

SERMON XXXIX.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.—ROM. viii. 29.

HERE is a reason why all afflictions work together for good to the called according to purpose, because they were predestinated to be like Christ in all manner of likeness—in sufferings, holiness, felicity. In sufferings; they must be afflicted as Christ was; he had his share, and they have their share: Col. i. 24, 'I rejoice in my sufferings, that I may fill up what is behind of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh.' Christ mystical is to suffer so much; he was appointed, and they are appointed: 1 Thes. iii. 3, 'That no man should be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.' Holiness: we are to be holy as he is holy, as well as afflicted as he was afflicted, 1 Peter i. 15. And again for felicity: his sufferings had a good end, so shall ours; he bore afflictions, and passed through them to eternal glory—'The captain of our salvation was made perfect by sufferings,' Heb. ii. 20; so in us, the cross maketh way to the crown; we can go no other way to heaven than Christ did. Therefore the conclusion out of all is, that afflictions work for good; they do not infringe our holiness, but promote it rather, if we be humble, meek, and patient as Christ was; they do not infringe our happiness, for still it fareth with us as it did with Christ. As he was a pattern in bearing afflictions holily and courageously, so in the crown of glory to be obtained after the victory; he was the leader of a patient and obedient people to everlasting happiness. So that here is a double argument why all afflictions must turn to good: because our afflictions fall not out besides the purpose of God; as not in Christ, so not in us; the head was to bear his share, and the members their share: and because the cross and sufferings are a means conducing to conformity to Christ in holiness and happiness—'For whom he did foreknow,' &c.

In the words observe—

1. The way God took in bringing his children unto glory, by conformity to Christ, in these words—*To be conformed to the image of his Son.*

2. The grounds of this conformity, set forth by two words, *foreknowledge* and *predestination*—*Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate.*

3. The reason of this conformity to Christ—*That he might be the first-born among many brethren*; that is, that he might have the privilege of the elder son, or the true and proper heir. The elder son was to be the head of the family, and lord of all the rest of the brethren. Let us explain these things.

[1.] The way and end aimed at: to conform us to the image of his son; that is, in resemblance to Christ, that we might enter into glory the way by which Christ entered, by a life of sufferings and hardness.

[2.] The grounds of this conformity—God's foreknowledge and predestination. The first of these terms implieth his gracious purpose

to save us; foreknowing here is choosing, or taking them for his own from all eternity: 1 Peter i. 2, 'Elect according to the foreknowledge of God;' that is, according to the eternal purpose of his love to them. For having all Adam's posterity in his eye and view, he freely chose them; they were in a sort present to God, and in his eye, before the foundation of the world; so that his foreknowledge is his purpose to do them good. The other word, predestination, is his appointing them to come to glory by the way of faith and holiness; for to destinate is to appoint, or order means to a certain end, and to predestinate is to appoint beforehand. And this predestinating is used of God's act, because when man willeth, or chooseth, or ordereth anything, it presupposeth an antecedent goodness in the things which he willeth or chooseth, or an antecedent conveniency in the thing ordered to the end to which it is appointed, which is prudent destination; but when God chooseth, or willeth, or ordereth anything, he causeth this goodness or conveniency to be in it; and therefore it is properly called predestination. Well then, observe, not things but persons are here spoken of—'Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate.' His foreknowledge implieth his favour and his choice: John x. 14, 'I am the good shepherd, that know my sheep, and am known of mine;' and ver. 27, 'I know them, and they follow me.' And his predestination is his appointing them to come to such an end by convenient means; sometimes it is applied to privileges, sometimes to duties. To privileges; because of the conveniency of antecedent and subsequent privileges. so Eph. i. 5, 'He hath predestinated us to the adoption of children.' It is fit we should be made children before we have a right to a child's portion; therefore God, by predestinating us to the adoption of children, maketh us fit to obtain the inheritance. Sometimes to duties; as to faith: Acts xiii. 48; 'As many as were ordained to eternal life believed;' and in the text, to holiness—'He did predestinate us to be conformed to the image of his Son;' that is, by predestination he bringeth it to pass that in time they do resemble Christ. The order and course of God's saving the elect must not be broken; he hath decreed, and forecasteth by what means he will bring them to glory. In short, foreknowledge and predestination agree in that both are eternal, but they differ in the formality of the notion; foreknowledge noteth his choice, or the purpose of his love, predestination his decree to bring things to a certain end by certain appointed means; and so he did fore-ordain and design them, by conformity to Christ in life and suffering, to come to celestial glory; and thus by foreknowing he did predestinate, and by predestinating he did foreknow.

[3.] The reason of this conformity to Christ—'That he might be the first-born among many brethren;' that is, that he might have the honour due to the first-born. The first-born was lord of the rest of the family: Gen. xxvii. 31, 'I have made him thy lord, and the rest of his brethren have I given to him for servants.' The first-born gave to the rest of his brethren a share of his father's goods, reserving to himself a double portion, Deut. xxi. 17. Now this is applied to Christ, who is Lord of the church, or head of the body, Col. i. 18, 'and heir of all things,' Heb. i. 2. And by virtue of this relation to the church, he must *πρωτεύειν*, first it in all things; or, as we translate it, he must in all

things have the pre-eminence, Col. i. 18 ; in our conflicts and trials he is the captain of our salvation, Heb. ii. 10 ; in holiness he is our pattern or copy, 2 Cor. iii. 18, *primum in unoquoque genere est mensura et regula ceterorum* ; in our glory and blessedness he is our forerunner, Heb. vi. 20, having actually taken possession of that felicity and glory which he spake of to his followers ; so that Christ's honour is reserved, and believers are comforted, whilst they follow their head and leader in every state and condition.

Doct. That the elect are in time distinguished from others by being conformed to the image of Christ.

1. Wherein this conformity to Christ consisteth.

2. Why this is the distinction between the elect, or called according to purpose, and others.

First, Wherein this conformity to Christ consisteth. I answer, In three things.

1. In sufferings and afflictions, in our passage to a better estate. As by the bounty of God we taste somewhat of the world to sweeten our pilgrimage, so also somewhat of the evil of the world to make us hasten our journey ; and herein we are made conformable to Christ, who was a man of sorrows, Isa. liii. 3. This must be expected by us ; for John xv. 20, 'The servant is not greater than the lord ; if they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also.' Art thou poor ? none of us is so poor as Christ was. Hast thou many enemies ? he had more, and was pursued with greater malignity. It must be patiently endured by us : 1 Peter ii. 21, 'Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps ;' we that look for his glory must bear his cross. Now he calleth us to no harder lot than he himself endured, or to go in any part of rough way that he hath not trod before us. Surely they that fancy to themselves an easy life, free from all kind of sufferings and molestations, must seek another leader : 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12, 'If ye be dead with him, ye shall also live with him ; if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him ;' we must be like him whom we have chosen for our head and chief in every state. What do we with christianity if we refuse to be like Christ ? we must be holy as he was holy, and afflicted as he was afflicted : 2 Cor. iv. 10, 'Always bearing about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus.' When name dieth, and interests die and languish ; when we are scorned and reproached, despitefully used for righteousness' sake, we carry up and down with us the lively resemblance of the sufferings of Christ, and so we begin to look like christians ; and however this seemeth to be troublesome and distasteful to those who are blinded with the delusions of the flesh, yet a believer should count it his glory, honour, and happiness, as Paul reckoneth it among his gain and great advantages he had by Christ : Phil. iii. 10, 'That I may know the fellowship of his sufferings, and be made conformable to his death, and count all things but loss and dung in comparison of it.' The bitter cross should be made lovely to us, because hereby we are made more like our Lord and Master. If our sufferings go on to death, we have the same issue that Christ had, and must endure it on the same comforts : Heb. xii. 2, 'Looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ; who, for the joy set before him, endured the

cross, and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God.' Death itself is a passage to life, therefore is Christ called 'the first-begotten from the dead,' Rev. i. 5. Well then, afflictions come not by the will of man, nor the bare permission of God, but his special decree; we are 'predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son.'

2. In righteousness and holiness. God hath appointed his chosen ones to be like his own Son in holiness; this the scripture doth everywhere witness: Phil. ii. 5, 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus;' and Mat. xi. 29, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly;' John xiii. 15, 'I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done;' Col. iii. 13, 'Forgiving one another, as Christ forgave you;' and in many other places. Many reasons there are for it, why this part of the conformity should be most regarded.

[1.] This is the end of conformity to him in our afflictions: Heb. xii. 10, 'That we may be partakers of his holiness;' that we may live a life of patience and holiness and contempt of the world, for otherwise God would not afflict but for our profit; he doth not grieve his children willingly, but as there is need and cause.

[2.] This is the way to conformity to him in glory. We that look for immaculate felicity in the other world must be like him for eximious sanctity in this world: 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'We are changed into his image and likeness, from glory to glory;' it is begun here and perfected there. Eternal glory is little else but holiness perfected, and spiritual life issueth into the heavenly as the rivers lose themselves in the ocean; therefore we shall never be like him in glory unless we be like him in grace first; this is the pledge of our beatitude.

[3.] This is a sign of our communion with Christ: 1 John ii. 6, 'He that saith he abideth in him ought also to walk as he walked.' If his Spirit be precious to you, is his example of no regard? Do you value his benefits and slight his holiness? It is a sign you esteem him for your own turns. You love Christ the saviour and hate Christ the sanctifier; you would abide in him to have his happiness, but you would not abide in him to imitate his obedience; this is perverse and unthankful dealing; no, you must mind both if you would justify your pretensions of adhering to Christ.

[4.] This will give us boldness in the judgment: 1 John iv. 17, 'We have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, so are we in the world.' That day may be considered *in esse rei* or *in esse cognito*. *In esse rei*, the day itself, when a perfect distinction is made between the sheep and the goats, elect and reprobate; now you shall stand in the judgment, for Christ will own his own image—acknowledge his mark. *In esse cognito*, in our present apprehensions of it, that when we think of it, we may have boldness. This giveth you joy and confidence for the present; sincerity breedeth confidence. When we are like Christ, our consciences are emboldened against the terrors of judgment to come.

3. In felicity and glory. Conformity to Christ showeth us not only what we should do, but what we may expect; the scripture speaketh of this conformity to him in glory, both as to the body and as to the soul. The body: Phil. iii. 21, 'Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body,' And the soul:

1 Cor. xv. 4, 'As we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly;' 1 John iii. 2, 'When he shall appear, we shall be like him;' and Ps. xvii. 15, 'But as for me I will behold thy face in righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Our blessedness standeth in communion with God and conformity to him, or the vision and fruition of him; when we are thoroughly changed into his likeness, we are in our perfect estate. Holiness for the present standeth in the intuition and sight of God, which we have by faith, and that communion we have with him in the duties of obedience. God is a holy and happy being; our conformity to his holiness is more exact; our communion with him as the fountain of all happiness is more full; we are in a capacity for a more perfect reception of his benefits.

Secondly, Why this is the distinction between the elect and others, this conformity to the image of his Son.

1. This suiteth with God's design of recovering man out of his lapsed estate, by setting up a pattern of holiness and happiness in our nature. To evidence this, I will show—

[1.] That our primitive glory was God's image—'Let us make man after our image and likeness,' Gen. i. 26. This was our perfection, which made us amiable in the sight of God, and was bestowed upon man as a special and eminent favour; this was the ornament and crown of glory which he would put upon a creature, which was his masterpiece, and the most excellent of all his works; and indeed what greater perfection can be in a creature than the nearest resemblance to his creator? Now this being lost by sin, to have this restored is the true glory of man: 2 Peter i. 4, 'That we may be made partakers of the divine nature.' We read, Prov. xii. 26, 'That the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour;' namely, as he hath more of the image of God upon him. It is not the rich, the honourable, the powerful man, but the righteous man is more excellent; he hath more of God, and more of a divine spirit in him, than all the rest of the world have. The saints are called 'vile persons,' Ps. xv. 4. Wickedness maketh a man base and vile, as holiness puts honour and glory upon them; therefore, this is the greatest excellency we are capable of, to come as near to God as we can in wisdom, purity, and holiness.

[2.] When this glory was lost none was fit to restore it but Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, or made man; for thereby the glory of the Father was again visible in him in our nature: Col. i. 18, 'He is the image of the invisible God;' Heb. i. 3, 'The brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.' He was made flesh, that the perfections of the Godhead might once more shine forth in human nature. In an image there must be similitude and likeness, and deduction, or a means of conveying that likeness; therefore, to make us like God, there must be a fit means. God is a pure spirit; we are creatures that indeed have an immortal spirit, but it dwelleth in flesh; therefore, to make us like God, the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as the glory of the only-begotten Son of God,' John i. 14. So by this means was this likeness deduced, and the image of God restored to lost man, and man restored to

God's favour, and made capable of happiness; therefore all the heirs of promise are predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, or to God appearing in their nature.

2. Because they are all called after Christ's name, christians from Christ. Now all that are called after Christ's name should be framed after his image, otherwise they will be called christians to the disgrace of Christ. The apostles never transferred their names to their disciples. They were of several factions, that said, one, I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos; another, I am of Cephas; and I, of Christ, 1 Cor. i. 12. No, we are all of Christ, and called christians because we partake of his purity and holiness. Surely, then, we ought to transcribe Christ's life, and live as if another Jesus Christ were come into the world—'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity,' 2 Tim. ii. 19. He that nameth the name of Christ, that calleth himself by Christ's name, or undertaketh the profession of the faith of Christ, must depart from iniquity, as Christ did.

3. Because all that are elected by God and redeemed by Christ are sealed by the Spirit. And what is the seal of the Spirit, but conformity to the image of Christ? It is often spoken of in scripture: Eph. i. 15, 'Ye are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise;' and Eph. iv. 30, 'And grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption;' 2 Cor. i. 22, 'Who hath sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit.' What is it, but the image of Christ impressed upon the soul by his Spirit? A seal prints upon the wax that which is engraven upon itself; princes stamp their own image on their coin; so doth the Holy Ghost form Christ in us, or imprint the image of God upon our souls. Now they that are thus sealed have God's mark, and are his peculiar treasure, and the first-fruits of his creatures; chosen out from others to be a people to serve, please, glorify, and enjoy God; so that if a man be to examine and judge his own estate, this is that which he is to look after, whether he be conformed to the image of Christ, yea, or no: 2 Cor. xiii. 5, 'Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith; prove yourselves; know ye not your own selves that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' That is it your observation and search must fix upon, whether Jesus Christ be in you or no.

[1.] Christ may be in you objectively, as he is apprehended and embraced by faith and love; the object is in the faculty. Things we often think of and love are in our minds and hearts; that is not it, or not all you seek after.

[2.] Again, Christ is in you effectively, as a principle of a new and heavenly life by his Spirit: Gal. ii. 20, 'Christ liveth in me.' That indeed is more.

[3.] Christ is in you representatively, or by way of conformity: Gal. iv. 19, 'Till Christ be formed in you.' Whether his nature and graces be there, whether you do resemble him in nature and life, this is that you seek after, as the fruit of the former.

4. Because Christ was an example; this hath great force. I take it for granted that it is a great advantage not only to have a rule, but a pattern and example; because man is so prone to imitate, an example in our nature maketh it the more operative; therefore Christ came to be an example of holiness and patience and happiness to us.

[1.] By this example our pattern is the more complete. There are some graces wherein we cannot be said to resemble God, as in humility, patience, obedience; these things imply inferiority and subjection, and God is inferior to none. But there are other graces, as knowledge, wisdom, justice, mercy, purity, wherein we resemble God. But in the other we have pattern from Christ: humility, Mat. xi. 29; obedience, Heb. v. 8; patience, 1 Peter i. 21. These are hard duties, go against the bent and hair; but when the Son of God will submit to them, and give us the example, shall we refuse to live in that manner and by those laws the Son of God chose to live by? Besides, it is the more likely he will pity and help us, because he knoweth what it is to obey in these cases.

[2.] This example showeth that a holy life is possible to those who are renewed by grace. Christ hath humbled himself, and obeyed God in our nature, and so had the interests of flesh and blood to gratify as well as others; therefore all these things may be done by those that have not divested themselves of flesh and blood. To assure us the more of this, Christ chose a life that might minister instruction to all men; rich and poor, bond and free, may imitate him, persons retired and solitary, and those that live abroad in the world, learned and unlearned. Had he lived deliciously, and conquered kingdoms, and acted as a free monarch and potentate, the poor might have been disheartened; but the meanest may learn of him; and the others need not be discouraged if they have a heart to subordinate all to God; Christ sanctifieth a free life.

[3.] This example showeth what will be the issue and success of a life spent in patience and holiness. Christ, when he had fulfilled all righteousness, and suffered what was necessary for our redemption, went home to God, and entered into that glory he spake of, and was received up into heaven as the reward of his obedience: 1 Peter i. 21, 'God gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God.' That this might be a visible demonstration to the world what shall be the end of a life spent in holiness and obedience.

Use 1. Is information.

First, What little hopes they have to get to heaven who are no way like Christ.

1. So unlike him in holiness. When Christ spent whole nights in prayer, they either pray not at all in secret, or put off God with the glance of a short compliment; it was as meat and drink to Christ to do his Father's will, and it is their burden; Christ was humble and meek, they proud and disdainful; Christ went about doing good, and they go about doing mischief; Christ was holy and heavenly, they vain and sensual; darkness is as much like light as they like Christ. Instead of showing forth the virtues of the Redeemer, they are of their father the devil, and his lusts will they do, 1 Peter ii. 1, compared with John viii. 4.

2. So unlike him in patience and courage under sufferings. Christ obeyed God at the dearest rates, and they are drawn from their duty by a small interest, a weak temptation, a shameful pleasure, a slight injury; the greatest things that can befall us are, in comparison of eternal glory, but a light affliction, which is but for a moment. Our

sufferings cannot be long, for the chains which unite the soul to the body are soon broken.

Secondly, It informeth us how we should be satisfied in our good estate, or know whether we have the true holiness;—viz., when we are such in the world as Christ was in the world. Some are satisfied, and content themselves with this, they are not as other men, who are beasts in man's shape: Luke xviii. 11, 'God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.' This is a sorry plea, when we have nothing to bear up our confidence but the badness of others. Others seek for virtue among the heathens, and think their perfection lieth in imitating the pagan gallantry; but alas! their virtue was but a shadow; self-love was the principle, pride the soul, and vain-glory the end thereof; besides, it was stained with many notorious blemishes. Alexander was valiant, but in his anger often dyed his hands in the blood of his friends; Pompey wise, but ambitious; Cato generous, and stiff for public liberty, but many times drank somewhat too liberally; Cæsar was merciful, but lascivious. No, it is not these, but the Son of God we must look upon, who hath established the genuine holiness. Others look no higher than the people who are in reputation for goodness among whom they live: but remember, they have their blemishes; either they sit down with low degrees of holiness,—whereas we are to be 'holy as he is holy,' 1 Peter i. 15, 'pure as Christ is pure,' 1 John iii. 3,—or else are tainted with some of their errors; for good people have their failings, which are authorised to the professing world by their example; as sheep go out at the gap where others have gone out before them: 2 Cor. xi. 1, 'Be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ.' Alas! otherwise to follow the best men will mislead us. Others bolster up themselves by the failings of the saints, whose miscarriages are recorded in the word of God. *Si David, cur non et ego?*—If David, why not I? No, Christ must be the copy that must ever be before our eyes; you must be holy as he is holy, and pure as he is pure.

Use 2. Is exhortation; to persuade you to look after conformity to the image of his Son. All men would be like God in glory and felicity, but not in righteousness and holiness. Satan's temptation to our first parents was, 'Ye shall be as gods;' Gen. iii. 5, not in a blessed conformity, but a cursed self-sufficiency; but this is no temptation we bring to you, but a remedy to recover the loss you incurred by that temptation, and a remedy not invented by ourselves, but decreed by God, and brought about in the most solemn way that can be imagined. The Son of God became one of us that we might be made like him: Phil. ii. 7, 'He was made in the likeness of men;' Rom. viii. 3, came 'in the similitude of sinful flesh,' took man's nature and punishment upon him, that he might purchase grace to conform us to that holy life which he carried on in our nature; this is that we persuade you unto. Now for directions.

1. The foundation is laid in the new birth, and the change wrought in us by regeneration. The Son of God was conceived by the operation of the Holy Ghost; so are we born of water and the Spirit, John iii. 5. In the birth of Christ it was said, Luke i. 35, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall over-

shadow thee ; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.' The Holy Ghost was the dispenser of this mystery, who formed the body of the Word incarnate, and gave him life ; now thus we are conformed to the image of his Son. It is the Holy Ghost that begets us unto God, and maketh us new creatures ; we owe our birth to him, that birth whereby we become the children of God.

2. Christ, being formed in the Virgin's womb by the Holy Ghost, devoteth himself to God ; for he saith, Heb. x. 7, ' A body hast thou prepared me : for lo, I come to do thy will ; ' 1 Cor. iii. 23, ' Christ is God's ; ' he came into the world as God's. Such a resignation there must be of ourselves to God, that we may do his will whatever it costs us, and suffer whatever he imposeth upon us : 1 Cor. viii. 5, ' They first gave themselves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God.'

3. When we are dedicated to God, the Holy Ghost is the same to christians that he was to Christ, a guide and comforter. He that giveth life giveth conduct and motion ; you find Christ still guided by the Spirit. If he retire into the deserts : Mat. iv. 1, ' Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness ; ' when he went back again : Luke iv. 14, ' Jesus returned by the power of the Spirit into Galilee.' So christians are still guided by the Spirit, led into, and out of conflicts, Rom. viii. 14. So a comforter : John i. 32, ' Upon him shalt thou see the Spirit descending and remaining on him ; ' so 1 John iii. 24.

4. There is a conformity of life necessary, that we be such to God and man as Christ was to God, seeking his glory—' I seek not mine own glory,' John viii. 50 ; pleasing God, ver. 29 ; obeying his will, John vi. 38 ; delighting in converse with him, for Christ spent much time in prayer ; was subject to his natural parents, Luke ii. 51 ; subject to rulers, Mat. xvii. 27 ; good to all : Acts x. 38, ' Went about doing good ; ' humble to inferiors, John xiii. 3, 4.

5. Eye your pattern much, Heb. xii. 2. Christ told the Jews, John viii. 12, ' I am the light of the world ; he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness ; ' his doctrine, his example. You must often examine what proportion there is between the copy and the transcript.

6. Shame yourselves for coming short, Heb. iii. 12-14. It is not an arbitrary thing : so much as you are unlike Christ, so much you lose of your evidence of election before time, and glory in time ; you should look upon yourselves as under a spiritual engagement to be more like Christ every day. A man is much under the command of his design, and the scope of his life.

7. A religious use of the means of communion with him, especially the Lord's supper. Natural means communicate their qualities to us ; we are changed into them when they are assimilated unto us. Nero sucked the milk of a cruel nurse ; Achilles was valiant, his master nourished him with the marrow of a lion. Those creatures bred amongst rocks are more rough and savage ; those that live in the fertile plains are more tractable. This holy food changeth our inclinations, and promotes holiness in us ; by eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood at this ordinance, we are inclined to live the life of Christ, and that is nourished and strengthened in us by it.