

is, what mercy is, what bounty and loving-kindness is; *per illius enim proprie quid Deus sit discimus*. Again, if they would know what kind of creature the devil is, they should first know what malice is and filthiness, and what villany and treachery is; for Satan is a compound of all these. The best picture that could be taken of the devil would be by the characters of malice, falsehood, and envy. But God is justice itself, goodness itself, mercy itself, as it is expressed in scripture.

2. In Christ, who is the 'express image of his person,' Heb. i. 3. Now, Christ disdained not the company of sinners, went about healing sicknesses and diseases, and doing good. His miracles were acts of relief, not done for pomp and ostentation.

3. In his providence: Acts xiv. 17, 'He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.'

SERMON XV.

His lord said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reaped where I sowed not, and gathered where I have not strawed; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.—MAT. XXV. 26, 27.

HERE is the master's reply to the servant's allegation. In the words we have two things:—

1. An exprobration of his naughtiness and sloth.

2. A retortion of his vain excuse upon his own head, 'If thou knewest,' &c. Not as if the lord did grant it to be true that the slothful servant had alleged; but his own opinions and conceits were enough to convict him.

[1.] Here is a *συγχώρησις*, a concession; for dispute's sake, be it as thou hast said.

[2.] The inference, 'Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, that at my coming I might have received mine own with usury.' The argument is returned upon himself. The bankers and usury here mentioned are only by way of comparison, and can no more be urged to justify the putting money to use than, 'Behold, I come as a thief,' can justify theft; or that parable Luke xvi. should justify fraud and injustice; the unjust steward did wisely, *non servi fraudem, sed prudentiam*, &c. Parables are not taken from those things that *de jure* ought to be done, but *de facto* are done. Therefore I shall not interpose any judgment of mine upon this occasion as to that case, whether any putting money to use be lawful, yea or no: only observe, that Christ will have his own with usury; some improvement he expects when he cometh.

First, I begin with the exprobration. It was a sharp but well deserved reproof; if the bad servant had feared this beforehand, it might have been better with him; shame is the fear of a just reproof. Mark

the different entertainment of the good and bad servant: there it is, Good and faithful servant; here, Thou wicked and slothful servant: Christ will upbraid the unfaithful at the day of judgment. He is called a wicked, evil servant, because unfaithful; slothful, because negligent.

Doct. 1. A slothful servant is a wicked servant.

These two terms are here coupled. There is a twofold sloth:—

First, Common, in the ordinary affairs of this life: 2 Thes. iii. 10, ‘We commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should they eat;’ 1 Tim. v. 8, ‘He that provideth not for his own is worse than an infidel;’ ver. 13, ‘And withal, they learn to be idle.’

Secondly, Spiritual, called *ἀκηδία*, and *torpor spiritualis*, one of the seven deadly sins among the papists; a remiss will in divine and heavenly matters, or a negligence in the duties of holiness, because of the labour and trouble that accompanieth them: Rom. xii. 11, ‘Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;’ Heb. vi. 12, ‘That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises.’ There are in these scriptures two words, *ἀκηδία* and *νωθροί*, dull, stupid, backward. They are both bad; but this latter is worst, because of the matter about which it is conversant. The one in our particular, the other in our general calling. To be negligent in our ordinary callings is bad; but much more in the great affairs of our souls. It is not only an evil thing, but an evil sin. Of this principally.

1. Because total omissions, against knowledge and conscience, especially of necessary duties, are very great sins. That omissions are sins as well as sins of commission, appeareth from the nature of the law, which consists of a precept and prohibition. It enforceth good, as well as forbiddeth what is evil: Ps. xxxiv. 14, ‘Depart from evil, and do good.’ In the government of man, the law useth both these, the bridle and the spur, inciting him to that which is good, and restraining him from that which is evil. You deny God his due when you withhold from him that service, love, and worship which he requireth; which is a great evil in his creatures, which are made by him, and fed and maintained by him. You wrong him when you deprive him of your service for whose use you were made. Therefore sins of omission are sins. Now, of all omissions, omissions of the most necessary duties are most culpable; want of love to God, fear of God, faith in God, are greater evils than not praying at such a time, hearing of the word, or labouring in our callings at such a time. The life of religion lieth in the one more than in the other; and they are more indispensably required. The scripture pronounceth a heavy doom upon these kind of defects: 1 Cor. xvi. 22, ‘If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.’ Among these, sins *contra remedium* are more baneful than *peccata contra officium*: Heb. ii. 3, ‘How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?’ Especially when total. To omit an act of love to God, or to fail in point of faith in a particular case or exigence, is a great evil; but to be wholly careless and mindless of the favour of God, or to seek after it in a very overly slight manner, is worst of all: Rom. iii. 11, ‘There is none that understandeth, that seeketh after God.’ They do not make it their business to remember God, or their duty to him, or their study to

please him; they think of him seldom, or very neglectfully worship him, or make mention of him very coldly, serve him carelessly, or by the by. This showeth that men are naughty, wicked, and in a cursed estate; especially when they are convinced of better, that God deserveth more serious regard at their hands, and Christ to be more dear and precious to them, and their converses with him more delightful. The religion they profess doth plainly call for more at their hands; and their consciences are clamorous, and the Spirit of God importunate with them. To omit a duty against knowledge is as great a sin as to commit evil against knowledge: James iv. 17, 'Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' The closer the application by serious convictions, strong motions, and impulses to do better, the greater their sin; for this argueth a flat disobedience and contempt of God, and a grieving of his Spirit, Eph. iv. 30, to give him the repulse when he would fain enter and take possession of our hearts. Now, put all these things together, and you will soon find that a slothful servant is a very wicked, naughty servant. *Satis est mali ipsum nihil fecisse boni.* They are not only evil servants that teach falsities, but they also that do not promote the kingdom of Christ to their power; not only they that do no hurt, but they that do no good: Mat. iii. 20, 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.' Not only the poisonous, but the barren tree.

2. The motives that draw us to this idleness and sloth are paltry, base, and such as offer great wrong to God. Alas! what have we to hinder us in God's service, but a little worldly profit, pleasure, or honour? Now, what a gross sin is it to love the world above God, or to neglect Christ that died for thee, merely to please the flesh, and to seek its ease and contentment! *Probatio unius sine contumelia alterius procedere non potest:* Heb. xii. 15, 'Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.' If there were some better or more considerable thing in the case, the fault were the less, and our negligence might the more be excused; but this is a gross sin, to despise God for poor contemptible vanities. The world counts profaneness by another measure than the scripture. You count adulterers and drunkards and swearers profane; but the scripture counteth them profane that have not an esteem of spiritual privileges. There are *peccata majoris infamiae*, and *peccata majoris reatus*. Some sins in the eye of the world have more filthiness and turpitude in them, and some sins in the eye of God have more guilt, as when we despise the favour of God, and do not think it worthy our most serious and lively diligence; the smallness of the temptation aggravateth the negligence. The service of God is of everlasting consequence, but the things of the world are of short continuance; all this dust is gone with the spurn of a foot; one turn of the hand of God separateth thy neglected soul from thy pampered body, and then 'whose are all these things?' Luke xii. 20; 2 Cor. iv. 18.

3. Negligent unfruitfulness is a breach of trust, to which we are bound by covenant, and so a disappointment of God's expectation. To fortify this consideration, I need not repeat that all God's gifts to us imply a trust; the very scope of this parable showeth it, and it may

be further confirmed by Isa. xliii. 21-24, 'This people I have formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise. But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel: thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings, neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense; thou hast bought me no sweet-cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thy iniquities.' That where God hath given a people advantages, he expecteth answerable service and improvement; and that we are bound to this by the covenant of grace, wherein we give up ourselves to the Lord for his use and service; and that God reckoneth upon this: Gen. xviii. 19, 'I know my servant Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him;' and Luke xiii. 7, 'Then said he to the dresser of the vineyard, Behold, these three years have I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree;' and Isa. lxiii. 8, 'For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie.' Only now I press that unfruitfulness and breach of trust is a great crime, and a disappointing the righteous expectation of God, a very provoking thing; and therefore the slothful servant, that doth not answer the ends of his trust, nor fulfil his covenant vow, must needs be highly culpable, though he should not break out into acts of gross excess, and apparent enmity against God.

4. He that ceaseth to do good, evil must needs ensue; and the unprofitable servant hath his blots and blemishes, which render him odious unto God. *Homines nihil agendo, male agere discunt*, saith Cato. Standing pools are apt to putrify; and the Psalmist saith, Ps. xiv. 2, 'They are all become filthy and abominable, for there is none that seeketh God.' When the gardener holdeth his hand, the ground is soon overgrown with weeds. Sins of omission will make way for sins of commission; and those that neglect improvement lose all reverence and awe of God every day more and more, and so are given up to a hatred of his people, and many brutish lusts. As a carcase not embalmed is more noisome every day: Job xv. 4, 'Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God.'

Use 1. Let us all be ashamed of our sloth. There is more evil in it than we are aware of.

1. Consider the necessity of diligence. There is nothing in religion can be gotten, kept, increased, or maintained, without great diligence. No comfort without it: 2 Peter i. 10, 'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give all diligence to make your calling and election sure;' 2 Peter iii. 14, 'Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace.' No grace without it: 2 Peter i. 5, 'And besides this, give all diligence to add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge.' No hope of coming to heaven without it: Heb. vi. 11, 'And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end.' *Illi falsi sunt*, saith Sallust, *qui diversissimas res expectant, ignavia voluptatem, et premia virtutis*. It is in vain to think that a loitering profession will ever bring any glory to God, comfort, or increase of grace to ourselves, or breed in us any comfortable hope and expectation of blessed-

ness to come. All excellent things are hard to come by; it is true in earthly matters, it is much more true in spiritual.

2. Consider the evil of sloth. A slothful man and a profane man differ very little: Prov. xviii. 9, 'He that is slothful in work is brother to him that is a great waster.' The one getteth nothing, and the other spendeth all. Thou wilt say, thou art no drunkard, no whore-monger. But thou art idle and negligent, so that you and they are brothers; all the difference is as between a consumption and an apoplexy; the one destroyeth in an instant, the other consumeth by degrees; the one is like splitting a ship, that goes down to the bottom presently, the other like a leaky ship that sinketh by degrees. Though you do not run into the same excess of riot with others, yet you are idle in the Lord's work: it cometh much to the same effect; the heart groweth poorer and poorer, till at length it ends in final hardness. Nay, in some sense negligence is worse than gross profaneness. Many from great sinners have turned great saints, but few from a lukewarm careless profession have come to anything. Therefore these are 'spewed out of God's mouth,' Rev. iii. 16. There is more hope of a sinner than of a lukewarm careless person, for he doth not think himself evil, and so is more liable to security. God may give grace to the one, but taketh away the talent from the other.

3. Consider the rewards of diligence. This labour will turn to a good effect: 1 Cor. xv. 58, 'Your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.' If there were nothing in chase, or not so great a reward, we had more excuse; but when the reward is so full and so sure, shall not we labour for it? We labour and toil, and use all diligence to obtain the things of this world; and shall we think to go to heaven with our hands in our bosom, or lying upon a bed of ease? To see men under the power of a lust may shame us, Ps. cxxvii. 2. Men rise early and go to bed late to gain the world; men labour, sweat, and travail, and spare no cost to go to hell. The devil gets more servants than God with all his promises, threatenings, and mercies. Shall they be so diligent that have such bad work, worse wages, and the worst master, and shall not we bestir ourselves?

4. The whole course of nature inviteth us to labour and diligence, in order to our future estate. The sun is unwearied in his motion, that he may go up and down, preaching God to the world: Prov. vi. 6, 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.' There is a great deal of morality hidden in the bosom of nature, if we had the skill to find it out. What can the ant do? 'She provideth her meat in summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.' These little creatures are not able to endure the cold of winter, therefore work themselves deep into the earth, but they carry their food along with them; and should not we have as great a sense of futurity? We cannot endure the day of the Lord unless we make provision: Prov. x. 5, 'He that gathereth in summer is a wise son, but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.' Now is our season to work, that in the day of our accounts we may not be unprovided.

The means against sloth are faith, patience, and love. Faith and patience we have in one place: Heb. vi. 12, 'That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the pro-

mises.' They inherited the promises, that is, the things promised. If we propound to ourselves such a divine and noble end as those great and glorious things that are offered in the promises, we must use the means. They had faith, so must we have; they had patience, and we must be patient.

[1.] By faith we are not to understand confidence and reliance upon God's promises; a probable human faith and hope will not be sufficient; but a firm adherence to God's word: whatever falleth out we are sure to have enough in the promise. We must have faith, because the things promised are invisible, rare, and excellent, far above the power of the creature to give. The promise is a firm and immutable foundation of our hope; we should rejoice in it as much as if the thing promised were in hand: 'In God I will rejoice, in the Lord I will praise his word;' or praise his word till the thing promised cometh to be enjoyed: 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for.'

[2.] For patience: Heb. x. 36, 'For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God ye might receive the promise.' And we must have patience, because the things hoped for are to come, and at a great distance: Rom. viii. 25, 'But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.' Besides, we shall meet with many difficulties, oppositions, and trials, all which must be overcome: many things must be done, many things must be suffered, and we must make our way through the midst of dreadful enemies before we can attain our end. Further, our desires are vehement, and we long for enjoyment, which is yet to come; therefore we must be patient, that we may quietly wait God's leisure: Rom. ii. 7, 'To them who by patient continuing in well-doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality, eternal life.'

[3.] The next grace is love. Where there is love there will be labour, Heb. vi. 10, 'For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love;' 1 Thes. i. 3, 'Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope;' Rev. ii. 3, 4, 'And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted: nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.' And love is said 'to endure all things,' 1 Cor. xiii. 7. It was love made Christ to suffer hunger and weariness, and to forbear to refresh himself for the good of souls; it was love made him endure the bitter agonies of the cross. Love puts strength and life into the soul, addeth wings and feet to the body, spareth no pains nor cost. Keep up this grace, and you have an overruling bent upon your hearts.

Use 2. If spiritual sloth be so great an evil, let the children of God take heed of it when first it beginneth to creep upon their spirits; as when they begin to pray without affection or fervour of spirit, to meditate of divine things without any sense, affection, or fruit; when they find it difficult to withdraw from carnal company or vain discourse, and are hardly persuaded to return unto themselves, and to consider their ways, and can freely let loose their thoughts and words to all manner of vanity, and their comfort is rather sought in the creature than in God; they can rarely speak of others, but it is in reflecting upon them rather than themselves; when reproofs grow burdensome,

and are not entertained as a help but as an injury ; when they give up themselves to carnal sports, and take a license for vain recreations, and so fly from the labours that are profitable and necessary for their soul's health ; their zeal languisheth, their duties are not so frequent, nor the means of grace used with life, vigour, and affection, but they are more coldly affected towards them ; a satiety and fulness creepeth upon them ; they do not so solicitously avoid the causes of sin, begin to indulge the body, or the bodily life, to have more admiring thoughts of the honours and pleasures and profits of the world ; either neglect or quench the motions of the Spirit : all these are the effects of a remiss will, or a fainting heart, that beginneth to tire in the ways of God.

Use 3. It serves to justify God in his judgments upon the careless and negligent, though they be not grossly dissolute and profane. There is more contempt of God in neglecters than you can at first be sensible of. Hypocrites complain of the severity of God, the rigour of his law, the grievousness of his judgments ; they should rather complain of the naughtiness of their own hearts. They are convinced of more duty than they are willing to perform, and they are not willing, because they follow after a few paltry vanities, which is a great dishonour to God. It was not the austerity and rigidness of the master in requiring improvement that hindered the increase of his talent, but his own baseness, being wedded to sensual delights. They say, 'The ways of the Lord are not equal ;' but their hearts are not right with God.

Secondly, I come now to the retortion of his vain excuse upon himself. The damned can have no just complaint against God ; they are apt to murmur, and lay their defects upon the rigidness of God's government or God's providence ; but in the issue the blame will light upon themselves, even the things they allege make against them. He was convinced the master expected increase, therefore he should have done what he could : Luke xix. 22, 'Out of thy own mouth I will condemn thee.' So it is here ; men's consciences convince them they ought not to live in idleness, and if they have a master, the thought of their account should enforce them, if not their own inclination, especially if a severe master. Grant the sinner's supposition, it bindeth the duty upon him, and so he cuts his throat with his own sword ; as they said of Job, chap. xv. 6, 'Thine own mouth condemneth thee ; thine own lips testify against thee.'

Doct. No excuse shall serve the unfaithful and slothful servant at the day of judgment.

Let a man deceive himself now, and please himself with these pretences as he will, all his excuses shall be retorted upon him, and made matter of his condemnation ; for the judge is impartial, and omniscient, his eyes cannot be blinded ; nay, he can open your own consciences, and so overwhelm you with the evidence and conviction of your sins, that you shall have nothing to say. As in the 22d of Matthew, 'The man was speechless' when arraigned. But because the excusing humour is very rife, and many things serve the turn now which will not bear weight then, I shall a little handle this matter of excusing. In the general, an excuse is an apology or vain defence, whereby the

sinner seeketh to palliate his negligence in God's service. To undeceive you—

First, Take these general considerations.

1. That carnal men are ill versed in the art of excusing evil, when they have a right principle to go upon, and that which they think maketh for them usually maketh against them. Solomon telleth us, Prov. xxvi. 9, 'That a parable in a fool's mouth is like a thorn in the hand of a drunkard.' The thorn was their instrument of sewing, as the needle with us. Now, a drunkard woundeth and goeth himself, because of his uneven touch, when his spirits are disturbed with excess of drink. Do but observe how contrarily and perversely wicked men will reason, and what inferences and conclusions they will draw from those very principles the godly make a good use of. As in 1 Cor. xv. 32, 'Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we shall die.' Now, compare this with 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30, 'But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use the world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away;' 2 Kings vi. 33, 'And while he yet talked with them, behold the messenger came down unto him; and he said, Behold, this evil is of the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?' Compare this with 1 Sam. iii. 18, 'And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him; and he said, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.' So Haggai i. 2, 'Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, The people say, the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.' Compare this scripture with 2 Sam. vii. 2, 'And the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.' When David dwelt in a stately house, his heart was set upon building a house for the Lord. So Rom. ii. 4, 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' with Titus ii. 11, 12, 'For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;' Jude 4, 'Ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.'

2. Sometimes carnal men pretend certain causes and excuses, when their conscience knoweth it is otherwise; and then the things alleged are not the real opinions and inward sentiments of their own minds, but something said or taken up to justify their sloth: 1 Cor. vi. 9, 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,' &c. As hopes of impunity, though they live a godless and sinful course of life. If they were serious, conscience would tell them men may be deceived with these things, but God cannot. Ye may stifle conscience for a while with these allegations, but it will speak, and then these sorry fig-leaves will not serve the turn to hide your nakedness.

3. Sometimes these excuses are the fruit of blindness, sottishness,

ignorance, and infatuation; and the sluggard hath a high conceit of his own allegations: Prov. xxvi. 16, 'The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.' He thinketh others are mopish, giddy, and crack-brained people, that make more ado with religion than needeth, are too nice and scrupulous; take it to be good prudence to keep out of harm's way: his very foolish thoughts he thinketh are wise reasons; that religion is a merry thing: Prov. xv. 19, 'The way of a slothful man is a hedge of thorns, but the way of the righteous man is made plain.' He imagineth difficulties and intolerable hardships in a course of godliness. It is our cowardice and pusillanimous ignorance maketh the ways of God seem hard. All things are comfortable, plain, and easy to the pure and upright heart. Thus he bloweth hot and cold, speaketh contrary things, according as he looketh upon them with a slight or pusillanimous heart.

4. Excuses argue an ill spirit and an unwilling heart. When they should do something for God, there is something still in the way, some danger, or some difficulty, which they are loath to encounter withal: Prov. xxvi. 13, 'The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way.' They are fruits of the quarrel between conviction and corruption, and are usually found in us when we first begin to understand the way of the Lord, but are loath to come up to the terms. Certainly it is better be doing than excusing. Doing is safe, but excuses are but a patch upon a sore place. If we have done a fault, it is better confess, and seek a pardon, than to excuse and extenuate.

5. Consider the invalidity of all things that are usually alleged by sinners; and to help you, consider—

[1.] Nothing can be pleaded as reason which God's word disproveth. The scriptures were purposely penned to refute the vain sophisms that are in the hearts of men: Heb. iv. 12, 'To divide between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart;' to discover the affections of a sensual heart, however palliated with the pretences of a crafty understanding, to hide the evil from themselves and others. You must not lift up your private conceits against the wisdom of God.

[2.] Nothing can be pleaded as reason which your consciences are not satisfied with as reason. That is the reason there are so many appeals to conscience in scripture. Do not your consciences tell you you ought to be better, to mind God more? That if these things be true, 2 Peter iii. 11, 'That all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?'

[3.] Nothing can be pleaded by way of excuse which reflects upon God, as if he had made a hard law. We are apt to plead so: 'The way of the Lord is not equal;' 'The woman thou gavest me, she gave me, and I did eat.' Will you excuse your idleness and sin by the severity of your master, and cast your brat at his doors?

[4.] There can be no excuse for a total omission of necessary duties. In a partial omission, the law itself alloweth a dispensation; as in case of sickness we are taken off from some work which God requireth at other times. But some things are indispensably required: John

iii. 5, 'Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;' Heb. xii. 14, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Here is *necessitas precepti et medii*.

[5.] You should harden yourselves with no excuse or reason but what you dare plead when you stand before the bar of Christ; for then will the weight of all pleas be considered. Now, God hath left all creatures without excuse, Rom. i. 20. There is some witness of God to them, that convinceth them of more duty than they are willing to perform.

Secondly, And more particularly, the usual excuses are these:—

Object. 1. I have no time to mind soul-affairs; my distractions in the world are so great, and my course of life is such, I have no leisure.

Ans. 1. Whatever your business be, you have a time to eat and drink and sleep; and have you no time to be saved? Better encroach upon other things than that religion should be cast to the walls, or jostled out of your thoughts. David was a king, and he had more distracting affairs than most of us have, or can have; yet, Ps. cxix. 147, 148, he saith, 'I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried;' and 'Mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I might meditate on thy word.'

2. Do you spend no time in idleness, vain talking, or carnal sports? And might not this be better employed about heavenly things? Eph. v. 16, 'Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.'

3. Much of religion is transacted in the mind. A Christian is always serving God; his second-table duties are first-table duties. As carnal men go about heavenly things with a carnal mind, so the Christian goeth about carnal things with a heavenly mind.

4. God would be sure to have a portion of time, therefore the Lord's day was appointed: Isa. lviii. 13, 'If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words,' &c. That it may be dear to us in the flesh, and in the Lord, when we have God's command, and the laws of the land too.

5. All your time is lost that is not spent in God's service.

Object. 2. But I have no power nor strength to do good; and what will you have us do?

Ans. You can do more than you do, but you will not make trial. God may be more ready with the assistances of his grace than you can imagine. The tired may complain of the length of the way, but not the lazy that will not stir a foot. If you did make trial, you would not complain of God, but yourselves; and beg grace more feelingly. You are not able because you are not willing. Your impotency is contracted by evil habits and long custom in sin; that is an aggravation of your sin.

Object. 3. It is dangerous and troublesome to own God and religion heartily.

Ans. Did not you resolve to serve God whatever it cost you? And is God harsh and severe because he trieth whether you will be as good as your word, and will not let you go to heaven with a vain complaint

in your mouths? Will this comfort you in hell, and for the loss of everlasting happiness? In hell will you say, I came hither to save myself a labour, and to be exempt from the diligence of the holy life, and sufferings incident to it? Will you stop a journey for your lives because the wind bloweth on you, and there is dirt in the way? Nothing can take off a minister from seeking the conversion and salvation of souls, Acts xx. 23, 24; and can anything be an excuse to you? Should your souls be dearer to us than you? It is necessary for our trial that we should meet with scorns and oppositions. Should a weak blast drive us from God? Rev. ii. 13, 14, 'I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith; even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.' It is exceeding commendable to be zealous in such a place, or in such a time, when religion is hazardous and dangerous. Christ suffered more for you than you can for him, and God hath greater terrors than man can present.

Object. 4. I am of a slow wit, have a weak understanding, know not to which party I should cleave and join myself.

Ans. Certainly not to that which is most pleasing to corrupt affections. But divisions in the church are to try the approved, who is chaff, and who is good grain: 1 Cor. xi. 19, 'For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.' The scripture is not dark, but we want eyes. You may know the mind of God: Ps. cxix. 18, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' And John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.'

Object. 5. I have so many temptations and enticements, I hope God will consider my weakness.

Ans. You are as earnestly persuaded upon better motives if persuasion will do it. What is a little worldly glory to eternal glory, brutish pleasures to pure delights?

Use 1. Since sloth is so great an evil, let the children of God take heed of it.

And so, first, of sloth and idleness in their particular calling. This was one of Sodom's sins: Ezek. xvi. 49, 'Pride and fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness.' This is sensuality, as well as other sins that are more noted in the world, as being an indulgence to the flesh, as well as other things, which are commonly decried, because they betray us to more shame in the world.

1. Every creature is God's servant, and hath his work to do wherein to glorify God; some in one calling, some in another: Neither rich nor poor are exempted; for a lawful calling is not a matter of necessity, but duty, enforced by a commandment. What our callings should be is determined by providence giving gifts and education, and obtruding us upon such a course of life. But it is a mistake to think that bare necessity maketh a calling; no, it is obedience. And if we be without such necessity, we may live idly, without any calling. No; every man and woman hath their labour and service; for God made no man or woman in vain. Would the wise and almighty God make so noble a thing as a rational human creature only to eat, and drink, and sleep.

and rise and dress themselves, that they may show themselves to company, and impertinently chat away their hours and precious time? No; he hath ordained them for some service, which at length they are to give an account of; as the Mediator did of his work: John xvii. 4, 'I have glorified thee on earth, and have finished the work thou gavest me to do.'

2. This work is not of one sort. Some are called to a higher, some to a lower employment, some noble, some citizens, some fathers of families, others matrons or mothers of families, some are magistrates, some ministers; but every one must do their duty in their place. Christianity falleth in with natural relations: 1 Cor. vii. 20, 'Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.' God gives every man his work: Mark xiii. 34, 'The Son of man is like a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work.'

3. The work of our callings must be constantly and diligently attended upon. A rich man cannot say, I have no need; therefore I will attend upon my calling at my pleasure. You must not consider your present need, but your future account. The baseness of a man's calling must not be a discouragement to a poor man, seeing God counteth himself honoured in the lowest service as well as in the highest, and hath promised the reward of the inheritance to servants as well as nobles: Col. iii. 24, 'Knowing that ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ.'

4. Every one that feeleth any tediousness growing upon him in his work should often rouse up himself by considering—

[1.] The active nature of man was never made to be idle; and shall we cross the law of our creation? When the beasts lie down in their dens, 'Man goeth forth to his labour and work till the evening,' Ps. civ. 23.

[2.] The preciousness of time, which is too good to be loitered away upon mere nothing. We should buy it at any price, not waste it: Eph. v. 16, 'Redeem the time.' We shall wish we had done so when it is too late.

[3.] The eye of God, who observeth every man in his station, how he acquitteth himself with good fidelity. Eye-service, with respect to man, maketh us unfaithful: Eph. vi. 6; but eye-service with respect to God is the great ground of diligence, Col. iii. 22, 23.

[4.] The near approach of death. Would we be found eating, drinking, playing, sporting away our precious time, or diligently employing ourselves in our callings, at that day? Luke xii. 43, 'Blessed is that servant whom when his lord cometh he shall find so doing.'

[5.] Our accounts, which mainly concerneth—(1.) Our particular calling, and that course of living wherein we were set to glorify God. The unprofitable servant will be cast into utter darkness, Mat. xxv. 30. God will judge all according to what they have done in their places; and then what will become of the idle and the slothful? (2.) In our general calling, as Christians. Take heed of being naughty and slothful servants.

First, Let us inquire who may be characterised with this brand.

1. Who? Those who complain for want of strength, yet do not

diligently use the means whereby they may be quickened and strengthened: they are idle, and lie upon the bed of ease, and complain that God doth not give grace; languish for comfort, rather than set about the work of obedience. Christ telleth his disciples, John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and manifest myself to him.'

2. That content themselves with a loitering profession, when their hearts swarm with noisome lusts, and are unfurnished of faith and love, and other necessary graces; and yet think a lazy profession will serve the turn: Mat. vii. 22, 'Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works: and then will I profess, I never knew them.' Because they pray, and hear, and receive sacraments, they think all is well, and they have no more to care for. Is this 'working out our salvation with fear and trembling'? Phil. ii. 12; 'Serving God instantly day and night'? Acts xxvi. 7; 'Labouring for the meat that perisheth not'? John vi. 27; 'Denying ourselves'? Luke xiv. 26.

3. That snuff at a little mock-service as if an intolerable burden: Mal. i. 13, 'What a weariness is it!'

4. The children of God may feel this temper coming upon them, when though they do not cast off prayer altogether, yet they cut off or abate and diminish their prayers, either in fervour, or frequency, or continuance and perseverance in prayer; pray without sense, affection, or life; or do not pray so often, or do not continue instant in prayer.

This cutting short of duties in time tendeth to a quitting of them altogether. Man is ready to cast off what he thinketh to be a burden. So when they are backward to meditation, or to withdraw from the delights of the flesh, and the distraction of ordinary employments. In all such cases we should rouse up ourselves. Time is short; our account sure and near; we are labouring for heaven and salvation: shall we tire and faint? 'Be not weary of well-doing.' It is spoken with respect to the duties of piety, Heb. xii. 12; duties of mercy, Gal. vi. 9; duties of our calling, 2 Thes. iii. 13. Oh! then, let us rouse up ourselves.

SERMON XVI.

Take therefore the talent from him, and give it to him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.—MAT. XXV. 28, 29.

WE have seen the arraignment of the evil servant; now followeth the sentence, which intimateth a double punishment—privative and positive, loss and pain. The former is in these two verses; wherein you may observe three things:—

1. The taking the talent from the evil servant.