

SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE TWENTY-FIFTH OF ST MATTHEW.

SERMON XVII.

And cast ye the unprofitable servant into utter darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.—MAT. XXV. 30.

IN these words is the positive part of the sentence; the master doth not only take away the talent, but condemneth him to eternal torments. In them take notice—(1.) Of the reason of the punishment; and then, (2.) The punishment itself.

1. The reason of the punishment is represented in the notion and character by which the party sentenced is expressed, 'The unprofitable servant.' The word *unprofitable* is sometimes used in a larger, and sometimes in a stricter sense. In a larger sense it is used for him that deserveth no reward; so it is said, Luke xvii. 10, 'We are unprofitable servants.' Sometimes more strictly and properly for the idle and the negligent, for them that do not their duty, and make no improvement of their gifts. So it is taken here, and in many other places; *καὶ τὸν ἀχρεῖον δοῦλον ἐκβάλλετε*, 'Cast ye the unprofitable servant.'

2. The punishment itself is represented by two notions:—

[1.] It is dismal, 'Cast him into utter darkness.'

[2.] It is doleful, 'There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

First, Dismal; *εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον*. (2.) It is doleful; *ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων*. Sometimes hell is expressed by one of these notions; as Mat. xiii. 42, 'He will cast the tares into a furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth;' so Mat. xxiv. 51, 'He shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' It is notable, that is the punishment of the luxurious servant, that did eat and drink with the drunken, and beat his fellow-servants; and here the unprofitable servant is threatened with the same, though he was not riotous, but negligent. Sometimes by both together; as Mat. viii. 11, 12, 'The children of the kingdom shall be cast into utter darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth;' and Mat. xxii. 13, 'Take him away, and cast him into utter darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Now, let us first consider the punishment as it is dismal, 'Cast him into utter darkness.' There are two terms to be explained—darkness, and utter darkness.

1. Darkness. Heaven is set forth by light, and hell by darkness. The inheritance of the saints is called an 'inheritance in light,' Col. i. 12, because that is an estate full of knowledge; for there we 'see God face to face,' 1 Cor. xiii. 12; an estate full of joy and comfort, Ps. xvi. 11; an estate full of brightness and glory: Dan. xii. 3, 'They shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever;' Mat. xiii. 43, 'The righteous shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of heaven.' How base soever the children of God appear in this world, in the world to come they shall be wonderful glorious. Now the opposite state of this is set forth by darkness; as the fallen angels are said to be 'held in chains of darkness,' 2 Peter ii. 4; or as Jude hath it, in 'chains under darkness,' Jude 6. Hell is compared to a prison or dungeon, 1 Peter iii. 19. So Christ speaketh of hell as the prison wherein damned spirits are held in a wretched and comfortless estate, in a state most remote from joy and blessedness.

2. It is called utter darkness, either because their prisons or dungeons were out of the city, as appeareth Acts xii. 10, or because they shall be shut from the feast or rooms of entertainment. Their feasts were usually kept by night; suppers, and not dinners; and then celebrated with a great many lamps and candles or torches. Now, those that were not only shut out from those rooms of entertainment, but cast into dungeons, were left in a comfortless condition. That it is opposite to the feast, these two places, Mat. viii. 12, and Mat. xx. 13, show. And here, when the good servants 'enter into the master's joy,' or sit down and feast with him, then is the naughty servant 'cast into utter darkness;' that is, shut out of the communion of the blessed spirits (who in the place of happiness have eternal joy), and cast into the dungeon of hell.

Secondly, Let us consider it as it is doleful, 'Where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Their estate shall be sad, and they shall have a bitter apprehension of it. Their apprehension is expressed by two things—their sorrow and indignation.

1. Their desperate tormenting sorrow, ἐκεῖ κλαυθμὸς, 'weeping.' This dolour shall arise from the inexplicable torments of body and soul.

2. Their indignation or vexation, 'gnashing of teeth.' It is a token of indignation and impatience; as Acts vii. 54, 'When they heard these things, they were cut at the heart, and gnashed on him with their teeth.' I shall explain it more by and by. Two points will arise hence:—

Doct. 1. That hell is a place and state of inexpressible torments.

Doct. 2. That unprofitableness is a damning sin.

The unprofitable servant is condemned, though he did not waste his master's goods, yet because he did not increase them. There is no treachery laid to his charge, no riot and wasteful profusion, no opposition to his fellow-servants, to vex or hinder them in their work. We hear nothing of this laid to his charge; but he neglected to do that which is good.

For the first point, that hell is a place and state of inexpressible torment, the argument may seem harsh and ingrate, but this is part of the doctrine that we must unfold. See the commission of the ministers of the gospel : Mark xvi. 16, 'He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.' It is gospel preaching to warn men of damnation ; we must curse, as well as bless ; and this part of doctrine hath its profit, as well as the more comfortable.

1. To those that are carnal, to rouse them out of their security. If men did believe the torments of hell, they would not sin as they do. Sermons of hell may keep many out of hell. *Ne fugiamus sermones de Gehenna, ut Gehennam fugiamus.* John startled many by pressing them 'to flee from wrath to come.' And it is God's usual course to bring to heaven by the gates of hell.

2. To God's children ; partly that they may know what they have escaped, to be the more thankful to their Redeemer. We were all involved in this condemnation ; and it is the Lord's mercy that we are 'as brands plucked out of the burning,' Zech. iii. 2. A child of God is a firebrand of hell quenched, Eph. ii. 3. It was the pity of our Lord Jesus to rescue us, 1 Thes. i. 10. It is a part of a christian's heaven to think of hell. The miseries of this life commend heaven to us ; much more the torments of hell. We know good the better by the opposite evil ; as the Israelites, when they looked back, and saw the Egyptians tumbling in the waters, it heightened the deliverance, and made them the more sensible of their own safety. And partly to warn them, and quicken them to their duty. This motive alone would beget slavish fear and compulsory obedience ; but mixed with others, it doth good. We need this discipline as long as we are in the world. We are flesh as well as spirit. Adam in innocency needed to be threatened and told of death. Paul saith, 1 Cor. ix. 27, 'I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection ; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.' If so sanctified a man as Paul, much more we ; and Rom. viii. 13, 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die ; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' It is one of the saints' motives. And partly because they that cannot endure to hear of such discourses discover much of the guilt and security of their own hearts. As Ahab said of Michaiah, 'He prophesieth nothing but evil,' so men say of many of the preachers of the gospel (that yet speak with tenderness and compassion), He preacheth nothing but hell and damnation. Presumption is a coward and a runaway ; but faith meeteth its enemy in open field : Ps. xxiii. 4, 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, yet I will fear no evil.' It supposeth the worst ; it can encounter the greatest terrors ; but a false unsound peace is a tender thing, loath to be touched, cannot endure a few sad and sober thoughts of the world to come, as sore eyes cannot endure the light. I shall only speak of this dreadful place and estate as it cometh under the view of this text, leaving a more full discussion of this point to the 41st verse of this chapter.

1. That there is a hell, or everlasting torments prepared for the wicked. It is good to prove a hated truth strongly. Now, it is so, that there is a hell, if God, or man, or devils be competent witnesses

in the case. God hath ever told the world of it, and his witness is true. In the Old Testament but sparingly, because the state of the world to come was reserved as a discovery fit for the times of the gospel, 2 Tim. i. 10; yet there God speaketh, Deut. xxxii. 22, of a 'fire kindled in his anger, that shall burn to the lowest hell.' God's wrath is represented by fire, which is an active instrument of destruction; and the seat and residence of it is in the lowest hell. So Ps. xi. 6, 'Upon the wicked shall he rain snares, fire, and brimstone.' See more, ver. 41.

2. Let us see it described here.

First, As a dismal state, 'Cast them out into utter darkness;' that is—(1.) Shut them out of the feast; and (2.) Cast them into the dungeon of hell. There they shall be deprived of all consolation and joy and happiness. As—

1. Of the sight of God, the company of the good angels and blessed spirits; to which loss there is added the most inexplicable torments of body and soul, which is exceeding great. And it is a dreadful thing to be deprived of the light of God's countenance, to be banished out of his presence. The disciples wept when Paul said, 'Ye shall see my face no more,' Acts xx. 38. What will the damned do when he shall say, 'Depart, ye cursed,' as it is in the 41st verse? Here in the loss all are equal, but not in the pain; all alike depart from God; they all lose heaven's joys, the favourable presence of God, and the sight of Christ, the company of the blessed, and their abode in those happy mansions in Christ's Father's house. Hell is a deep dungeon, where the sunshine of God's presence never cometh. God is *summum bonum*, the chiefest good; and in the other world, *omne bonum*, all in all. All things there are immediately from God, rewards and punishments. Better lose all things than God: Exod. xxxiii. 15, 'If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.'

Object. But is it any grief to the wicked to want God, from whom they have such an extreme averseness and hatred?

Ans. They are sensible of the loss of happiness; their judgment is changed, though not renewed. Fogs of error, atheism, and unbelief then vanish; they are confuted by experience. There are no atheists in hell; they know there is a God, and that all happiness consists in the full enjoyment of him; which happiness they have lost by their own folly, as by their bitter experience they can find, being in a place most remote from him: therefore, as rational creatures, they cannot but be sensible of their loss; and that sense must needs breed sadness and dejection of spirit; being they look not upon God as lovely in himself, but as one that might be profitable to them: *oculos quos occlusit culpa, aperiet pœna*. It would lessen their torments if their understandings might be taken away: they know what it is to want God, though their hatred of him still remaineth.

2. The sight of Christ. They had a glimpse before they went into hell, by the glory of his presence: 2 Thes. i. 9, 'They shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.' That short experience of Christ's appearing will remain in their minds to all eternity; it will stick by them. How are they thrust out? Christ himself, who hath the keys of death and hell, shall bid them go; as if he had said, I cannot endure your presence.

3. From the company of the blessed : Luke xiii. 28, 'There shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.' Envy is a great part of their punishment, as well as horror : Luke xvi. 27, 'And being in torments, he lift up his eyes, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.' It is a torment to think that others of the same nature, interests, instruction, do enjoy what they have forfeited.

4. From an abode in the palace of heaven : Rev. xxii. 15, 'Without shall be dogs and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.' If the pavement of heaven is glorious, what will the place itself be ? And from this glorious place they are banished.

Secondly, This utter darkness implieth positively a state of woe and misery most remote from this blessedness ; for as they are shut out of the palace of heaven, so they are cast into the prison of hell, where all is dark, without hope of ever coming out more : 2 Peter ii. 17, 'To whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.' Hell is a region upon which the sun shall never shine. They know they shall never be reconciled to God, nor their punishment ended or lessened : 'Their worm shall never die, their fire shall never be quenched,' Mark ix. 44. They can never hope to be admitted into God's presence more. There are many ups and downs in a christian's experience. God hideth his face sometimes, that he may show it afterwards the more gloriously. The church prayeth, Ps. lxxx. 19, 'Turn again, and cause the light of thy countenance to shine upon us, and we shall be saved.' But this is an everlasting darkness. God doth, as it were, by chains hold them under everlasting torments. It is a curse that shall never be reversed, a comfortless life that shall never have an end. Men might lose the face of God if they were annihilated ; but the souls of men and women do not go to nothing, or die as their bodies, but subsist in a dolesome miserable state of darkness, and in the place of everlasting imprisonment, where the devils and damned spirits torment one another. All here are kept safe, without any possibility of escaping ; here God holdeth them in everlasting chains.

Now this is just ; they that rejected the light are thrust into utter darkness. They reject the light of the gospel : John iii. 19, 'Men love darkness more than light.' They despise the light of glory, in comparison of worldly things and present satisfactions : Ps. cvi. 24, 'They despised the good land.' They forsake God and their own happiness ; that which is now their sin is then their misery. They first excommunicated God, Job xxii. 17, and that for a trifle. They think his presence a torment : Mat. viii. 20, 'What have we to do with thee ? art thou come to torment us before the time ?' Rom. i. 28, 'They did not like to retain God in their knowledge.' They could not endure to think of God, and abhorred their own thoughts of God, that they were their burden.

Secondly, It is a doleful place and state. Here are two notions, the one expressing their grief and sorrow, the other their vexation and indignation.

1. Their grief and sorrow. In hell there is nothing but sorrow and

fear, overwhelming sorrow and despairing fear : it is a helpless and hopeless grief. Carnal men are prejudiced against godly sorrow ; but that is useful and profitable, 2 Cor. vii. 10. These sorrows would prevent those that the damned suffer in hell. The sorrows of repentance are joys in comparison of these sorrows ; the sorrows of repentance are full of hope. God will afford comforts to his mourners ; but the sorrows of the damned are heightened by their own desperations ; it is for ever and ever. These are small, those swallow us up ; these are curing, those tormenting ; here it is like pricking a vein for health, hereafter wounds to the heart. These are mixed with love : Luke vii., she that loved much, wept much. The cup of wrath is unmixed, confounding and overwhelming us with continual amazement. These are short, those endless.

2. Their vexation and indignation. The grinding and the gnashing of the teeth is usually in pain or rage, in pain of body and soul. But of that afterwards, when I come to speak of hell under the notion of everlasting fire. Now, as it is a token and effect of rage. Now the damned are represented as full of rage, blasphemy, and indignation against God, against the saints, and against themselves.

[1.] Against God ; they have despised his favour, and now feel the power of his justice and displeasure against them, and have still an implacable hatred against him. We see in Rev. xvi. 9, when they were ‘ scorched with great heat, they blasphemed the name of God, which had power over these plagues ; and repented not, to give glory to God : they blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains and sores, and repented not of their deeds.’ I know that this prophecy doth not concern the state of the wicked in hell, but their plagues and disappointments in this world. However the fashion and guise of the reprobate is to be observed, here when they will not repent, so there when they cannot repent. Like men distracted and mad, they gnaw their tongues, and gnash their teeth ; like mad dogs, that bite their chains, or wild bulls in a net or toil, that roar and foam. They will curse God that created, and sentenced them to this death ; his power, by which they are continually tormented ; his wisdom, by which he governeth the world ; his goodness, that to them is turned into fury ; his Son’s death and blood, which hath profited so many, and they have no benefit by it.

[2.] Against the saints. They hate them, and have an envy at all the felicity that betideth them in this world : Ps. xxxvii. 12, ‘ The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth at him with his teeth ;’ so Ps. cxii. 10, ‘ The horn of the righteous shall be exalted with honour : the wicked shall see it, and be grieved ; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away.’ The godly are their opposite party ; then their blessedness shall be so great that they shall envy their happiness when they see the godly in good case, and themselves miserable. At the great day the wicked shall see the believers’ joy to the increase of their own sorrow.

[3.] Against themselves ; their own hearts shall reproach them : Hosea xiii. 9, ‘ Thou hast destroyed thyself.’ They shall rave and vex at their own past folly, past neglects, and past abuse of grace, and past refusal of that happiness which others enjoy, when they find their own

delights salted with the present curse. Little comfort and satisfaction shall they have, when they remember they came thither to avoid the tediousness of a few blessed duties.

Use. Is to shame us that we make no more preparation to escape this dreadful estate; or, in the language of the Holy Ghost, that we do not 'flee from wrath to come.' No motion can be earnest and speedy enough. There are two things that are very great wonders:—

1. That any man should reject the christian faith, so clearly promised in the predictions of the prophets, before it was revealed, and confirmed with such a number of miracles, when it was first set afoot, received among the nations by so universal a consent, in the learned part of the world, notwithstanding the meanness of the instruments employed in it; and perpetuated to us throughout so many successions of ages, who have had experience of the truth of it. And yet still we have cause to complain: Isa. liii. 1, 'Lord, who hath believed our report?' Some cannot outsee time and look beyond the grave: 1 Peter i. 9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off;' and 2 Peter iii. 3, 'There shall come in the latter times scoffers, and mockers, walking after their own lusts.' Many dare not question the precepts of christianity, because of their usefulness to human society and reasonable nature; they doubt of the recompenses, and yet have a secret fear of them, and seek to smother it by their incredulity and unbelief. But alas! it will not do. They scoff at others as simple and credulous; none so credulous as the atheist; there is a thousand to one against him: at least, if it prove true, in what a case are they? It will do them no hurt to venture upon probabilities until further assurance. What assurance would you have? Luke xvi. 30, 31, 'You have Moses and the prophets; if you believe not them, neither will you be persuaded if one came from the dead.' Will you give laws to heaven? God is not bound to make a sun for them to see that wilfully shut their eyes; yet that way what assurance would you have to prove this is no phantasm? Doth God need a lie to persuade you to your duty? But—

2. The greater miracle is that any should embrace the christian faith, and yet live sinfully and carelessly; that they should believe as christians, and yet live as atheists. You cannot drive a dull ass into the fire that is kindled before him: Prov. i. 17, 'Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird.' How can men believe eternal torments, and yet with so much boldness and easiness run into the sins that do deserve them? Many times not compelled by any terror, nor asked or invited by any temptation, but of their own accord they tempt themselves, and seek out occasions of sinning. On the other side, can a man believe heaven, and do nothing for it? If we know that it will not be lost labour, there is all the reason we should not grudge at it: 1 Cor. xv. 58, 'Be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.'

Now there are three causes of this:—(1.) Unbelief; (2.) Inconsideration; (3.) Want of close application.

[1.] Want of a sound belief. Most men's faith is but pretended, as appeareth by the effects.

(1.) By our proneness to sin. If God did govern the world by sense, and not by faith, we should be other manner of persons than we are, in all holiness and godliness of conversation. If we were sure and certain that for every law we break, or for every one whom we deceive and slander, we should hold our hands in scalding lead for half an hour, how afraid would men be to commit any offence? Who would taste meat, if he knew there were present death in it? yea, that it would cost him bitter gripes and torments? How cautious are men of their diet that are prone to the stone, or gout or colick, where it is but probable the things we take will do us any hurt? We know certainly that 'the wages of sin is death,' yet how little are we concerned at sin!

(2.) By our backwardness to good works. Sins of omission will damn as well as sins of commission, small as well as great. It is not said, *Ye have robbed, but, Ye have not fed, ye have not clothed; not, Ye have blasphemed, but, Ye have not invoked the name of God; not done hurt, but done no good: 'And cast the unprofitable servant,' &c.*

(3.) By our weakness in temptations and conflicts. We cannot deny a carnal pleasure, yet we are told, *Rom. viii. 13, 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.'* Nor withstand a carnal fear, yet we are told, *Mat. x. 28, 'Fear not him that can kill the body, but fear him that can cast both body and soul into hell.'* But shrink at the least pains of duty, when we are told on the one hand, *1 Cor. xv. 58, 'That our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord;'* on the other side, *Rev. xxi. 8, 'That the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.'* On the other side, that it is the most irrational thing to go to hell to save ourselves the labour of obedience. The whole world promised for a reward cannot induce us to enter into a fiery furnace for half an hour. If one much desiring sleep, which is *Chrysostom's* supposition, should be told that if he once nodded he should endure ten years' torment, would he venture?

(4.) By our carelessness in the matters of our peace. If we were in danger of death every moment, we would not be quiet till we got a pardon. All men by nature are children of wrath, liable to this horrible estate that hath been described to you; but yet few run for refuge, *Heb. vi. 18, 19, nor 'flee from wrath to come,' Mat. iii. 7. Seek 'peace upon earth,' Luke ii. 14. Labour 'to be found of him in peace,' 2 Peter ii. 14.* How can a man be at rest, till he be secured, and can bless God for an escape?

[2.] Want of serious consideration. The scripture calleth for it everywhere: *Ps. l. 22, 'Consider this, ye that forget God;'* and *Isa. i. 3, 'My people will not consider.'* Many that have faith do not act it, and set it a-work by lively thoughts. When faith and knowledge are asleep, it differeth little from ignorance or oblivion, till consideration awaken it. Carnal sensualists put off that they cannot put away, *Amos vi. 3.* Many that know themselves wretched creatures are not troubled at it, because they cast these things out of their thoughts, and so they sleep; but their damnation sleepeth not, it lieth watching to take hold of them; they are not at leisure to think of eternity.

[3.] Want of close application: *Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we then*

say to these things?' Job v. 27, 'Know this for thy good.' Whether promise or threatening, we must urge and prick our hearts with it. Self-love maketh us fancy an unreasonable indulgence in God, and that we shall do well enough, how slightly and carelessly soever we mind religion. We do not lay the point and edge of truths to our own hearts, and say, Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' These are the causes. Now there is no way to remedy this but to get a sound belief of the world to come, and often to meditate on it, and urge our own hearts with it.

Doct. 2. That unprofitableness is a damning sin.

If there were no more, this were enough to ruin us. By unprofitableness I do not mean want of success; to the best, gifts may be unprofitable: Isa. xlix. 4, 'I have laboured in vain,' saith the prophet Isaiah; but want of endeavour, omitting to do our duty. The scope of the parable is to awaken us from our negligence and sloth, that we may not prefer a soft and easy lazy life before the service of God, and doing good in our generation. Now, because we think omissions are no sins, or light sins, I shall take this occasion to show the heinousness of them; and here I shall show two things:—

First, That there are sins of omission. Sins are usually distinguished into sins of omission and commission. A sin of commission is when we do that which we ought not; a sin of omission, when we leave that undone which we ought to do. But when we look more narrowly into these things, we shall find both in every actual sin; for in that we commit anything against the law, we omit our duty, and the omitting of our duty can hardly or never fall out but that something is preferred before the love of God, and that is a commission. But yet there is ground for the distinction, because when anything is formally and directly committed against the negative precept and prohibition, that is a sin of commission; but when we directly sin against an affirmative precept, that is an omission. We have an instance of both in Eli and his sons. Eli's sons defiled themselves 'with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,' 1 Sam. ii. 22. Eli sinned in that 'he restrained them not,' 1 Sam. iii. 13. His was an omission, theirs a commission.

Secondly, That sins of omission may be great sins appeareth—

1. Partly by the nature of them. There is in them the general nature of all evil; that is, *ἀνομία*, 'a transgression of a law,' 1 John iii. 4; a disobedience and breach of a precept, and so by consequence a contempt of God's authority. We cry out upon Pharaoh when we hear him speaking, Exod. v. 2, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?' By interpretation we all say so; this language is couched in every sin that we commit, and every duty we omit. Our negligence is not simple negligence, but downright disobedience, because it is a breach of a precept; and the offence is the more, because our nature doth more easily close with precepts than prohibitions. Duties enjoined are perfective, but prohibitions are as so many yokes upon us. We take it more grievously for God to say, 'Thou shalt not covet,' than for God to say, 'Thou shalt love me, fear me, and serve me.' We are contented to do much which the law requireth, but to be limited and barred of our delights, this is distasteful. To meet with

man's corruptions indeed, the decalogue consists more of prohibitions than precepts; eight negatives, the fourth and fifth commandments only positive. To be restrained is as distasteful to us as for men in a fever to be forbidden drink; nature is more prone to sin. But to return, there is much disobedience in a sin of omission. When Saul had not done what God bid him to do, he telleth him, 'Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness as iniquity and idolatry,' 1 Sam. xv. 11; implying that omission is rebellion, and stubbornness parallel to idolatry and witchcraft.

2. Partly by the causes of them. The general cause is corrupt nature: 'They are all become unprofitable,' Rom. iii. 12, compared with Ps. xiv. 3, 'They are altogether become filthy.' There is in all by nature a proneness to evil, and a backwardness to good. Onesimus before conversion was unprofitable, good for nothing, Philem. v. 11; but grace made a change, make him useful in all his relations. The particular causes are—(1.) Idleness and security; they are loath to be held at work: Isa. lxiv. 7, 'None stirreth up himself to lay hold on thee;' 'They forget his commandments,' Jer. ii. 31, 32. (2.) Want of love to God: Isa. xliii. 22, 'Thou hast been weary of me, O Israel;' and Rev. ii. 4, 'Nevertheless I have something against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.' And (3.) Want of zeal for God's glory: 'Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,' Rom. xii. 11. Where there is a fervour, we cannot be idle and neglectful of our duty. There is an aversion from God before there is an express disobedience to him.

3. Partly by the effects—internal, external, eternal.

[1.] Internal; gifts and graces languish for want of employment: 1 Thes. v. 19, 'Quench not the Spirit.' Thomas his omission made way for his unbelief, John xx. 24.

[2.] External; it bringeth on many temporal judgments. God put by Saul from being king for an omission: 1 Sam. xv. 11, 'It repenteth me for setting up Saul to be king, for he hath not done the thing that I commanded him;' forbearing to destroy all of Amalek. For this he put by Eli's house from the priesthood: 1 Sam. iii. 13, 'I will judge his house for ever, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.' Eli's omission is punished as well as his sons' commission, yet it was not a total omission. Compare 1 Sam. ii. 23–25, 'And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people; nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear of you; ye make the Lord's people to transgress: if one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not to the voice of their father.' His admonition was grave and serious, yet it was not enough. All Israel knew their sin before; Eli took upon him to reprove them secretly, whereas the fact was open, and he should have put them to open shame: and then his rebukes were mild and soft; he should have frowned upon them, punished them, but his fondness would not permit that.

[3.] Eternal, here in the text: 'Cast the unprofitable servant,' &c. These sins Christ will mainly inquire after at the day of judgment; and ver. 42, 43 of this chapter, and Mat. vii. 19, 'Every tree that

bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire ;' though not bad or poisonous fruit. By all these arguments it appeareth that sins of omission may be great sins.

Thirdly, That some sins of omission are greater than others. All are not alike, as the more necessary the duties, the more faulty the omission : Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' 1 Cor. xvi. 22, 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha.' Not if a man hate, but if he love not, &c. These are *peccata contra remedium*, as others *contra officium*. By other sins we make the wound, by these we refuse the plaster. Again, if the omission be total : Jer. x. 25, 'Call not on the name of the Lord ;' Ps. xiv. 3, 'None seeketh after God.' Again, when seasonable duties are neglected : Mat. xxv. 44, 'When I was an hungered ye fed me not ;' 1 John iii. 17, 'He that hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother in need ;' Prov. xvii. 16, 'Why is there a price put into the hand of a fool?' And then when it is easy, this is to stand with God for a trifle : Luke xvi. 24, *Desideravit guttum, qui non dedit micam* ; Amos ii. 6, 'They sold the poor for a pair of shoes.' And when convinced of the duty : James iv. 17, 'To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.'

Fourthly, In many cases sins of omission may be more heinous and more damning than sins of commission. (1.) They are the ruin of most part of the carnal world. Carnal men are often described by their omissions, 'To be without God,' Eph. iii. 12 ; Ps. x. 3, 4, 'The wicked through the pride of their heart will not seek after God ; God is not in all their thoughts ;' Jer. ii. 32, 'None stirreth up himself to seek after God.' And (2.) Partly because these are most apt to harden us more. Foul sins scourge the conscience with remorse and shame, but these bring on insensibly slightness and hardness of heart ; and therefore Christ saith, publicans and harlots shall enter into the kingdom of God before pharisees that rested in a superficial righteousness, but neglected faith, love and judgment, Mat. xxi. 31. And (3.) Partly because omissions make way for commission of evil : Ps. xiv. 4, 'They that called not upon God eat up his people like bread.' They lie open to gross sins that do not keep the heart tender by a daily attendance upon God. If a man do not that which is good, he will soon do that which is evil, John ii. 13. Oh ! then, let us bewail our unprofitableness, that we do no more good, that we do so much neglect God, and no more edify our neighbour, so that God's best gifts lie idle upon our hands.

Fifthly, The first and main evil of sin was in the omission : Jer. ii. 13, 'My people have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters ;' James i. 14, 'Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.' First enticed from God, and then drawn away to sin, therefore the work of grace is to 'teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,' Titus ii. 12. By ungodliness is meant, not denying God, but neglecting God ; there our chief mischief began ; for when we do not look upon God as our chief good, then we seek happiness in the creature.

Use 1. To show that if the unprofitable servant be cast into hell, what will become of them that live in open sins, that bid defiance to God ?

2. To condemn the unprofitable lives of many; they live as if they had only their souls for salt to keep their bodies from stinking; cumber the ground, Luke xiii. 7; do not good in their relations, are neither comfortable to the bodies nor souls of others. Certainly how mean and low soever you be in the world, you may be useful. Dorcas made coats for the poor. Servants may adorn the gospel, Titus ii. 10.

3. If sins of omission be so dangerous, we may cry out with David, Ps. xix., 'Who can understand his errors?' The children of God offend in these kind of sins oftener than in the other kind. They are not guilty of drunkenness or uncleanness, but of omission of good duties, or slight performance of them. Paul complaineth, Rom. vii. 18, 19, 'For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not; for the good that I would, I do not.' And should not you complain likewise? A child is not counted dutiful because he doth not wrong and beat his father; he must also give him that reverence that is due to him. Alas! how many duties are required of us to God and men, the neglect of which we should humble ourselves before God for!

SERMON XVIII.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.—MAT. XXV. 31–33.

THIS latter paragraph I cannot call a parable, but a scheme and draught or a delineation of the last judgment, intermingled with many passages that are plainly parabolical; as that Christ setteth forth himself as a king sitting upon the throne of his glory, and as a shepherd dividing his flock; that he compareth the godly to sheep and the wicked to goats. Those allegations and dialogues between Christ and the righteous, Christ and the wicked, 'When saw we thee an hungry?' &c., have much of the nature of a parable in them. In these three verses we have described—

1. The appearance, or sitting down of the judge.

2. The presenting the parties to be judged. The former is in ver. 31, the latter in ver. 32, 33. In ver. 31 we have—

[1.] The person who shall be the judge, *the Son of man.*

[2.] The manner of his coming; it shall be august and glorious.

Where note—

(1.) His personal glory, *he shall come in his glory.*

(2.) His royal attendance, *and all the holy angels with him.*

(3.) His seat and throne, *then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.*

First, The person is designed by this character and appellation,