Therefore this must be the scope of our whole lives, especially in the nobler actions of our lives. The noblest actions of our lives are our engaging in duties of worship in the ordinances of God; now there we must not only serve God but seek him. What is it to seek God in ordinances? In a word, it is this to make God not only the object, but the end of the worship; not only to come to God, but to come to God for God, so as to resolve that we will not go from him without him, *abs te absque te non recedam*. As Jacob said: Gen. xxxii. 26, 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.' And therefore seeking God notes our scope; when we make this the great aim of our lives, especially in the duties of religion, in acts of worship, we desire to meet with him.

[3.] It implies a seeking of him in Christ. For without a mediator guilty creatures cannot enjoy God. We cannot immediately converse with God, there must be a mediator between God and us: John xiv. 6, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me.' There is no getting to God but by Christ. God in our nature is more familiar with us, and more especially found of us: Hos. iii. 5, 'They shall seek the Lord their God and David their king,' that is, Christ. There is no seeking or finding of God but in and by Christ. Saith Luther, *Horribile est de Deo extra Christum cogitare*—It is a terrible thing to think of God out of Christ. As Themistocles, when he sought the favour of Admetus, which had been formerly his enemy, the historian tells us he snatched up his child, and so begged entertainment of him. We are enemies to God; if we go to him we must carry Christ with us. It is Christ's great work to bring us to God. He died for 'that end, that he might bring us to God,' 1 Peter iii. 18; and it is the great duty of a christian; he ought to come to God by him—'He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.' Heb. vii. 25. And therefore since we have lost the favour of God, we shall never find him but in Christ.

[4.] This seeking is stirred up in us by the secret impressions of God's grace, and the help of his Spirit. All the persons are concerned in it, 'For through him we have an access to the Father by one Spirit,' Eph. ii. 18. Natural men are well enough pleased without God or they have but faint desires after him. Take men as they are in themselves, and the psalmist tells us, Ps. xiv. 2, 'No man understandeth and seeketh after God;' they have no affection, no desire of communion with him. So Ps. x. 4, 'The wicked, through the pride of his counte-

nance, will not seek after God; God is not in all their thoughts.' Wicked men cast God out of their minds, never care whether he be pleased or displeased, whether he be enjoyed or hide himself from us. Ay, but the Spirit of God works this work in us. How so? The spirit of bondage brings us to God as a judge; God as a judge sends us to Christ as mediator; and Christ as mediator, by the spirit of adoption, brings us back to God again as a father; and so we come to enjoy God. The divine persons make way for the operations of one another. Saith Bernard, *Nemo te quærere potest, nisi qui prius invenerit; tu igitur invenire ut quæraris, quære ut inveniaris, potest quidem inveniri, non tamen præveniri*—None can be beforehand with God; we cannot seek him till we find him; he will be found that he may be sought, and he will be sought that he may be found; his preventing grace makes us restless in the means, and puts us upon those first motions and earnest addresses towards God.

SERMON XXXIV.

And that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.—
HEB. xi. 6.

[5.] THIS seeking must be our *ἐργον*, our business, as well as our scope; a thing that we would not mind by the by, but as the great work we are to do in our lives here in the world: Dent. iv. 29, 'Thou shalt find him if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul;' and Jer. xxix. 13, 'Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart;' and 2 Chron. xv. 15, 'They sought him with all their hearts, and their whole desire, and he was found of them. Many are convinced that they cannot be happy without the favour of God; their consciences tell them they must seek after God, but their affections carry them to the world. Oh, but when your whole hearts are in this, when you make it your great business, then shall you find him. If you content yourselves to look after God by the by only, and as a recreation, and with a few slight endeavours, and do not make this the great employment of your lives, you will never find him. Certainly we were made for God, it was the end of our creation; therefore this must be the business of your lives. God made us for himself, and we can never be happy without himself. And as it was the end of our creation, so it is the end of his gracious forbearance and indulgence in the course of his providence. Wherefore doth God forbear with sinning man, when he punished the apostate angels presently?—'That they might seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him,' Acts xvii. 27. We do not live to live, but we live to seek God. When we had lost God by Adam's apostasy, God might have cut off all hope that ever we should find him again; as the angels, when they lost their chiefest good, could never recover their first estate. But it is God's indulgence to deal with us upon more gracious terms,

that we might seek after him. God needed not seek the creatures, he had happiness enough in himself; but we needed such a creator. He that hides himself from the sun impairs not the light thereof. We derogate nothing from God, but it is a loss of benefit to us that we seek him not, for the present and for the future. If you seek him, you shall be happy for the present; for the God of Jacob hath pawned his word to you that none shall seek him in vain: 'Isa. xlv. 19, 'I said not to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain; and Ps. xxii. 26, 'They shall praise the Lord that seek him.' You will have cause to bless God ere the search be over. And for the future: Amos v. 6, 'Seek the Lord, and ye shall live well then.' Here is the great work and business of your lives, diligently to seek after God. Though it may be at first you do not find him, yet comfort thyself that thou art in the seeking way, still in pursuit of him. Better be a seeker than a wanderer: Ps. xxiv. 6, 'This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob.' Though thou dost not presently feel the love of God, and hast no assurance of thy pardon, nor sensible comfort from his Spirit, yet continue seeking; here is your business, here is your work.

2. Why is this put here, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him'? (1.) It is put exclusively. Privileges in scripture are propounded with their necessary limitation; we disjoint the frame of religion, if we would sever the reward from the duty. God is a rewarder, but to whom? To the careless, to the negligent? Oh, no! he will be an avenger to them: Ps. ix. 17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God;' not only they that deny God, but they that forget God, that do not seek after him. As they cast God out of their mind and affections, so God will cast them out of his presence. (2.) It is put inclusively: God will impartially reward every one that seeks him, without any distinction. The door of grace stands open for all comers. Every one that seeketh God finds entertainment, not only in regard of the answers of grace for the present, but as to eternal recompenses hereafter.

[1.] For the present. Oh, do not conceive of God after a carnal manner! It was the corrupt theology of the gentiles, *Di magni curant, parva negligunt*, that the gods did look after great things, but small and petty things they left to others, as if the great God did act according to the advice of Jethro to Moses: Exod. xviii. 21, 22, 'Thou shalt appoint rulers of thousands, hundreds, and fifties, and tens, and let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge.' But the Lord's providence here in the world extends to every one that seeketh him, and he hearkens to the prayers of the poorest beggar as well as the greatest monarch; persons despicable in the world may find audience and acceptance with God: Ps. xxxiv. 6, 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him;' David speaks it of himself, when he was a ruddy youth following the ewes great with young. There is none among the sons of men that hath cause to say as Isa. xl. 27, 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God;' that is, God hath so much to do in the world that he forgets me, he doth not mind my case; for the Lord hath a providence.

[2.] Hereafter they will find in him a rewarder. There is none so poor but he will find God makes good his promise. There is a notable expression, Eph. vi. 8, 'Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.' He speaks to encourage servants (who at that time were slaves) in singleness of heart to go about their duty. Even the basest drudgery of servants is a doing good, and comes within the compass of those good works which God will take notice of. God does not look to the external splendour of the work but to the honesty and sincerity of it, though it be of a poor drudge and slave that is faithful in his calling. Nay, God will rather forget princes, lords, and mighty men of the earth, vain and sinful potentates, than pass by a poor servant that fears him. You find that God gave the angels charge over Lazarus' soul, Luke xvi. 22, 'The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.' The beggar's soul is thus conducted in state to heaven. Whoever seeks him will be sure to find him a rewarder.

Secondly, I come to the nature of this faith. You have seen the thing that is to be believed; but how is it to be believed?

1. It must be a firm and certain persuasion. The reward is sure on God's part. Men may be ignorant, forgetful, unthankful, as Pharaoh's butler forgot Joseph, Gen. xl. 23; but the Lord is righteous, and will not forget your labour of love: Prov. xi. 18, 'To him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.' It may be the work you do for God is like ploughing or sowing, difficult and hard work, but we are sure of an excellent crop. When we feel nothing but trouble and inconvenience, sense will make lies of God, and we are apt to say, 'I have cleansed my heart in vain,' Ps. lxxiii. 13. But the Lord will not forget this service you do for him. Under the law God would not have the hireling defrauded of his wages because he hath lifted up his soul to it. The man comforted himself with this thought: he should have his recompense at night. So when thou hast lifted up thy soul to look for those great things promised, God looks upon himself as bound; therefore this must be entertained with a strong faith, and without doubting. We read in scripture of a threefold assurance; an 'assurance of understanding,' Col. ii. 2; an 'assurance of faith,' Heb. x. 22; and an 'assurance of hope,' Heb. vi. 11. All this represents the firmness of that assent by which we should receive the promises.

2. It must not be a naked assent, but a lively and operative faith, urging and encouraging us to seek after God upon those hopes. There are many that are able to dispute for the truth of the rewards of religion, but yet do not feel the virtue of them. This is not enough, to have notions and opinions that God is a rewarder, but we must have a lively operative faith: Phil. iii. 14, 'I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.' That is a due apprehension of the reward, when we are engaged thereby to the duties which the reward calls for: Heb. xi. 13, 'They were persuaded of them, and embraced them;' when it ravishes the affections and engageth the heart; when it keeps us from fainting under the cross, 2 Cor. iv. 16; when it abates the eagerness of our pursuit after worldly things; when we are more contented with a little here, because we are persuaded we shall have enough with God. A rich man that

hath a vast inheritance of his own, to see him among the poor that glean up the ears of corn that were scattered, this were an uncomely thing. Oh! do we look for so great blessedness, and are we scraping so much in the world, — ‘We that are begotten to a lively hope?’ 1 Peter i. 3. Such a faith produceth sobriety and moderation to worldly things; 1 Peter i. 13, ‘Be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.’ In short, we that look for such things should give diligence to be found of him; and what manner of persons ought we to be? 2 Peter iii. 11. If it be not a dead and a naked opinion only, to dispute about the rewards of religion, but a well-grounded confidence, it will quicken our endeavours, moderate our desires, allay the bitterness of the cross, and help us on in the way to heaven.

3. It is an applicative faith. We must believe God is not only a rewarder, but say with Paul, This he will be to me; for so we have the expression, 2 Tim. iv. 8, ‘Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,’ &c.; this is proposed and made over to me for my comfort and my quickening. Salvation in general hath no such an efficacy: 1 Cor. ix. 26, ‘I run, not as uncertain.’ In the Isthmian games, to which the apostle alludes, held near Corinth, a man might run, but he was not certain whether he should have the goal or no; but I run not as uncertain, as one that hath the prize in view, and am comfortably assured I shall obtain it. This quickeneth us to a comfortable, willing industry.

Thirdly, The influence that it hath upon our obedience and service to God.

1. To keep the heart free and ingenuous. We are apt to look upon God as a Pharaoh, harsh and austere, as if he had required work where he will not give wages. But think of his mercy and kindness, and readiness to reward the services of his people, that you may come to him with an ingenuous confidence. Our obligations to God are absolute; we are bound to serve him, though nothing should come of it. Ay, but he is pleased to move us by rewards, ‘to draw us with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love,’ Hos. xi. 4. When he might rule us with a rod of iron, and require duty out of mere power and sovereignty, he will govern us rationally, by precepts and rewards. Men do not use to enter into covenant with a slave, yet God is pleased to indent with us; he would have us to look upon him as a rewarder. In all our services we are to remember that God is, that we may be aweful; and ‘he is a rewarder,’ that we may be ingenuous.

2. To keep the heart sincere and upright. Oh, there is nothing makes the heart so sincere as to make God our paymaster, and to look for our reward from him only. Carnal affections will draw us to seek praise and honour of men, some present profit, some reward here: Mat. vi. 2, ‘They have their reward,’ and give God a discharge; but a man’s sincerity is to look for all his reward from God: Col. iii. 23, ‘Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance.’ You have a master good enough, and need not look for your pay elsewhere.

3. To quicken us in our duty, and make us vigorous and cheerful and diligent in our service: 1 Cor. xv. 58, ‘Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of

the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.' Idols can do nothing for their worshippers; these will deceive you, but God will not be served for nought; your duty that you do to him will return into your bosoms, and will bring a blessing; not like a ball struck into the air, that returns not again to you, but like a ball struck against a wall, that returns to your hand again. Let us who are bred up in the belief of this principle, bless God—

[1.] That there is a reward. He might have cut off all hopes and left us under the despair of the first covenant, and then our guilty fears would represent God under no other notion but that of an avenger; and our punishment might have begun with our sin, as the fallen angels were held in chains of darkness, under an everlasting horrible despair of mending their condition. When once we had lost God, we might never have found him more; his language to the fallen creature might have been only thunder and wrath. Or if he would quit us from what is past, and release our punishment for the future, he might only have ruled us with a rod of iron, and imposed laws upon us out of mere sovereignty, and say, Thus and thus shall ye do, 'I am the Lord;' or, at least, have held us in bondage, and suspended the publication of a new and better covenant, and kept it in his own breast, that we might wholly stand to his arbitrary will, whether he would reward—yea, or no. Thus the Lord might have done with us; but he will rather draw us by the cords of a man, hold us to our duty by the sense of our own interest, and give us leave to encourage ourselves with the thoughts of his bounty. There are many in the world that think it unsafe to use God's motives, and destroy his grace, for which we have cause to bless God. They say, God is to be worshipped, though we had no benefit by him, merely for the excellency of his being; but this is but a fancy and an airy religion; to abstract religion from rewards is to frame a religion in conceit. The two first notions of God are his being and his bounty, and we must reflect upon both. It is a description of the people of God, Rom. ii. 7, 'That by patient continuance in well doing, they seek for honour, and glory, and immortality.' We may seek honour from God; and a great part of our sincerity lies in this, to make God our paymaster; and therefore let us bless God that there is a reward.

[2.] That there is so great a reward: Mat. v. 12, 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven'—such as we may admire rather than conceive; and 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'Our light affliction, that is but for a moment, worketh for us—*καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν*,—a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Heaven will not admit of a hyperbole. In other things, fancy may easily overreach, the garment may be too big for the body; but all our thoughts come short of heaven. God himself will be our reward: Gen. xv. 1, 'Fear not, Abraham; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' When he would encourage us to well-doing, he goes to the utmost; he hath no greater encouragement to propound to us. As the apostle said, Heb. vi. 13, 'When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself.' God hath no greater thing to give us, and therefore saith, 'I will be your reward;' though he does not for the present make out himself in that latitude

to us, that he will hereafter when God is all in all. There is enough to counterbalance all the inconveniences of religion ; when you sit down and count the charges, you will be no losers. The difficulties of obedience, the sorrows of the cross, shall all be made up to you in this reward ; and therefore let not your hearts be faint, nor your hands shake, but ‘ Press on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,’ Phil. iii. 14. If it be a painful race, remember what is the crown ; we run for the everlasting enjoyment of the blessed God. As we christians have the noblest work, so we have the highest motives ; there is a reward, and a great reward.

[3.] That this reward is so freely dispensed, and upon terms of grace—*χάρισμα*—‘The grace of God is eternal life,’ Rom. vi. 23. Such are the riches of his grace to lost sinners, that we can hardly believe, especially with application, what is told us of this readiness of God to do good to the creature, and to reward our slender services. But then how should this encourage us to draw nigh to the fountain of rich grace, for pardon, life, and glory, when so much is so freely prepared for such unworthy ones : Ps. xxxvi. 7, ‘How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God ! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.’

[4.] That all this is made known to us, and that we are not left to uncertain guesses and conjectures. The heathens were sensible of the recompenses of another world ; they had some dreams of elysian fields, and fancies about noisome rivers, and obscure grottoes, and dismal caverns in the earth, as places of punishment ; but they knew not whether this were a fable or a certain truth. As men that see a spire at a distance in travelling ; sometimes they have a sight of it, and sometimes they have lost it, and cannot tell whether they saw it or no. Thus it was with the heathens : saith Lactantius—*Virtutis vim non sentiunt, cujus premium ignorant*—they were ignorant of the power of godliness, because they knew not the rewards of godliness. But all is clear and open to us, and established upon certain terms : 2 Tim. i. 10, ‘Jesus Christ hath brought life and immortality to light by the gospel.’ Well then, if these be the thoughts that enliven all our duties, how clearly may we take God under these notions—‘That God is, and that he is a rewarder.’

[5.] That it is so surely made known unto us. God foresaw that in this lower world, where God is unseen, where our trials are so great, where our hopes are to come, where the flesh is so importunate to be pleased and gratified with present satisfactions, God foresaw, I say, that we would be liable to much doubting and unbelief ; and therefore he hath not only passed his word that there shall be a reward, but hath given us a pawn and earnest of it in our heart, to assure us of it : 2 Cor. i. 22, ‘Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.’ The comforts that we have in well-doing in this world are not only *donæ*, gifts of God, but *arrhæ*, an assurance that God will give us more ; they are a taste how good, and a pledge how sure our reward shall be.

[6.] That we have hopes and encouragements to put in for a share, and come and take hold of eternal life upon these terms ; that we can-

not only say in general, 'God is a rewarder,' but he will be so 'to me,' 2 Tim. iv. 8, 'Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of glory.' This was not peculiar to Paul only, for he saith—'And not only for me, but for all that love his appearing.' All those that do believe the rewards of the christian religion, and act upon this encouragement, and serve God faithfully, all that prepare for it, may say, 'For me,' there is a crown of life; this I expect from God's hand. Oh, then blessed be his name that hath given us 'so good hope through grace,' 2 Thes. ii. 16. That is cause of rejoicing and thanksgiving indeed: Luke x. 20, 'Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' When we can see our names in Christ's testament, look upon ourselves as concerned in this reward, that we have a title to it; or if we have not a title, the door is open, the promise is sure, the way is plain, the helps are many, and we may have a title if we will. And therefore let us bless God that there is a reward, a great reward, a reward so freely dispensed, and this made known and assured to us by the joys of the Spirit, and that we have hopes and encouragement to go on in well-doing upon this ground.

Use 2. If God be a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, then here is a reproof, because so few seek after God. Paul charges it upon all natural men: Rom. iii. 11, 'There is none that seeketh after the Lord;' we all at first go wandering after our own fancies, and never think of returning to God, as our chief good, till we have tried ourselves with a thousand disappointments, and are scourged home to him; yea, it were well if we would seek him at the last or were brought to God upon any terms. But, alas! some seek him not at all; others do not seek him diligently, but in a slight and overly fashion.

1. Some do not seek him at all. Alas! there are many that run away from God, and are never better than when they can get out of his eye and presence—'God is not in all their thoughts,' Ps. x. 4. As the prodigal went from his father into a far country, so a carnal man is ever running from God. He runs from his own conscience, and cannot endure to commune and hold a little parley with his own heart, because he finds God there. He shuns the presence of holy men, because they have God's image—they put him in mind of God; slights the ordinances of worship, lest they revive a sense of God in his heart, and he meet with God in them. The word brings God too near him, and awakens his fears. Prayer he slights, because it engageth him to speak to God. He shuns the thoughts of death, because then the spirit must return to God that gave it. If the Holy Ghost stirs up any thoughts of God in his heart, he will not cherish them; he abhors his own thoughts of God, and is ready to say as Satan, Mat. viii. 29, 'What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?' Thoughts of God and Christ and heavenly things are a torment to him.

2. There are others that do not seek him diligently, and with their whole hearts. Oh, to what a sorry use do the most of us put our lives! We are hunting after the profits of the world and the pleasures of our senses, but we do not inquire after God. Most of us have cause to blush and to be ashamed,—How little is our delight in God? how

seldom do we think or speak of him? how cold is our affections to him? how dead and careless are our prayers that we make?—our thoughts are taken up with trifles, and God finds no room there. If any speak of God in our company, or mention his great love to sinners, we frown upon the motion, and think it unseasonable for those meetings and hours that we have consecrated to mirth and carnal sports, as if our thoughts of God were like gall and wormwood to embitter the pleasure we affect. We had rather have anything than God, his gifts than himself, yea, the worser sort of them, than his favour and grace; and then we offend him, we do not take such care to please him, and reconcile ourselves to him by the means he hath appointed. They that do indeed love God, and seek after God, they are with him morning, noon, and night; nay, they do carry God along with them in all their businesses and occasions: Ps. xvi. 8, ‘I have set the Lord always before me;’ and Ps. cxxxix. 18, ‘When I awake, I am still with thee.’ We that seldom think or speak of God, do we seek after God? surely no.

Use 3. To exhort us to seek God, and to seek him out till we find him.

1. To seek God. Motives—

[1.] To enjoy God, who is the centre of our rest, and the fountain of our blessedness, is the chief end for which we were made. Man was made to use the creatures, and to enjoy God. All things were made to glorify God, but some creatures to enjoy him, as men and angels. We sin against the law of our creation, and swerve from the great end of our lives and actions, if this be not all our hope and all our desire: Ps. lxxiii. 25, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee.’ Nothing but God can make us happy.

[2.] It is our business to seek him, as well as our happiness to enjoy him. Since the fall, God is lost, and out of the indulgence of his grace offereth himself to be found again, and inviteth us to communion with himself, that we may have everlasting blessedness: Amos v. 5, ‘Seek ye the Lord, and ye shall live.’ Now, for us to despise this grace and turn our backs upon this offer, not to regard it in our thoughts, not to pursue it with earnest endeavours, it is a slighting of God’s mercy: Ps. lxxxii. 11, ‘But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.’ He offereth himself, and we make little reckoning of it.

[3.] Because we are sluggish and backward, all external providences tend to quicken us to this duty. Mercies: Acts xvii. 27, ‘That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.’ God refresheth our sense and taste with his goodness—with new experiences every day, that set us a-work anew in seeking after him. Afflictions: Hos. v. 15, ‘I will go, and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.’ This is the right use of all our troubles to drive us home to God, to quicken us to look after communion with him, and to make up our former negligence with double diligence herein, to set an edge upon our affections. God knows want is a spur to a lazy soul.

[4.] All ordinances are appointed for this end and purpose, that we

might seek after God and find him : Exod. xx. 24, ' In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee ; ' Mat. xviii. 20, ' Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them ; ' there he cometh most sensibly to manifest himself to us ; Rev. ii. 1, ' These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.' His special presence is in his church. If we find him not in the time we seek him, we shall soon after : 2 Sam. vii. 4, ' And it came to pass that night, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan ; ' Cant. v. 5, ' I rose up to open to my beloved, and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh upon the handles of the lock ; ' some impression was left that worketh afterward.

[5.] It is the end of the Spirit's motion : Ps. xxvii. 8, ' When thou saidst, Seek ye my face ; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' God speaks to us by the injection of holy thoughts and the inspiration of his grace, and we should, like a quick echo, take hold of this.

[6.] Let me press you, because all the pretences that keep you from seeking God are in vain ; as (1.) That there is no need of seeking God ; or (2.) That it is in vain to seek God.

(1.) That there is no need of seeking God. We should always be seeking of God, till our loss by the fall be fully made up in heaven ; we should still seek God, till we enjoy him among his holy ones. We seek God on earth, but we find him in heaven : Ps. cv. 4, ' Seek the Lord, and his strength, seek his face evermore.' We need him every hour for direction, protection, strength, and comfort ; we are in danger to lose him, if we do not continue the search : all the while we are in the world this work must be plied close.

(2.) As the devil saith to the secure, There is no need ; so to the fearful and troubled sinner, that it is in vain to seek God, especially when former endeavours succæd not—there is no hope for him. Oh, but seek him ! the God of Jacob hath not said, ' Seek ye me in vain,' Isa. xlv. 19. He hath engaged himself plainly, openly, and perspicuously, not in obscure and ambiguous terms, such as may bear contrary senses, that their fraud and ignorance may not be discerned ; and he performeth what he promised : Ps. xxii. 26, ' They shall praise the Lord that seek him : your heart shall live for ever.' *Neminem tristem dimisit*, He never sent any away sad, but will comfort them. Wisdom is light and knowledge to the soul : Prov. xxviii. 5, ' They that seek the Lord understand all things'—the meaning of all his providences. And it is comfort to the soul ; Ps. lxxix. 32, ' Your heart shall live that seek God ; ' and protection, Ezra viii. 22, ' The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him, but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.' So that we shall have cause to praise God before the search be over : Mat. vi. 33, ' Seek ye first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, and all these things shall be added to you.' But besides this, if there were nothing in hand, there is much in hope ; it bringeth an everlasting reward : Amos v. 6, ' Seek ye the Lord and ye shall live ; ' and in the text, ' He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' They that do not seek his face shall never see his face ;

however, if we do not sensibly find him, yet we may comfort ourselves, that we are in a seeking way, and still in the pursuit: Ps. xxiv. 6, 'This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah.' This is the mark of God's chosen people, and we should be still wrestling through disappointments. Better be a seeker than a wanderer. But the wicked are described by this— that 'They are all gone out of the way,' Ps. xiv. 3.

2. For the manner—seek him out.

[1.] Seek him early, whilst you have strength to serve him, and whilst you have means to find him. This is a work that must not be put off: Isa. lv. 6, 'Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.' God will not always put up with your frequent denials. There is a time when God will be gone, and seeking will be to no purpose: compare Prov. i. 28, 'Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me;' with chap. viii. 17. 'I love them that love me; and they that seek me early shall find me.' There is a seeking out of self-love, and a seeking out of love to God. When death cometh and their day is past, many at last may seek God; and their straits may drive them to him, who were never put to it by any sense of sin. While hot and eager in sinning, they are not sensible of it; as Samson knew not that God was withdrawn while he slept in Delilah's bosom, till he knew the Philistines were upon him; and then it was too late. The greatest contemnners and despisers of God do at last see that there is no happiness but in God; but then miss the blessing, as Esau did, though he sought it with tears. Therefore will you despise grace to the uttermost, and weary it out to the last gasp? It may be by thy lamentations on thy death-bed, God will learn others to take heed of trifling with him. Oh then, if they could but call time back again! What, Lord! not give me one hour, or one day more? There is no place without examples of this kind, of those that lament their time is out and opportunities lost, when God hath offered grace to them. Some instances there are, whom God sets forth to be terrors to the secure world, who are as good as men risen from the dead, to tell others of the vanity of their sinful courses; who, looking upon time past, see it is irrecoverably lost, and gone away as a dream and a shadow. Upon time present they feel their souls naked, their accounts not made up, an end come to all their hopes and comforts here; body sick, conscience trembling, heart hard, God departed, and the grave opened for their filthy carcases, and devils waiting for their secure souls, and for time to come think of nothing but hell and horror and judgment to come; and so they lie complaining, that they had not improved their time. But much time is lost, wishing others to take warning by them, and saying to them, Oh, do not cast away mercy, nor let the precious blood of Christ, which is worthy to be gathered up by angels, run a wasting; now I see the end of my joys, and the beginning of my torments! Oh, then, seek God out of love to God: 1 Peter iv. 3, 'For the time past of our lives may suffice us, to have wrought the will of the gentiles;' Hos. x. 12, 'For it is time to seek the Lord.' Misspent time in neglecting or refusing to seek the Lord ought to be redeemed, and will be so in all that are sensible of their own case. When God maketh an offer, we should be so far from delaying or putting off our

seeking after him, that we should look back upon the time already spent out of communion with God as very long, too long for the good of our souls. It should be a grief of heart to us to think of pleasing the flesh, or living in a state of estrangement any longer. Otherwise, we do in effect say, We have not taken time enough to dishonour God and destroy our own souls : Luke xiii. 25, 'When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us ; he shall answer and say unto you, I know ye not, whence ye are ;' John vii. 34, 'Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me.' Most men think Christ a thorn in their side, and that it will never be well till he be gone ; but then they shall seek him, and shall not find him, though they would have him. Though they put away Christ and his truth, yet in ensuing calamities they as earnestly beg for their Messias. So Hos. v. 6, 'They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord ; but they shall not find him ; he hath withdrawn himself from them.' Men countemn the offered grace. The foolish virgins sought when it was too late : Mat. xxv. 11, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' Therefore early, while God stretcheth out his arms, let us not receive his grace in vain.

[2.] Seek him with all the heart, not with a double heart, or a divided heart : James i. 8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways ;' their hearts hang between two objects—God and the world ; the conscience is for God, and the heart for the world : Ps. cxix 10, 'With my whole heart have I sought thee :' when the prevalency of our affections carrieth us to God, and we seek him for himself.

[3.] Seek him earnestly. Carnal men will now and then throw away a prayer. Our affections are strong for earthly things, why not for God ? Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple : ' this is our great business.

[4.] Seek him constantly and unweariedly ; do not give over till you enjoy God. You must not be discouraged with every disappointment. When God seemeth to put us off : Luke xi. 'Because of his importunity, 8, διὰ τὴν ἀναίδειαν, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.' God hideth himself many times, that we may the more earnestly seek after him ; as Cant. iii. 1, 3, 'By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth ; I sought him but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broadways, I will seek him whom my soul loveth ; I sought him, but I found him not,' &c. The woman of Canaan that came to Christ would not be put off ; the lord may be hidden to influence our desires ; the children of God are never satisfied while they are in the world : 2 Cor. v. 6, 'Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord : ' we cannot have complete fruition till we be where God is.