

SERMON X.

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.—Rom. viii. 8.

THIS verse is consecretary from the whole discourse, especially from the former verse. They who are in the flesh, are professed enemies to God, and therefore *they cannot please him*.

In the words here are two things—

1. The persons spoken of.
2. What is said of them.

1. The persons spoken of. They that are in the flesh, that is, who are unregenerate, in the state of corrupt nature. He saith not, if the flesh be in you, ye cannot please God, but if you be in the flesh, that is in a carnal state. As to be in the faith, 2 Cor. xiii. 5, implieth being in a gospel state; and to be in Christ: Rom. viii. 1, noteth a state of true Christianity; so to be in the flesh is to be under the dominion and power of the flesh, so as to serve the lusts and passions thereof; during this carnal and corrupt estate, till men are converted and changed, they cannot please God.

2. What is said of them? They cannot please God. Which may be interpreted two ways, *quoad conatum, vel quoad eventum*. First, With respect to their endeavour, they will not frame their doings, nor make this their business and scope to please the Lord, as it is said of the Jews that rigorously kept up the ritual observances of the law: 1 Thess. ii. 15, 'They please not God, and are contrary to all men.' They were as far from fulfilling the true meaning of the law, as they were from observing the gospel; and all men as long as their lusts are untamed and unbroken, they cannot do those things which are pleasing in his sight. Secondly, With respect to God's acceptance and favour, they are not accepted with him so as to obtain life and peace, and be exempted from condemnation.

Doct. Carnal men do not, cannot please God.

To prove this I shall lay down some propositions:—

1. That it is man's duty and happiness to please God. For this end was he made and sent into the world, not that he might live to himself, but unto God. I prove it by this argument; It is man's happiness to please him upon whom he dependeth; all the world goeth upon this principle, that dependance begetteth observance, or a study to please; and as the dependance is less or greater, so men take themselves bound more or less to please those from whom they receive their supplies, as children their parents, servants their masters; and if any breach and displeasure fall out, their dependance obligeth them to see it made up again. We have an instance in scripture: Acts xii. 24, 'Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon, but they came with one accord to him, and desired peace, because their country was nourished by the king's country.' What their interest taught them to do to man, our interest teacheth us to do to God; we depend upon none so much as God, from whom we have both our being and well-being: 'In his hand is our breath, and all our ways,' Dan. v. 23. Our business lieth more with God, than with all the world besides, and therefore him should we love and study to please.

2. That this being man's duty and happiness, it should be our work and scope to approve ourselves to God; for man is never in his proper posture, till he mindeth his true work and happiness, but is either out in the end or way; his end, if pleasing God and being accepted with him be not his scope; the way, if he doth not those things which God will accept. Therefore God's children are sometimes described by their intention, which is of the end, *intentio est finis ultimi*: sometimes by their choise, which is of the means, *electio est mediū*; by their scope and intentin: 2 Cor. v. 9, 'Therefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted with him,' *φιλοτιμούμεθα*. This is the honour we affect, the end which we propound to ourselves, and which our minds are principally set upon. Some seek to please God, others to please their fleshly mind by the fruition of some inferior good. That is our end which we love most, and are pleased best with, and would do most for; so the people of God are sometimes described by the choice of their ways: Isa. lvi. 4, 'They choose the things that please him, and take hold of his covenant;' that is, resolve to do what is pleasing to God, or to behave themselves in such a manner as they may be accepted with him.

3. That it is no easy matter to make this our scope and work to please God. This I shall prove by two reasons.

[1.] Because of the thing itself.

[2.] Because of the requisites thereunto, which are, that a man be renewed and reconciled, &c.

[1.] The matter of itself. God is a great and holy God, and will not be put off with anything, but expecteth worship and service from us becoming his majesty; and lest we should mistake, hath stated our duty in his holy law; which we are to study and fulfil, we are to study it, and know how God will be pleased: Rom. xii. 2, 'That we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.' It is a good and perfect rule that we must live by, for this is only *εὐάρεστον* acceptable or well-pleasing unto God: so Eph. v. 10: 'Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord? We must not serve God hand over head, but prove and try our way, and every step of it, whether it be well pleasing unto him; and consult often, not what is our interest, but our duty; not what is for our advantage, and will gratify our lusts and please the world, but what will please God; and again, v. 17, 'Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' We may mistake, and therefore we must search again and again, *crassa negligentia dolus est*. It is a sign men have no mind to practise, when they have no mind to know, or be informed. And we are to fulfil our duty as well as to understand it, and that not in a few things, but all: Col. i. 19, 'That ye walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.' Some men are in with one duty, and out with another; but this is to please ourselves, not to please God. Some will rest in rituals, and neglect morals, though the moral duty hath the attestation not only of the word of God, but of conscience: Rom. xiv. 17, 18, 'For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost: for he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men.' Many will rest in ordinances and church-privileges, this will not satisfy God: 2 Cor. x. 5, 'With many of them, God was not well-pleased.' Some rest in moralities, and cast off faith

and the love of God; others please themselves in an overly religion, without moral duties.

Nor must this be minded superficially; no, we must be every day more exact in our walking, that no cause of offence, or breach may arise between us and him: 1 Thess. iv. 1, 'As ye have received of us, how to walk, and how to please God, so you would abound therein more and more.' You never please God so much, but you are to please him better; he expecteth more from you, the more you are acquainted with him; and that we should not always keep to our first weaknesses.

[2.] Consider what is requisite thereunto, viz., that a man be in a reconciled and renewed estate.

(1.) Reconciled to God by Christ. All mankind is fallen under the displeasure of the most high God, by preferring the pleasure of the flesh before the pleasing of God; and there is no atonement found to pacify him, but only Jesus Christ, who is his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased: Mat. iii. 17. Upon his account grace may be had, both to justify and sanctify us. Now while men are in rebellion against God, they have no interest in Christ, or the grace purchased for them, but are under death and damnation, and therefore cannot be accepted with God, so far as to obtain the great reward; yea, to do nothing acceptably to him, till we believe and are in Christ Jesus, and have his merits applied to us; therefore it is said: Heb. xi. 6, 'Without faith it is impossible to please God;' for till there be some means, that God be a rewarder rather than a punisher to the fallen creature, nothing is done kindly, or taken kindly. Well then, nothing can please God but what is done in faith, or in a reconciled estate; and that both in respect to the person working, or the work itself. With respect to the person working; for he is not within the covenant of grace till he believe, but the wrath of God abideth on him: John iii. 36; he is an enemy to God. 2. With respect to the work itself; for till it be quickened by a true and lively faith, and love to God as the consequence of it, it is but the carcase of a good work, and so not acceptable to God; the life and soul of it are wanting, that obediential confidence which should enliven it. Certainly there is no bringing forth fruit unto God, till married to Christ: Rom. vii. 4. As children are not legitimate who are born before marriage, it is a bastard offspring; so neither are works acceptable till we are married to Christ.

(2.) It is also requisite that the person be renewed by the Spirit of Christ; for otherwise he cannot have his spirit, affections, and ways, such as to please God. Nature can rise no higher than itself; it is grace carrieth the soul to God; there needeth renewing grace: Heb. xii. 28, 'Let us have grace, whereby we may serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear.' To serve him *εὐαρέστως*, in an acceptable manner, and with that reverence and seriousness as is necessary, is a work above our natural faculties; till God change them, we cannot please him. So also actual grace: Heb. xiii. 21, 'Working in you that which is pleasing in his sight.' The best actions of wicked men please him no more than Cain's sacrifice, or Esau's tears, or the Pharisees prayers, it is but a shadow of what a man reconciled and renewed doth, or an imperfect imitation, as an ape doth imitate a man, or a violent motion doth resemble a natural.

Use 1. Is to show us what to think of the good actions of carnal men ; they do not please God ; they are for the matter good, but there are manifold defects in them.

1. There is a defect in their state, they are not renewed and reconciled to God by Christ, and therefore God may justly say : Mal. i. 10, 'I have no pleasure in you, neither will I accept an offering at your hands.' They live in their sins, and therefore he may justly abhor and reject all their services ; they live in enmity to him, and in neglect of his grace, and will not sue out their atonement.

2. There is a defect in the root of these actions. They do not come from faith working by love, which is the true principle of all obedience, Gal. v. 6. Without love to God in Christ, we want the soul and life of every duty. Obedience is love breaking out into its perfect act : 1 John ii. 5, 'If we keep his word, herein is love perfected.'

3. There is a defect in the manner. They do not serve God with that sincerity, reverence, seriousness, and willingness, which the work calleth for ; they show love to him with their lips, when their hearts are far from him, Mat. xv. 8 ; there is an habitual aversion, whilst they seem to show love to him. All their duties are but as flowers strewed upon a dunghill.

4. There is a defect in the end. They do not regard God's glory in their most commendable actions ; they have either a natural aim, as when they are frightened into a little religiousness of worship in their extremities : Hos. vii. 14, 'They howl upon their beds for corn and wine.' And then they are like ice in thawing weather, soft at top, and hard at bottom. Or a carnal aim, out of bravery and vain glory, Mat. viii. 2. Or a legal aim, when they seem very devout, to quiet conscience, or to satisfy God for their sins, by their external duties : Mic. vi. 6, 7, 8, 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, and calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' But Solomon telleth us, Prov. xxi. 27, 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,' much more when he bringeth it with an evil mind. At best it is an abomination, much more when it is to buy an indulgence in some licentious practice, by performing some duties requiring a sin-offering, not a thank-offering. But this cannot please God, so as to obtain an eternal reward. God temporarily rewardeth moral obedience, to keep up the government of the world ; as Pagan Rome while it excelled in virtue, God gave it a great empire and large dominion. And Ahab's going softly and mourning, was recompensed with a suspension of temporal judgments : 1 Kings xxi. 29, 'Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days.' Again, there is a difference between a wicked man going on in his wickedness, and a natural man returning to God. When wicked men pray to God to prosper them in their wickedness, as Balaam's altars were made ; or to beg pardon while they go on in their sins ; so 'the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,' Prov. xv. 8. Namely, as they rest in external performances, and think by their prayers or some other good duties to put by the great duties of faith,

repentance, and new obedience, so these prayers and good things are abominable; but in sinners returning to God, and using the means, and expressing their desires of grace, though but with a natural fervency, and with some common help of the Spirit, though the action doth not deserve acceptance with God, and the person is not in such an estate that God hath made an express promise to him that he will accept him, yet he hath to do with a good God, who doth not refuse the cry of his creatures in their extremities, and it is a thousand to one, but he will speed. The carnal man is to act these abilities, and common grace he hath, that God may give more.

Use 2. Is to exhort us. 1. To come out of the carnal estate into the spiritual life; for whilst you are in the flesh, you cannot please God. Now what is more unhappy than to do much to no good purpose; to be acquainted with the toil of duties, and not to be accepted in them? Men are apt to rest in some superficial good actions, and so neglect the grace of God in Christ. We cannot sufficiently beat men from this false righteousness wherewith they hope to please God. Certainly while you are ruled by the world, the flesh, and the devil, you are unfit to obey God; therefore you must renounce the flesh, the world and the devil, and give up yourselves to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. All after-duties depend on the seriousness of the first: 2 Cor. viii. 5, 'They first gave themselves to the Lord, then unto us, by the will of God;' and Rom. vi. 13, 'Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.' The more heartily you give up yourselves to obey God, and look for his favour upon the account of Christ's righteousness, and wait for the healing grace of his Spirit, in the use of fit means, the more easily, readily, and comfortably will the spiritual life be carried on; and the more hearty and serious you are in this, the more peace you will have, and such graces will be heaped upon you, as will be the evident tokens of God's approbation and acceptance. Till you renounce God's enemies, and consent to be the Lord's, you are in the state of rebels; rebels in heart, though subjects in show; and what you perform, is by constraint, and not by a willing mind. God hath right to our duties, before we consent, and therefore it is a sin in carnal men to omit them, but our consent and self-obligation is necessary to our voluntary obedience and acceptance with God. Besides, when this resignation, willingness and consent, is deep rooted, it becometh as a nature to us, and carrieth the force and authority of a principle in our hearts, and puts the soul upon such sincere obedience as God will take kindly at our hands; it habitueth the mind to an obediencial frame, and then the particular acts will not be very difficult.

2. To exhort us to please God. This must be managed,—

[1.] Negatively:—

(1.) Not to please the flesh; flesh-pleasing is the fortress of sin, for all sin tendeth to flesh-pleasing. Now christians are to crucify the flesh, not to gratify the flesh; our Lord Jesus Christ pleased not himself, Rom. xv. 3; he sought not to gratify that life he had assumed; not that we should deny the body all delight in the mercies of God;

then the soul would soon be clogged, which perfecteth its operations by the body. We are to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, but not to abstain from worldly comforts, which would produce the same effect, hindering our cheerful service of God. Common mercies must be received as mercies, else there would be no room for humiliation and thanksgiving. Not of humiliation, when God correcteth us for sin by depriving us of those mercies, and so there would be no distinction between mercy and punishment; nor for thankfulness, for we cannot be thankful for what we do not esteem and relish in some subordinate degree. Is it a mercy, or is it not? If it be a mercy, we may use it with thanksgiving; if not, then you cannot bless God for it. But in the use of these things, we must take heed that the soul be not drawn away from God, and the interest of the flesh be not set up against him. It becometh a christian much more to mortify the deeds of the body, than to fulfil his lusts; and he must be cautious that he do not displease God by pleasing the flesh; that Satan who is ever laying his baits to catch unwary souls, do not draw him to such an use of bodily pleasures, as are immoderate and sinful.

(2.) Not to please men, who have power, or many advantages over us. That we please not them to the wrong of God: the apostle saith; Gal. i. 10, 'If I yet pleased men, I were not the servant of Christ.' There is a twofold man-pleasing, which is sinful; the one respects the matter, the other the scope. First, The matter, when we seek to please them by something that is sinful, or by dispensing with our duty to God. To do this voluntarily and deliberately, is to forsake our vowed duty in the covenant, and to renounce our happiness, and therefore a damnable sin; we forsake our duty, when man must be pleased by some known sin; no, our absolute dependance is on God, and therefore his will must be regarded in the first place: Acts v. 29, 'We ought to obey God, rather than man.' And therefore no man must be pleased by sin, it is a renouncing of our happiness, as if their favour were to be preferred before the favour of God: John xii. 42, 'Nevertheless among the chief rulers also, many believed on him: but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue;' and chap. v. 44, 'How can you believe that seek honour one of another?' No, God is enough to a gracious soul: Ps. lxiii. 3, 'Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.' His approbation should satisfy us; the people of God have felt what it is to have displeased God, and what it is to be reconciled to him by the death and intercession of Christ; that to them it is a small matter whether man be pleased or displeased; if God be pleased, it is no matter who is displeased.

Secondly. As to their scope, when the matter is pleasing both to God and men, but you regard man's eye most: Eph. vi. 6, 'Not with eye-service as men-pleasers; but as the servant of God, doing the will of God from the heart;' and Col. iii. 22, 'Not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but with singleness of heart, fearing God.' As your happiness lieth not in man's approbation, so this is the only constant motive of pure and sincere obedience.

[2.] Positively. Pleasing God is your great duty and business in the world; this is uprightness, and this will be your safety and

happiness; for if you study to please God, then God is ever with you. Christ hath given you an instance of that: John viii. 29, 'And he that sent me is with me, the Father hath not left me alone: for I do always those things that please him.' And then it is no matter who is displeased and angry with us: Prov. xvi. 7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh his enemies to be at peace with him.' God will hear your prayers: 1 John iii. 22, 'And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments. He will give you everlasting happiness and glory: Heb. iv. 5, and truly he is not hard to be pleased: Mal. iii. 17. Man-pleasing is a more difficult and unprofitable task; God is pleased with nothing that hurts yourselves or others.

3. Let me exhort you, to beg more of the spirit: for whilst we are in the flesh, we cannot please God; and therefore you must beg more plentiful grace to change your natures, and to fix your intention right that you may please God in all things. Your natures are never changed till your love be altered, nor till God direct your love: 2 Thes. iii. 5, 'And the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God.'

SERMON XI.

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit; if so be the Spirit of God dwell in you.—ROM. viii. 9.

In these words the Apostle applieth the property of the justified, unto the Romans. In this application you may observe both his charity and his prudence;—

1. His charity, but you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit.

2. His prudence, if so be the Spirit of God dwell in you.

1. For that clause which expresseth his charity. The phrases of being 'in the flesh,' or 'in the spirit,' are the same with being 'after the flesh,' and 'after the spirit,' ver. 5, or 'walking,' or 'living after the flesh,' or 'after the spirit,' used in other verses of this chapter.

2. In the other clause which expresseth his prudence. The word is either causal or conditional, and signifieth either for so much, or if so be; our translation preferreth the latter rendering; and the sense is, if it were not so, I would not judge you to belong to Christ. As to the latter, observe two things. (1.) To be in the spirit, or to have the spirit dwelling in us, is the same, for the inhabitation is mutual; we are in the spirit, and the spirit in us. (2.) That the Spirit of God and of Christ are all one, witness the proof here subjoined, for he that hath not the Spirit of Christ, is none of his.

Doct. That they in whom the Spirit of God dwelleth, though they live in the flesh, they do not live after the flesh.

1. The terms must be explained.

2. The connection proved.

1. The terms must be explained. Two terms there are:— [1.] What is the indwelling of the spirit; [2.] What it is to live in the flesh.