

## SERMON XL.

*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*—HEB. xi. 8.

THE scope of the apostle in this chapter is to prove that the doctrine of faith is an ancient doctrine and that faith hath been always exercised about things not seen, not liable to the judgment of sense and reason. He had proved both points by instances of the fathers before the flood, and now he comes to prove them by the examples of those that were eminent for faith after the flood. And in the first place he pitcheth upon Abraham—a fit instance; he was the father of the faithful, and a person of whom the Hebrews boasted; his life was nothing else but a continual practice of faith, and therefore he insisteth upon Abraham longer than upon any other of the patriarchs. The first thing for which Abraham is commended in scripture is his obedience to God, when he called him out of his country; now the apostle shows this was an effect of faith.

In the words there are these circumstances—

1. The ground of Abraham's faith—*When he was called.*
2. The nature of that call—*To go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance.* Wherein there is intimated a command and a promise: a command to go out of his country into a certain place; then a promise that he should afterward receive it for an inheritance.
3. The effect and influence of his faith upon that call—*He obeyed, and went out.*
4. The excellency and amplification of that obedience—*Not knowing whither he went.*

[1.] For the ground of his faith—'Abraham, when he was called.' Some read it *πίστει ὁ καλουμένος Ἀβραὰμ*, by faith he that was called Abraham obeyed. Abram's name was changed by special occasion. Now some of the fathers would make the apostle in this place to ascribe it to his faith. But this exposition would offer manifest violence to the words and scope of the apostle, we translate it better—'By faith Abraham, when he was called,' for the apostle alludes to the call of God, which is set down in the book of Genesis, chap. xii. 1, 'Now the Lord said to Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land which I shall show you.' This was God's first call to Abraham, wherein he would exercise and try his faith. And this calling was not as the ordinary way of calling is now, by the ministry of man, but by some extraordinary vision and oracle, which was God's ancient way; and therefore it is said, Acts vii. 2, 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham,' viz., in vision, and then gave him his call.

[2.] The second circumstance in the text is the nature of the call, where there is a command to go out of his country, and a promise to come into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance.

(1.) For the command—'To go out.' In Genesis the words are more emphatical—'Get thee out of thy country, from thy kindred,

and from thy father's house.' All which are cutting and killing words to flesh and blood; to leave our dearest comforts, our nearest relations, or native soil. Go from thy country, saith God to him, a hard saying to flesh and blood. The soil in which we first drew breath seems to lay claim to a man's affections; certainly by long custom it enchants us into a secret love, so that a homely cottage in our country seems sweeter than a palace in a strange land. It is very hard to part with things and places to which we are accustomed. What saith Austin, *Dulcia limina, atque amabilem larem, quem et parentum memoria, atque ipsius infantia rudimenta confirmant?* The sweet air where he was wont to converse with his father, friends, kinsfolk, must all these be left? The smoke of our country seems more bright and comfortable than fire in a strange place; yet God saith to Abraham, Go out of thy country. It is harder to Abraham than to another because of his blood and birth, and because he had great possessions there. Many may leave their country out of necessity and inconvenience when it is not well with them, or so well as they could wish at home; but to rich Abraham it is said, Go out of thy country. And it followeth, 'From thy kindred, and from thy father's house.' Go thou, or go thyself. Though he should have no company with him, yet he was to go out of that idolatrous place. If we must needs leave our native soil, yet it were some comfort to have some of our friends and companions with us to solace our exile and erect a new home and country; but Abraham was to forsake all his kindred. He did indeed labour all that he could with his kindred to make them sensible of the oracle and command of God, but he could not prevail. Some of them he got as far as Charran the borders of Canaan. For God's command did not exclude them in case they would follow him, but in case they refused; then Abraham was to go alone. Lot went with him throughout, and Terah his father as far as Charran, and there died: Gen. xi, 31, 'And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot, the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarah, his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.' And though there be no mention of Abraham's brother, yet certainly he went as far as Charran too, as may be collected from other places of scripture. But this is not all, it follows, 'Unto a land which I shall show thee.' Abraham was not acquainted with the fixed place of his abode, he had no visible, certain hopes upon his removal. It is irksome to leave our country and father's house; but if it were for better conveniences, it might be digested; but who would change a certainty for an uncertainty, and leave that which was in hand for wide and unknown hopes? But thus it must be; we must obey God, and not regard what flesh and blood can say to the contrary

[2.] For the promise—'Unto a land which he should afterward receive for an inheritance.' Abraham did not follow God for nought, he was no loser by God, there was an inheritance; but however, faith for a great while was to conflict with much difficulty, before he should receive the inheritance. Consider how God tried Abraham's faith in his promise. It was long ere the place of his inheritance was fixed, ere God told him Canaan should be the land. The command and the promise were first made to him in Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia,

before he dwelt in Charran, Acts vii. 2. Well Abraham depends upon this promise, goes towards Canaan from Charran. And when he comes into Canaan, he had not a foot of land: Acts vii. 5, 'He gave him no inheritance, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.' The promise was to his posterity; he had not one foot himself till he purchased the cave of Machpelah to bury his dead wife in. Well, if his posterity might enjoy it, this was a comfort; but yet, for a great while he had no seed. And when he had seed, God told him his seed was to be four hundred years in Egypt under miserable servitude and bondage, and then they should come and inherit the land, Acts vii. 6. And in the meantime the land was possessed with mighty kings, giants, men of renown and honour, but Abraham was a stranger there. All this is said to show that faith is contented with God's word; it leaves God to the accomplishment of the promise, and minds present obedience. He went out, and that was a great trial; and what was his encouragement? the promise that he should receive it for an inheritance.

[3.] The third circumstance in the text, the effect and influence of faith upon the call—'He obeyed, and went out;' ἠκούσθη καὶ ἐξῆλθε, he 'obeyed,' that signifies the consent of the mind; and 'went out,' that notes his practice and actual obedience; he obeyed not only in word but in deed; there was a promise of obedience with actual performance. It is easy to speak of these things, as the rebellious son said, Mat. xxi. 30. 'I go, sir, and went not.'

[4.] The fourth circumstance, the commendation of his obedience—'Not knowing whither he went.' God did not at first tell him of the place, for the greater trial of his faith. It is true, God had showed him in the general how he should take his course and journey; you must not think he was ignorant whether he should go west or east, towards Canaan or from it, but he did not know whether he went towards the particular place where this inheritance lay, Gen. xi. 31. As soon as Abraham received the call, he went towards Canaan. He knew not what kind of land the land of promise was, nor when it was fixed—'The land that I shall show thee;' but when he was in Canaan, then God told him, 'This is the land I will give to thee; so Gen. xii. 7, 'Unto thy seed will I give this land.'

I shall draw the words thus explained to some doctrinal issue and conclusion. The main point is faith's ready obedience to the call of God. Now there is a threefold call, and the text may be applied to either of them. There is a general call to the obedience of the gospel, a particular call to some office and course of life wherein we may glorify God, and a personal call to the exercise of that office.

1. There is *vocatio ad fœdus*, a general call to the covenant of grace, by which they are called by the ministry of the word, and the efficacy of the Spirit, to the faith and obedience of the gospel. It is called general because it concerns all christians.

2. There is *vocatio ad munus*, a calling us to some office and course of life wherein we may glorify God by exercising the gifts he hath bestowed upon us, which is called a particular calling because it is not common to all christians.

3. There is *vocatio ad exercitium muneris*, a personal call, by which

the particular circumstances are determined, and we are directed to the choice of the place and the people among whom we are to exercise this office and function to the glory of God. Of all these I shall treat in order, for to all these the circumstances of the text may be accommodated. Here was *vocatio ad fœdus*; when God appeared to Abraham it was not merely in a prophetic manner, and for some special intent; but to call him to grace, for he was an idolater then, and that he might serve him by the obedience of faith. It is true, the reason was extraordinary, as all dispensations then were; but this call was the means of his conversion, for by this means he was taken out from the idolatry and other corruptions of life, to which Chaldea was extremely given, and Abraham among the rest, so that he could not remain there without great danger. Then there was *vocatio ad munus*, to an office; Abraham was called to a strange country, that God's blessing might appear in multiplying his seed, and he might be a means to glorify God in the sight of the Canaanites. Then there was *vocatio ad exercitium muneris*, a personal call to Canaan, the fixed place, that he might take possession of that country by faith and hope, and in that country typically of heaven, as in the next verse.

First, I shall apply the verse to the general call, and so many points are notable—

1. Observe, that faith, wherever it is, it bringeth forth true obedience—by faith Abraham, being called, obeyed God. Faith and obedience can never be severed; as the sun and the light, fire and heat. Therefore we read of the 'obedience of faith,' Rom. i. 5. Obedience is faith's daughter. Faith hath not only to do with the grace of God, but with the duty of the creature. By apprehending grace, it works upon duty: Gal. v. 6, 'Faith works by love;' it fills the soul with the apprehensions of God's love, and then makes use of the sweetness of love to urge us to more work or obedience. All our obedience to God comes from love to God, and our love comes from the persuasion of God's love to us. The argument and discourse that is in a sanctified soul is set down, Gal. ii. 20, 'I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' Wilt not thou do this for God, that loved thee? for Jesus Christ, that gave himself for thee? Faith, it works towards obedience by commanding the affections of love, of hope, of fear; it makes use of love—'Faith works by love,' fills the soul with apprehensions of God's love; then what wilt thou not do for him? Then it makes use of fear—'Noah, moved with fear, prepared an ark, for the saving of his household,' Heb. xi. 7. Sometimes it makes use of hope, as here, when Abraham hoped and expected these things of God, then 'he obeyed him, and went forth, not knowing whither he went.' There are no hopes equal to the reward it proposeth, no fears comparable to the terror it representeth, no motives so strong as it urgeth.

2. Observe, the ground of this obedience is God's call. Here are two instances together: Noah's faith wrought by fear, the ground of that was oracle—'Being warned of God;' and Abraham's faith wrought by hope, the ground of it was God's call, 'By faith—Abraham, being called of God;' he had the express command and promise of God. Hence observe, till we have a call we cannot take

the honour of laying claim to the promises : for no man takes this honour but he that is called of God, and we shall have no warrant for obedience without a call. It is but will-worship without a call, and hope would be but a mere fancy. As those which stood idle in the market-place, when they were asked, Why do not you labour? they answered, None hath hired us : we were not called to work. Without a call the world would be but a general cell of monks, that leave kindred and father's house without any warrant.

3. Observe, this call consisteth of a command and a promise : 'Go thou,' there is the command—'and thou shalt receive the land for thy inheritance,' there is the promise. The command is the ground of duty, and the promise is the ground of hope and expectation. And still God dealeth with us in the same manner—'Believe, and thou shalt be saved;' with all the commands of God there is a promise annexed. Hence observe, it is God's mercy to propound encouragements when he might enforce. God will draw us with the cords of a man, and allure us into obedience by commands and promises. The brute-creatures are ruled by mere sovereignty, but God deals with men as men. We have election and choice ; and therefore there is not only duty laid before us, but death and life. God said to Abraham, Go ; it is a hard duty, but thou shalt not lose by it, for thou shalt have the land of Canaan for thy inheritance.

4. I observe again, this call is brought to men when they are in their worst estate : for mark, the call was made to Abraham when he was at Mesopotamia, Acts vii. 2, in Ur of the Chaldees ; then God said to him, 'Leave thy country and thy father's house.' Therefore, when this call is mentioned, Gen. xii. 1, the phrase there is 'the Lord had said to Abraham;' God had spoken to him before he came from Charran. Now in Ur of the Chaldees they were idolaters : Josh. xxiv. 2, 3, 'Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood,' &c. Then when he was serving idols, he and all his kindred, then God comes and enters into a treaty of grace with him. That is the reason the apostle makes Abraham to believe in God as 'justifying the ungodly,' Rom. iv. 5. Abraham before grace was, as we all are, ungodly, a worshipper of idols. Hence observe, when God comes to call us, he calls us out of mere grace. Consider this, that you may neither despair of mercy, nor yet ascribe grace to any merit or good dispositions of your own. Abraham, that was the father of the faithful, the chiefest of believers, when God came to take him to grace, he was as vile a sinner as any. The whole land was open to God, but God took Abraham your father. Was he better than others? No ; he and his father served idols, the son could not be better than the father by whom he was educated ; but God of his mercy singled him out from the rest. Paul, a persecutor, Abraham, an idolater, obtained mercy of God : 1 Tim. i. 13, 'Who was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious, but I obtained mercy.'

5. I observe again, that free grace makes a distinction between them of the same line and kindred ; God called him alone, and blessed him—'Forsake thy country and thy father's house.' None of

Abraham's kindred, but only Lot were called; the rest were turned out: Isa. li. 2, 'Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him;' that is, though there were more besides him of his race and family. Thus God can make a difference between brother and brother, and between brother and sister; Jacob was loved, and not Esau; Abel was accepted, and not Cain. God can come into a town, and pick out two or three berries on the top of the uppermost branches—'One of a city, and two of a tribe,' Jer. iii. 14. God may leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness of the world to seek one sheep. Those that are in the same bed, in the same employment, feeding at the same meal, one shall be taken to grace, and the other shall be left to misery and judgment. He can put a distinction between husband and wife; free grace picks and chooses according to its own pleasure. Remember this, that thou mayest know who it was that made thee to differ, and admire not only the kindness, but the freedom of his grace: Rom. ix. 18, 'Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy.'

6. In this call I observe that God bids him to leave his country and his father's house; hence note—

*Doct.* When God calls us to grace, we are not only to leave sin, but to leave the world, and all things that are dear to us in the world.

As soon as God appeared to Abraham, he was to leave Chaldea, Charran, and all, for Canaan. Faith, where it is rightly planted, turns the heart not only from sin to God, but from the world to God, from the creature to the creator, from carnal things to those that are more excellent and heavenly. Not that we must leave our possessions and renounce our estates as soon as God calls to grace, without a special call, as that trial was: Mat. xix. 21, '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.' That was a special trial; but we must come out from the world in heart and affection: Ps. xlv. 10, 'Forget thy own people, and thy father's house.' We must not be wedded in our affection to the world, but contracted and wedded to Christ. Many, if they leave gross sins, they think they are safe; but in conversion there is a turning from the creature to God, as well as from sin to God: Mat. xix. 27, 'We have forsaken all and followed thee.' In vow and affection you must renounce the world, that you may keep your hearts loyal and chaste to Jesus Christ. You must sell all for the pearl of great price. And then take heed after conversion that you do not retract your vow, for your estate is no longer yours, but God's; you must part with your estate upon just and convenient reasons of religion; when it is not consistent with the conscience of our duty to God. Nabal was but a fool to say, 'Shall I take my bread and my wine,' &c. 1 Sam. xxv. 11, and the prodigal to say, I spend but my own. When thou art converted, it is not thine, but all is left and given to God, to be disposed of according to his will and pleasure; and when the keeping of an estate is not consistent with our duty to God, we must part with it. Sometimes Christ and the world will be together; but when they part, we must not forsake Christ to keep mammon company. When we cannot get an estate but we must quit our conscience, or keep an estate and a good conscience together; or when

violence or death divorceth us from our comforts, our heart must not be overwhelmed with grief or trouble; let us remember by believing we forsook the world, and promised to cleave to God.

7. I observe again, that God shows him the worst even at his first calling. God might have given the call in one word, but it is amplified, Gen. xii. 1. Observe—

*Doct.* When we give up our names to Christ, the Lord would have us sit down and count the charges, that so we may meet trouble with the more resolution.

When a virgin was enamoured with that sour philosopher, he showed her his crooked back; thus Christ tells us the worst at first, what we must look for—trouble, hazard, inconveniences of the world. Can you deny yourselves in all this? Luke xiv 26, ‘If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.’ It is a general case; and then he useth the similitude of building, that he must sit down and count the charges. When a man hath allotted so much for building, so long as he keeps within the bounds of his allotment he parteth with it freely; but when that is gone he parts with every penny after with grudging. It is good to make Christ large allowance at the first, that we may not grudge our bargain and contract.

8. It is said of Abraham, he obeyed and went out; he obeyed, that signifies the consent of his mind; and he went forth, that notes his actual obedience to that word: he not only promised, but performed.

Observe—

*Doct.* It is the property of faith to subject all our wills and all our interests to God’s pleasure.

Faith, when it takes, it gives; with one hand it takes Christ; with the other hand it resigns and gives up ourselves, our relations, and all our comforts to the will of Christ. There is a notable expression, and some understand it of Abraham’s obedience, Isa. xli. 2, ‘He called the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot.’ When God called Abraham, he called him to his foot; and there Abraham would follow after God according to the pleasure of God. And so it is the property of faith to make us set foot by foot with God, to go after him wheresoever he goes. God’s call must be readily executed, whatever comes on it.

9. He obeyed, and went forth; there was not only a consent of heart, but he readily performed. Observe—

*Doct.* We must not only give God good words, and make vows at our effectual calling, but we must be sensible of the vows of God.

Many are apt to speak good words, as Christ hath a parable of the formal professor: Mat. xxi. 28–30, ‘A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, Son, go into the vineyard and work. And he saith, I will, and did not. And he came to the other, and he said, I will not; and after he repented, and went;’ which is the better son? It is easier to talk of leaving friends, lands, and our father’s house, and take upon ourselves a voluntary exile for a good conscience, than to do it. It is easy to talk of these things in the serene times of the gospel, but this is like him in the parable, ‘I go, sir, and went not.’ It is said

of the children of God, Rev. xii. 11, that 'they loved not their lives to death;' that is, they did not only in prodigality and presumption give up their lives to God, but when it came to performance, when death was at hand, either they must die or renounce Christ, then they loved not their lives. So when God puts us to deny every near comfort, to quit country, parents, every dearest thing—when we cannot keep these things with a good conscience, then faith submits to it.

10. Consider, in the history there was some kind of halting, though it be said in the general that he obeyed, for he stayed at Charran about five years. When Terah went out of Ur, he was two hundred years old; when he died in Charran, he was two hundred and five years old. He stays there when he should have gone into Canaan, as may be gathered out of Gen. xi. 25, but there he stays till he had buried his father; and truly I do believe that then he was revived by some new call, and again admonished, when he was somewhat slack and negligent. Some deny a second call, but it is clear to me by what is said: Acts vii. 4, 'Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran; and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell;' that is, by a new persuasion and excitation God awakened him again, and bid him to go into Canaan. And so, Gen. xii. 4, it is said that 'Abraham departed as the Lord had spoken to him.' Hence observe—

*Doct.* Faith may sometimes make a halt, and grow weary, but it rouseth itself up again.

So it is with us in our spiritual course; when we begin to look after God, we are apt to halt and linger, therefore we had need be roused again. A ship that is bound for such a harbour, yet by the violence of the storm may be driven back, but it makes way towards its port again; so by temptation we may be driven back for a time, but we must make way to our port and haven again. Oh, it is well if we can but make advantage of our falls, as a ball beaten down to the ground rebounds the higher.

11. I observe again, 'He obeyed.' That hath respect to the encouragement the promise gave, and yet how long was it ere the promise was accomplished. Hence observe—

*Doct.* True faith doth constantly adhere to God, though it presently finds not what it believes and expects from God.

Abraham left Ur, then Charran, and though he had not a foot in the land of Canaan, yet still he waits upon God. The famine drove him out of Canaan into Egypt, Gen. xii. 10; afterwards he had wars and conflicts with the kings of Canaan, they would not allow him a safe abode; he was burdened with envy, without children, yet still he waits for the accomplishment of the promise, and believes in hope against hope. Well then, we must trust God, though we have nothing of present feeling. Oh, it is an excellent thing when we can say as the people of God, Isa. xlv. 24, 'In the Lord my God I shall have righteousness and strength.' Well, I will wait upon God, though nothing comes to hand; though there be nothing in feeling, yet we must wait upon God. We read, Heb. iii. 6, of *καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος*, 'The rejoicing, or glorying of hope.' It is excellent when we can glory in our hopes, and in what we do expect. There is more of duty in waiting, though there

is less of comfort; and when we have nothing in feeling and fruition, yet then to depend upon God; this is like an Abraham that built an altar, and offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving, Gen. xii. 8. Oh, that we could give thanks, and bless God for our hopes; and in the midst of difficulties, yet wait upon God for what we shall have.

12. I observe, 'He obeyed, not knowing whither he went.'

*Doct.* Upon a divine call we must obey, though we do not know what will come of it.

This is of excellent use to christians that are yet in the twilight of grace, between grace and nature; they do not know what will come of it, yet they venture upon Christ. The master calls; you are invited to grace, and you should make an essay. We owe God blind obedience. Blind men will follow their guides over hills and through dales fearing nothing; so should we follow God. Carnal reason will be full of objections, but in such cases we should not dispute but resolve; and let us cleave to Christ, and hang upon Christ, though we do not know what will come of it; as the lepers: 2 Kings vii. 4, '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 into the host of the Syrians; if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.' So also in discharging our duty; when we know not what success we shall have, still we must perform it; as the prophet in his public contests with an obstinate people gains acceptance with God, though not success with men: Isa. xlix. 4, 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.'

*Secondly*, I come now to apply the text to a particular calling, to some office, employment, and course of life wherein to glorify God. And here I shall inquire—

(1.) How we shall know that we are called to such an employment, now oracles are ceased, and God doth not so immediately speak to us as he did to Abraham. (2.) How must we behave ourselves in that calling; what is the obedience of faith. (3.) I shall handle some cases incident to this matter.

1. How we shall know that we are called of God. It is a matter necessary to be known, that we act in faith and obedience. A man cannot expect God's blessing but in God's way. And the general rule is, *ἔπovou Θεῶ*, follow God. Now how shall we do to see God in our calling, that we may walk with him foot by foot? It is said, Isa. xli. 2, 'Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot.' By way of answer to this necessary question, I shall lay down several propositions.

[1.] That every man must have a particular calling. Life was given us for somewhat; not merely to fill up the number of the world, or to grow in stature—so life was given to the plants, that they may grow bulky, and increase in stature; not merely to taste pleasures, that is the happiness of beasts, to enjoy pleasures without remorse. God gave men higher faculties of reason and conscience; reason to manage some work and business for the glory of God; and conscience, that he might review his work, and mind his soul. The rule is general, that all

Adam's sons are to eat their bread in the sweat of their brows : Gen. iii. 19, ' In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.' I know it doth not bind in the rigour of the letter ; the priests were not to sweat : Ezek. xlv. 18, ' They shall not gird themselves with anything that causeth sweat ;' yet in the intent it binds to some honest labour, the sweat of the body or of the brain. Adam's two sons were heirs-apparent of the world, and the one was employed in tillage and the other in pasturage. The world was never made for a hive for drones, and the word giveth no privilege to any to be idle. It is true, there is a difference between employments ; some live more by manual labours, others in more genteel employments, as the magistrate, the minister, and those that study for public good. Manual labour is not required of all, because it is not a thing that is required *propter se*, as simply good and necessary, but *propter aliud*, as for maintenance and support of life, to ease the church, to supply the uses of charity. When the ends of labour cannot otherwise be obtained, then handy labour is required. A minister is forbidden travail and labour, it being a means of distraction ; but he is to be laborious and diligent in his calling. A gentleman is to fit himself to do his country service, either in magistracy or ministry ; if need be in the ministry, it is not beneath them. The first-born were the priests, that is, the most noble, the most worthy, the most potent, ere God settled it in the tribe of Levi. Diligent they are to be in doing their country good one way or other, and to spend the more time in spiritual exercises, the less they need handy labour ; but when their whole life is spent in eating, drinking, sporting, sleeping, it is bestial. Idleness was one of Sodom's sins : Ezek. xvi. 49, ' Behold this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom ; pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters.' It makes you lose your right to the creatures—' If any would not work, neither let him eat,' 2 Thes. iii. 10. Gentlemen are but robbers that live idly and without a calling ; though they are freed from servile and handy labour, yet they are not freed from work and business. If any man might be allowed to be idle, then one member would be lost in the body politic. Man is born a member of some society, family, city, world, and is to seek the good of it ; he is ζῶον πολιτικόν. We see in the body natural there is no member, but it hath its function and use, whereby it becometh serviceable to the whole. All have not the same office, that would make a confusion ; but all have their use, either as an eye, or as a hand, or as a leg, and it must be employed. So in the politic body no member must be useless, they must have one function or another wherein to employ themselves, otherwise they are but unprofitable burdens of the earth. Again, every man is more or less intrusted with a gift, which he is to exercise and improve for the common good, and at the day of judgment he is to give up his accounts ; Mat. xxv. 19, ' After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them.' If he hath but one talent, it must not be hidden in a napkin. Well then, if every man hath a gift for which he is accountable to God, he must have a calling : 1 Cor. vii. 17, ' As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk,' and choose his state of life. Besides, a calling is necessary to prevent the mischiefs of idleness, and those inconveniences

that follow men not employed; standing pools are apt to putrify, but running waters are sweetest. An idle man is a burden to himself, a prey to Satan, a grief to the Spirit of God, and a mischief to others. He is a burden to himself, for he knoweth not what to do with his time. In the morning he cries, Would to God it were evening, and in the evening, Would to God it were morning—the mind like a mill, when it wanteth work, falleth upon itself. He is a prey to Satan; the devil findeth the house ‘empty, swept, and garnished,’ Mat. xii. 44; the devil findeth them at leisure, and then sets them a-work. When David was idle on the terrace, he fell into a snare. Birds are not taken in their flight, but when they pitch and rest. He is a grief to God’s Spirit: Eph. iv. 28, ‘Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good,’ compared with ver. 30, ‘And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.’ Idle men quench the vigour of natural gifts, and lose the ability of nature. He is a mischief to others, 2 Thes. iii. 11—*Μηδὲν ἐργαζομένους, ἀλλὰ περιεργαζομένους*—‘Working not at all, but are busybodies.’ They that nothing will do too much; no work makes way for ill work. Censure do and busy inquisition into other men’s actions is the native fruit of idleness; and so they prove the fire-brands of contention and unneighbourly quarrels. There must be a calling then to prevent these mischiefs.

[2.] That this calling must be good and agreeable to the word of God, which is ‘A lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path,’ Ps. cxix. 105. It were not a perfect rule, if it did not direct us in all cases; therefore in the choice of our course of life, we must consult with the word, that we may not settle in a course of sin. Men may tolerate evil callings, but God never appointed them, and therefore here we are not called to them, but called off from them. Now if any calling be against piety, temperance or justice, it is against the word,—for the word ‘teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world,’ Titus iii. 12. Against piety, as to be an idolatrous priest, or to make shrines for idols, which was Demetrius’s calling in Ephesus; and Tertullian, in his book ‘De Idololatria’ showeth that this was the practice of many christians to get their livings by making statues and images and other ornaments, to sell to heathen idolaters. Against justice, as piracy, brokage, and other oppressive courses. Against sobriety, as such callings as merely tend to feed the luxury, pride, and vanity of men, as stage-plays and the like, it were endless to instance in all. In the general, the calling must be good and lawful, if we would see God in it.

[3.] This calling must not only be good, but we must see God in it. Providence ruleth in everything that falleth out, even in the least matters; especially hath the Lord a great hand in callings, and in appointing to everyone his state and condition of life. In paradise, God set Adam his work as a gardener to dress and prune the trees: Gen. ii. 15, ‘And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden, to dress it, and to keep it;’ and still he doth not only give the ability and special inclination, but also disposeth of the education of the parent, and passages of men’s lives to bring them to such a calling; Isa. liv. 16, ‘Behold I have created the smith, that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for

his work.' Common trades and crafts are from the Lord. The heathens had a several god for every several trade, as the papists now have a tutelar saint; but they rob God of his honour, he giveth the faculty and the blessings; so it is said, Isa. xxviii. 24-29 *ad finem*, 'Doth the husbandman plough all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of the ground?' &c. 'His God doth instruct him to discretion and doth teach him. For the fitches are not thrashed with a thrashing-instrument, neither is a cart-wheel turned about upon the cummin, &c. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.' God giveth the skill and appointeth the work. Your particular estate and condition of life doth not come by chance, or by the bare will and pleasure of man; but the ordination of God, without which a sparrow cannot fall to the ground: Prov. xx. 24, 'Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?'

[4.] In the higher callings of ministry and magistracy, our call from God must be more solemn, because in these callings God's glory and the good of human society are more concerned; and therefore such have need of a clear call that manage them. In ordinary callings there is required both fitness and inclination, or a fitness of gifts and inclination, which are the fruits of God's general providence. Fitness in every calling is a common gift of the Spirit; so it is said of Bezaleel, Exod. xxxi. 3, 'I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship.' An inclination to such a calling is from God's general providence, depriving them of higher opportunities of advancement, and overcoming their hearts to make choice of such a work. Now the more weighty the business and affair of life is, the more is providence concerned in it: and therefore for magistracy and ministry much more doth God make them fit and willing. Fit: 2 Cor. iii. 6, 'Who hath made us able ministers of the new testament;' and willing: Mat. ix. 38, 'Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into the harvest;' he thrusteth out labourers into the harvest. They are God's special giit, sought of God in prayer, and he giveth them commission. Again, there is an outward rail set about these callings, that men may enter in by the door, in an external lawful way, which is not so much required in other callings. Private callings are at the appointment of parents; public must be left to a solemn external call, lest all order be broken both in church and commonwealth; others serve only for the accommodation, but these are for the essence and foundation of human society.

[5.] The calling of magistrates must not be undertaken, whatever abilities and inclinations men have, till they have a fair invitation from those that have power to call them; and then it must not be refused. Men are God's instruments in this kind, and therefore we must not only have gifts from God but allowance from men; and therefore they sin that enter upon the magistrate's office by violence, or by money and bribery, and do not expect a call and the fair invitation of providence; as Absalom had an itch to be a judge and a ruler, but he got the office by rebellion. And again they sin, that when they have a fair call from God and men—from God by giits, and from

men by choice and allowance—refuse, out of a desire of ease and privacy, or for want of courage. But I will not meddle with this more now.

Ministers must expect both an internal and an external call—a call they must have, that they may not run till they are sent. Jesus Christ took not this honour upon him, till he was called by God. There is much of God to be observed in this calling, that we may expect a blessing, and digest the difficulties and inconveniences of it with patience: Acts xv. 7, 'God made choice among us, that the gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe;' there was a choice of Peter among the rest of the apostles; so Acts. x. 41, 42, 'Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people,' &c. Well then, but when are we chosen? There is an internal call from God, and an external call from the church. The internal call from God, that is it chiefly which I am to speak of, though I shall touch on the other also. This is when a man is made fit and willing. Fit he must be; if the Spirit of God fitted Aholiab and Bezaleel for the material work of the temple, then much more is there a fitness required in the ministers of the gospel: 1 Tim. i. 12, 'I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.' There must be some competent ability. If God ever puts us into the ministry, he first enableth us; and that is not all he must be willing: 1 Tim. iii. 1, 'If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.' There must be a strong inclination, that if God give a call, we will take up such a course of life. Well then, he hath not this inward call that is willing, but not fit, or fit, but not willing, much more he that is neither fit nor willing, but only is thrust upon such an office by the carnal importunities of friends; and he that hath both, hath the call of the Spirit. But now an internal call is not enough; there must be that which is external, as Peter was sent by an angel to Cornelius, and had an external call from Cornelius too, Acts x. So must we, having an inward call, wait for the outward call of the church, otherwise we cannot lawfully be admitted to the exercise of the calling. As in the old testament, the tribe of Levi was by God appointed to the service of the altar, yet none could exercise the ministry and calling of a Levite, till he was anointed and purified by the church: Exod. xxviii. 3, 'And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise-hearted, whom I have filled with the Spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office; so Num. iii. 3, 'These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests which were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office.' Thus the ministers of the gospel, though called by God, must have their external separation, and setting apart to that work by the church. The outward call belongs to the church, but it is to be done in order—election by the people, examination of life and doctrine with authoritative mission by the presbytery, confirmation by the magistrate: Acts vi. 3, 'Wherefore brethren look ye out among ye seven men, of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;' where election is referred to the body of the church and

ordination to the elders: Acts xiv. 23, 'And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed;' Acts xiii. 2, 3, 'The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.' And the christian magistrate hath his share, to see that all things are done orderly; and then they are to have his confirmation.<sup>1</sup>

[7.] For ordinary callings then we are called by God; when God giveth ability and inclination, and openeth a fair passage in his providence, that is to be looked upon as a call. Inclination there must be, that we may be fit for our calling, and our calling fit for us; otherwise we are like a member out of joint, out of our place and way. If we be at our own disposal this must be observed: if not, parents and those that have the disposal of us, must observe it; they must consider the child's inclination, using prayer, calling in the advice of others. It is the weightiest affair of life; much is to be known by children's inclinations. The Athenians would set before their children, the trowel, the shovel, a sword, and a book, that they might choose their calling. As Nazianzen tells us, Athanasius acted the part of a bishop when a boy, which being observed by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, he brought him up for the ministry. And Origen would be often asking his father, Leonides, concerning such and such places of scripture. Much of God's pleasure is seen in their inclinations, which if parents observe not, mischief follows—sometimes to the church, sometimes to the children themselves. And abilities and gifts must be observed both by the parent and by themselves when we come to maturity, and to choose our own way: Prov. xvi. 20, 'He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.' And then providence is to be observed in the designment of education, and the advantages which God offereth for the choice of our course of life. Take all together, and it maketh a call for ordinary offices of life; otherwise, as great mischiefs arise, as if a man should walk with his hands and work with his feet.

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## SERMON XLI.

*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed and he went out, not knowing whither he went.—HEB. xi. 8.*

2. How to behave ourselves in this calling, that we may, as Abraham did, manifest the obedience of faith.

[1.] Where you see God before you, you must cheerfully follow after. If you see God calling you to the ministry, magistracy, or any inferior course of life, therein doth he expect glory from you; and for that end did he give you gifts, an account of which you must render at the last

<sup>1</sup> See this more fully handled in the sermons on John xvii. 13.

day. We are apt to dispute with God, and to consult with our natural affections: Exod. iv. 13, 'Send I pray thee, by the hand of him, whom thou wilt send.' By gifts, by special instinct, by the invitation of providence, by the call of the church and state, God hath declared his pleasure; and then sit down, count the charges, and put thy hand to the plough. Though it may be otherwise you might have a more quiet and a more splendid and plentiful course of life; yet this is the way God calleth you to; as here Abraham obeyed, and went forth.

[2.] Confine your endeavours within this calling, and keep within the bounds of it. If you do anything that is not within the compass of your calling, you can have no warrant that it pleaseth God. Christ would not intermeddle out of his calling: Luke xii. 14, 'Man, who made me a judge, or a divider over you?' Uzziah's putting his hand to the ark cost him dear. If troubles arise, we cannot suffer them comfortably; we are out of God's way. Mischiefs abroad come from invading callings, as tumults and confusions in nature, when elements are out of their places. Never do I look for peace and establishment till all things run in their own proper channels. *Pax est tranquillitas ordinis*, is a true description of external peace. Callings are not to be invaded by the magistrate, or the people. So Acts x, the angel appeareth to Cornelius: but he bids him send to Peter, to preach to him, and settle him in the faith. Why doth he not teach him himself? No; his commission was only to bring a message from God, not to preach the gospel. The magistrates that are as angels of God should not usurp spiritual administrations, but leave them to those that are called of God. When Saul would be doing the priest's office, God was angry with him, 1 Sam. xiii. 13, 14; Uzziah was smitten with leprosy for taking a censer to burn incense upon the altar of incense, 2 Chron. xvi. 18. The magistrates have enough to do about religion. Christ hath recommended his spouse to them, that they may give her house and harbour, and maintain and defend her. Let them do that; but it is a sacrilege and usurpation when they intermeddle in the minister's calling. Nor must it be usurped by the people. God hath chosen witnesses: Acts x. 40, 41, 'Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, &c.' Christ would not appear to the multitude. It is not everyone's work to preach, but of those that are chosen by God; for it is not a work of charity but a duty belonging to a particular calling. He that cannot say he is a chosen witness, why should he intermeddle? Let them increase their knowledge and instruct their families, taking all occasion of gaining neighbours; let them be much in examining their hearts and private meditations; they will have far more comfort, and show less of pride and usurpation.

[3.] Humbly wait upon God for his blessing in the use of means. Men must work, but cast their care upon God: Mat. vi. 31, 'Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?' God will not put the trouble of the event upon us—'Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things,' ver. 32; 'Abraham obeyed, not knowing whither he went.' As in a pair of compasses, one foot is fixed in the centre, while another wandereth about in the circumference; so the work of faith

is not to abate industry, but to fix the heart. Faith is not idle, but waiteth; this is the proper temper of a christian. Let us do our duty, and leave our care upon God. Anxiousness about the success and event is a sin, because then we take God's work out of his hands. Success is God's work, labour is ours. This life is called, 'The life of our hands;' God maintaineth it, but by our hands. Not to labour is to tempt providence; to cark is to distrust it. Miracles are not multiplied without necessity. When we neglect means, we discharge God of the obligation of his promise. If you starve for want of industry, you can blame none. God hath not undertaken that sin shall not be our ruin, but rather the contrary. But now by a quiet use of means you enter into God's protection, as the protection of the law is only for them that travel on the road: Ps. lv. 22, 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.' Business is our work, but care is our burden, that must we cast on God. It is no more dishonour for God to bear our burden, than for Christ to bear our sins.

[4.] With patience digest the inconveniences of your calling. Affliction attendeth every state and condition of life; but we may go through them cheerfully—we are in our way, and in our place. You may meet with discouragements as a minister, or as a magistrate; yet go on whatever men do, God is a good pay-master, and your work is with the Lord. You may meet with discouragements as a servant, but it is thy calling, and therein God will be glorified. When troubles overtake us in our calling, we do not rush into them, but fall into them: James i. 2, 'My brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations.' It is matter of rejoicing when ye fall into divers trials, not when ye draw them upon yourselves, or thrust yourselves into them; some run into afflictions, and seek the cross, do not take it up when it stands in their way.

[5.] Bear up against opposition and difficulty with courage and boldness. Jonah smarted for declining the duty of his calling, because of danger. When you meet with unreasonable men—'The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil,' 2 Thes. iii. 3. It is good to follow God wherever he leadeth. If to do any work, to undergo any danger, remember he is faithful; he is not wont to put an heavy burden upon weak shoulders: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.'

3. There are some cases; as—

[1.] Suppose a man hath entered upon a calling, especially a higher calling upon carnal grounds, as profit and preferment; or by carnal means, as many enter into the ministry; and being taught better things, should they leave their office and employment?

*Ans.* If he findeth himself unfit for that calling into which he hath thrust himself out of an evil aim, or that he wants gifts for the exercise of it, he must lay it aside; for he cannot do faithful service to God in that calling, and he cumbereth the ground and occupieth the room of another; like that barren fig-tree, on which that sentence was passed:

Luke xiii. 7, 'Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?' But if there be hope, that he is able to discharge his duty in some measure, he must not desert his station; he may afterwards by his repentance and faithfulness approve himself to God and the church; at first, he wanted not gifts, but uprightness.

[2.] Whether a man may not change his calling?

*Ans* (1.) Negatively. Not out of pride and disdain at the meanness of it. It is credit enough to do God's work; if it be a servile calling to church or commonwealth, you do him service. There is no calling so mean but a humble heart may do God service in it; you may adorn the gospel as long as you walk honestly. The apostle exhorts servants, Tit. ii. 10, 'Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.' Not out of covetousness; Heb. xiii. 5, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have.' God will be sure to cross carnal desires. Not out of envy and ambition, because others have a better calling than we; this breedeth mischief and confusion: 2 Sam. xv. 4, 'Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!' Not out of distrust and impatience; you will meet with like trials in every condition of life. He that cannot trust God in one calling, doth but trust himself in another. Not out of fond curiosity and levity of mind, out of inconstancy and itch of novelty; they love to make experiments, though to their own loss and the public disturbance many times. It must not be done lightly and rashly; but upon weighty causes: 1 Cor. vii. 20, 'Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.' Every one should be contented with his own place and station, Though the calling in itself be low, yet to him it is best, and most expedient for him; otherwise you tax God's providence, who called you to such a function.

(2.) Positively. I confess it may be done; for that place, 1 Cor. vii. 20, 'Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he is called;' the meaning is, the place wherein religion finds us is not to be changed merely upon receiving religion. It is true, a servant may become free; Amos was an herdsman, yet was made a prophet; Christ's disciples were fishermen. There are cases which may clear up the will of God to a man's conscience. Private necessity and public good may make a man change his calling. Private necessity, as when the former calling ceaseth to be useful, and to minister supply to us, as framing instruments of war in a time of peace, or when the course of trading is altered. Public good, as when a man may be more useful, if by mistake or the carnal affection of parents he have been diverted to another course of life.

[3.] Whether a man may offer himself to a calling, being sensible of his inward call, and after trial of strength of gifts, or should expect till he be invited by others?

*Ans*. He may desire it; therefore in a modest manner he may manifest his desire to whom it concerneth: 1 Tim. iii. 1, 'If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work;' if a man be entrusted with fitting gifts, and set apart by God, he may offer himself

to a lawful trial, without a presumption of his strength or a haughty ambition, but out of the conscience of an inward call, to employ his talent in the service of the Lord. Moses' tergiversation had like to cost him dear: Exod. iv. 14, 'And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses.'

*Thirdly*, I shall now apply the text to a personal calling, or a call to such a place, where we may exercise our talents and abilities for the glory of God, and the good of others.

This case is weighty, and necessary to be resolved—

1. Because the place falleth under a call, as well as the office itself. The apostles had not only a commission, but a passport; upon every removal or resting they ever depend on the call of God. Paul was warned by oracle to tarry in Corinth: Acts xviii. 10, 'I have much people in this city;' and by vision he was called into Macedonia: Acts xvi. 9, 'And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.' Nay, when they purposed to go to one place, out of the judgment of reason, they were diverted to another by revelation: Acts xvi. 7, 'After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not.' It is true, we cannot expect oracles, nor must we expect extraordinary dreams,—our removes are not of such consequence, and these are God's ancient ways; yet our goings fall under a providence: Ps. xxxvii. 23, 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way.' And it is not comfortable and safe to shift from place to place till we see God before us; as the Israelites moved by the motion of the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. And it is said, Acts xvii. 26, 'He hath determined the times beforehand, and the bounds of their habitation.' As their course of life, so also their place and dwelling are ordered by God.

2. We cannot else expect a blessing. There where God hath set us, there will he be with us, and bless us. This keepeth up our dependence upon him: Ezra viii. 21, 'Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance;' and ver. 31, 'Then we departed from the river Ahava, on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem; and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.' They went on cheerfully, and found God in the journey. Here he hath fixed me, and here will I expect his blessing.

3. It is necessary to still murmurings when we are reduced to straits. God trieth his people with difficulties and inconveniences; though we have God's warrant for our way, we cannot expect an absolute freedom from them. Now if they light upon us in God's way, and the place where he hath called us, we may bear them with the more patience. As suppose poverty, troubles from ill neighbours, or sickness, if we have not asked God's leave and blessing, conscience will turn upon us, and sting us with remorse. But when we are persuaded that God hath called us, faith quiets the heart, and worketh a humble submission. The disciples were all sent to sea by Christ: Mat. xiv. 21, 'Jesus con-

strained his disciples to get into a ship;’ there was a call, yet they were tossed with waves. Christ’s warrant for the voyage did not exempt them from trouble and danger; yet we read of no fear till Christ appeared on the waves, then ‘they thought him a spirit, and were sore afraid,’ ver. 26. But Christ comforts them, and revealeth himself to them—‘Be not afraid, it is I,’ ver. 27. So usually it falleth out, this is a pattern of providence; there will be troubles, but in God’s way we need fear no danger.

4. Because it is a piece of atheism not to acknowledge God in every accident and affair of life. God will have the dominion of his providence acknowledged: James iv. 13–15, ‘Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get a gain, . . . for that ye ought to say, If the Lord will we shall live and do this or that.’ Such resolutions shut out God when conceived without prayer and inquiry of God. Do not first say, We will go to such a place, but, Lord, shall I? We are neither lords of lives nor of actions; it is a piece of religious manners to ask God’s leave, and wait for his answer, if we expect his blessing: Judges i. 1, ‘The children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first to fight against them.’ Yea, profane Ahab: 1 Kings xxii. 6, ‘Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?’

5. Because many cases are exceeding difficult, as when God calls us from a place of ease and safety to a place of hazard and danger; as when Christ called Peter to leave the ship, and come to him upon the waters, Mat. xiv. 29; so when God calls to forsake our dearest interests and relations. Now in such cases our call should be cleared up to us, lest we decline the duty of our calling, as Jonah did; God called him to go to Nineveh, and because it was a work of much danger and difficulty, he fleeth to Tarshish, to his great loss and hazard, for he was forced to take up his lodging for a while in the whale’s belly. Or sometimes there is a more urgent call; God calleth one way, and our inclinations draw us another, and the question lieth between duty and interests, and yet interests want not excuses.

Well then, how shall we know the place when God hath called us to fix the place of our abode? The question concerneth either christians in general, or else more particularly ministers, whose service is more weighty, for in ordinary removes there is a greater latitude, or else gentlemen who travel to get knowledge and experience, or else merchants for traffic, whose affairs do often call them from country to country. Now something is to be spoken for their satisfaction, that they may see God therein.

*First*, For christians in general, and so there are two cases—(1.) Concerning the fixing of their abode; (2.) Concerning flying in times of persecution.

1. Concerning the fixing of their abode. What rules shall they observe to guide them in this weighty affair of life? Particulars are infinite, the general rules are these—

[1.] There is much in the designation of providence, there where God hath fixed our interests, birth, education, &c.: Acts xvii. 26, ‘And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face

of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.' There providence left us, and there without scruple we may expect to find God. I am sure there we have most opportunities to serve him, because of the privileges of our birth and interests; every man hath a right to the privileges of his native soil.

[2.] But we are not absolutely confined there, but that upon convenient reasons we may remove. 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.' God is not tied to places, nor we. As they laughed at his folly in Plutarch that said there was a better moon at Athens than there was at Corinth; certainly there is not a better God in one place than in another. God is the same in England, in France, in the Indies. And as God is not tied, so we are not tied: Ps. cxv. 16, 'The heaven, even the heavens are the Lord's; but the earth hath he given to the children of men.' The earth lieth freely open to all passengers. What partitions and restraints shall we fix but those that God hath fixed by providence and property? As long as we acknowledge providence in asking his leave, seeking his blessing, observing the way that he openeth to us, and as long as we do not invade property, and disturb the first occupants, we may remove.

[3.] This removal must not be out of levity and wantonness, but upon weighty cause. Some men are never fixed, but flit hither and thither, though still to their loss and inconvenience. 'A rolling stone never gathereth moss. This is to tempt God, as if his providence should be at our beck. It was the advice of a heathen, Where thou art well, keep thyself well, lest thinking to meet with better thou findest worse. Usually these rolling stones carry their curse with them, and when men will be trying conclusions; the last conclusion of all is want and inconvenience.

[4.] The weighty causes upon which we may remove are want of health, if the places we live in prove hard and barren, and we know not how to subsist, or want of ordinances, or a lawful calling from state and church, whereof we are members, as to be ambassadors, or messengers of the churches, or such like cases determinable by christian prudence. And so in conjugal relations: Ps. xlv. 10. 'Forsake thine own people, and thy father's house.' Only, where the remove is of greater hazard, the call must be more urgent: Mat. xiv. 22, 'And straightway Jesus' — *ἠνάγκασεν*—'constrained his disciples to get into a ship.'

[5.] Upon what cause soever we remove, we must consult with God for his leave: James iv. 1. 5, 'If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that;' for his blessing: Gen. xxiv. 12, 'O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day,' still consult with the oracle. It was the theology of the gentiles, *Dii magna curant, parva negligunt*—The gods regard great things, but neglect small things. This thought is in the heart of many christians, as if God did only care for the greater matters. The blind world sets up an idol called chance or fortune, and lives at peradventure: Prov. iii. 6, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' The children of God dare not resolve upon any course till they have asked counsel of God; they run to the oracle or ephod. Jacob in his journey would not go to Laban, nor come from him without a warrant.

Jehoshaphat doth not send for the captains of the army, but the prophets of the Lord: 1 Kings xxii. 7, 'Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of him?' This is a great argument of the fear of God. The heathens had their sybils, and oracles of Delphi and Jupiter Ammon.

[6.] God's answer after prayer must be observed, otherwise we do but mock God, and use it as a ceremony. Many ask God with an idol in their hearts: Ezek. xiv. 3, 'Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the Lord will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols.' Men are resolved, and then pretend to consult God, as Jeremiah said to Johanan and his company, Jer. xlii. 20, 'Ye dissembled in your hearts when you sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God, and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it.' Observe then God's answer, your comfort and happiness dependeth on it; as when God in the course of his providence openeth a way, or by inward instinct directeth us to such a course, or by powerful and persuading reasons poisseth the judgment, usually by counsel in the heart: Ps. xvi. 7, 'My reins instruct me in the night season;' or such a fit accommodation of the circumstances and passages of providence, God inviteth and calleth forth his people to follow him.

[7.] In doubtful cases we must not be swayed with interest but conscience. All scruples must be determined by principles and reasons of religion. It is carnal to measure all things by ease, peace, and temporal welfare; we must consider where we can have the greatest capacity of glorifying God; that is the general rule, even in civil affairs: 1 Cor. x. 31, 'Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' This is the great end of our lives. A christian doth not altogether look how he may more gratify his own concerns, but how he may be more useful, and serve the great end for which he was sent into the world; as a traveller, when he cometh to two ways, and knoweth not which to take, he doth not look which is fairest or foulest, most smooth or plain, but which is most likely to suit with the purpose of his journey. The plains of pleasure and profit may be more grateful to the flesh, but they lie out of our road to heaven. Means must be chosen with respect to the end; in all deliberate counsels reasons of religion must bear sway. Usually we consult with flesh and blood, and then the conflicts of lusts and knowledge breed scruples and irresolutions; conscience saith one thing, and lust and interests another, and so men are uncertain.

[8.] Whatever we do, we must go there where we have the ordinances, and enjoy the communion of saints, otherwise we turn our backs upon God, and that will not be our comfort: 1 Peter ii. 2, 'As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.' True saints cannot be without ordinances. It was Lot's sin to choose Sodom for the pleasantness of the situation: Ps. lxxxiv. 10, 'For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand; I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.' It is observed of Cain, Gen. iv. 16, 'And Cain went out from the pre-

sence, of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, in the east of Eden.' How did he go from the presence of the Lord, seeing God is everywhere? The meaning is, he went from that part and quarter of the world where God had his church, the place of his special presence. God's children have left many conveniences to enjoy ordinances, as Moses left the honours of Egypt for the company of the people of God. It is a fault in christians to turn their backs upon the church and go to a Sodom, where they will be grieved to see and hear God dishonoured.

2. About flying in times of persecution.

[1.] In general, it is lawful in some cases. We have a precept, at least an allowance for it: Mat. x. 23, 'When they persecute you in this city, flee ye to another'—viz., when our life shall serve more for God's glory and the church's good, than our death can. If God driveth us out of our place, and provideth another, accept it with thankfulness. I prove this by example and reason. By example—Christ fled into Egypt when Herod sought his life: Mat. ii. 13, 'And when they were departed, behold the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.' And Christ hid himself, and went out of the temple, when the Jews threatened to stone him: John viii. 59, 'Then took they up stones to cast at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.' So the prophets and holy men in scripture—Elijah fled to Beersheba when Jezabel sought his life: 1 Kings xix. 3, 'And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba.' Paul was let down by the wall in a basket to escape the Jews: Acts ix. 25, 'Then the disciples took him by night and let him down by a wall in a basket.' We are bound to keep our lives till God requireth them. Life is a treasure he hath lent us, and we must keep it till the owner demandeth it of us, and to lay it out for his use; as when a man delivereth money to you, you must answer for it to him. To draw danger on ourselves is to tempt God; when means of escape are offered, we must use them with thankfulness, and when God in his providence openeth a fair door. All this showeth that it is not unlawful in itself.

[2.] Though it be lawful to fly in persecution, yet it is not lawful for all. Austin saith, *In graviore persecutione nec omnes fugere, neque omnes manere debent*; all should not stay, nor should all fly, as not those that are useful to the church: John x. 12, 'He that is an hireling and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.' This is not to avoid persecution, but to run away from our duty. He that should be an example of fortitude and constancy should not first manifest fear. Though in a personal persecution, when pastors are most aimed at, they may fly, as in the before-mentioned examples of Christ, Elijah and Paul, and the prophets that were hid by Obadiah by fifty and fifty in a cave, 1 Kings xviii. 13. Those that by a special instinct of the Spirit of God are called to suffer and confront the adversaries of the truth must not decline it, 'Paul went bound in spirit to Jerusalem,' Acts xx. 22; and when his sufferings were foretold, and the disciples besought him not to go to Jerusalem,

he answered : Acts xxi. 13, 'What mean you to weep, and to break my heart? I am ready, not to be bound only, but to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus.' God had picked him out for a champion, and he would not draw back. Or when all lawful means of escape are taken away from us, so that we cannot fly without dishonesty and disobedience, and scandal, we must go through it. God, that is Lord of thy life, requireth it of thee: Rom. xiv. 7-9, 'For no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's.' For to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be lord both of dead and living.' By a base flying from suffering you retract your vows when God challengeth you upon them.

[3.] For a more particular determination general rules cannot be given, but it is left to every one's particular prudence and faithfulness, that we act so that we neither wound conscience nor dishonour God; and we are not faithful unless we seek wisdom of God, what to do in this particular. It is most natural to us to fly, and think of starting holes; but the best way is to fly to Christ, and make his name our strong tower. Otherwise we cannot fly from God; the Jews brought a tempest with them whithersoever they went.

*Secondly,* More particularly concerning ministers, whose office is of public use and influence, what is to be observed in fixing their station and place of service? Ministers are to be considered either as altogether free, or else as already related to some congregation and particular place.

1. If free already, the case is the more easy, these things make a call.

[1.] A fair invitation from those that have power to call; providence is to be observed in stirring up the hearts of men. Besides authoritative mission, there is an election or call from the people, as Christ had his ordination from God and election from the church; as Hosea i. 11, 'Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head,' compared with Eph. i. 22, 'And give him to be the head over all things to the church.' It is notable that in Paul's vision the call is not managed by God, but by a man of Macedonia: Acts xvi. 9, 'And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us.' Only if a people be not in a capacity to choose, then an authoritative mission is enough, and we must preach whether they will hear or whether they will forbear; as Paul and Barnabas were sent from the elders of Antioch to go to the gentiles, Acts xiii.

[2.] When there is a universal concurrence of sweet providences removing all rubs and difficulties, there is a clear call of providence. Sometimes there is a call from a people, which a man cannot close with unless he should break through the hedge, and then a serpent will bite him. Sometimes there may be an inclination, and providence may hinder: Acts xvi. 7, 'They assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not.' God himself may cast some bar in his providence in our way. Or Satan may hinder: 1 Thes. ii. 18, 'Wherefore we would have come unto you (even I Paul) once and again, but Satan hindered us.' Satan hinders by stirring up opposition against

the ministers of the gospel. Or the greater necessities of other people may hinder us: Rom. xv. 22, 'For which cause' (speaking of his preaching the gospel where it had not been preached) 'I have been much hindered from coming to you.' But then it is not every inclination of our own hearts which is sufficient, but an inclination spiritually raised by the instinct of the Holy Ghost, after prayer; not upon secular encouragements of plentiful revenues, or a fatter portion in the world. It is upon my heart to live and die with you.

2. About removes from one place to another, take these rules.—

[1.] It is not simply unlawful. Ministers are not so fixed, as that they cannot remove upon no accounts; if so, raw and inexperienced persons might happen to supply the greatest places. Churches are bound to spare to others out of their plenty; as the elders at Antioch sent some of their company to preach to the gentiles, Acts xiii. We are ministers of the catholic church rather than of any great congregation; and where there is greatest necessity, or greatest aptness and proportion of gifts, there are our pains to be bestowed. Greatest necessity and opportunity: the good shepherd runneth after the lost sheep, and leaveth the rest in the fold; and where greatest measure of gifts. God fitteth every light to every socket.

[2.] Whenever it is done, it must be with great advice and caution, and upon an urgent call, by which you may clearly gather that God hath called you to preach the gospel to them. The call had need be urgent: whatever concurrerth to an ordinary call must be double. It must be upon much seeking of God, clear evidence, consent of others, a spirit purged from secular interest, the consent of the church you leave gained, as much as may be, that they may deny themselves.

[3.] It is most comfortable when driven away by providence rather than our own choice, as by defect of maintenance—that is a negative or privative persecution, in which case we may fly to a another city; or by violence of unreasonable men, that have not faith; or upon contempt: Acts xix. 9, 'When divers were hardened and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them;' so Mat. xiv. 15, 'This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away.' You are free of their blood if they will not hear. Your rule is, Mat. x. 14, 'Whosoever shall not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.'

*Thirdly*, For gentlemen who travel to get knowledge and experience.

1. It must not be undertaken upon light grounds. It is a great adventure, and it is a sin to tempt God to protect us by casting ourselves upon great hazards for so small a reason as for mere pleasure and curiosity, or pride and vain glory, to learn exotic fashions or the like.

2. It must not be to places idolatrous, and where true religion is under a restraint; you usually then put yourselves upon a snare. Abraham could not remain in Chaldea because of abominable idolatry and corruption, and you go into them voluntarily to learn of their ways.

3. If it be in places free from infection, where you may live with safety and a good conscience, to get more knowledge and experience, it is commendable; as the Queen of Sheba came from far to hear the wisdom of Solomon, 1 Kings x. 1, for which she is commended by Christ, Mat. xii. 42.

*Fourthly*, For merchants, who remove for traffic, especially into places where the true religion is not professed, it may be suppressed with extremity of rigour.

1. It is lawful certainly to pass from country to country for traffic's sake and to maintain commerce, for there are divers commodities in divers places.

2. Conversation with heretics and infidels may be allowed, else we must go out of the world: 1 Cor. v. 9, 10, 'I wrote unto you in an epistle, not to company with fornicators, yet not altogether with the fornicators of the world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world.' I speak of a civil commerce, which may be maintained with these cautions.

[1.] With all our traffic we must take all occasions to propagate religion in the truth and power of it especially when stirred up by impulse of spirit; Deut. xxxiii. 18, 19, 'And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness, for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas and of treasures hid in the sand.'

[2.] Traffic must be managed by fit persons, not novices, and persons ungrounded in religion; it is very dangerous for such. This is as if you should turn a child loose among a company of poisons; an empty pitcher soon cracks by the fire.

[3.] There must be no fixed habitation; if you thus leave the ordinances and societies of saints for trade, religion is made to stoop to gain.

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## SERMON XLII.

*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.—HEB. xi. 9, 10.*

THE apostle is commending faith from the examples of the patriarchs; after the flood he beginneth with Abraham, the father of the faithful. In the former verse he speaks of the place whence he was called, in this of the place to which he was called; there he had commended him for his self-denial in obeying God's call, and here for his patience and constancy in waiting for the promise. From God's training up Abraham in a course of difficulties, we see it is no easy matter to go to heaven; there is a great deal of ado to unsettle a believer from the world, and there is a great deal of ado to fix the heart in the expectation of heaven. First there must be self-denial in coming out of the world, and divorcing ourselves from our bosom sins and dearest interests; and then there must be patience shown in waiting for God's mercy to eternal life, waiting his leisure as well as performing his will. Here is the time of our exercise, and we must