

SERMONS UPON MARK III. 5.

SERMON I.

And Jesus looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.—MARK iii. 5.

IN the first verse of this chapter we read that 'there was a man which had a withered hand,' who came to Jesus for relief on the sabbath-day. Here was a fair occasion offered to the pharisees to display their malice. The sabbath was of high esteem and veneration among the Jews, and therefore now they thought by this means to blast the repute of Christ among the people. In case he should heal on the sabbath-day, their noise and clamour against him might seem to be justified; therefore it is said, 'They watched him whether he would heal on the sabbath-day,' ver. 2. But Christ is not daunted; he goeth on with his work for all their prejudices; nay, to make the miracle more manifest, he biddeth him 'stand forth,' ver. 3. However, to satisfy the people, he disputeth with them; they themselves would do more to a beast than he was requested to do to the man with a withered hand: ver. 4, 'He saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath-day, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?' In Mat. xii. 10, it is said they propounded the question to him; and in the 11th verse, by way of answer, he maketh use of an argument from a beast fallen into a pit: 'He said unto them, What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out? But they held their peace.' They could reply nothing by way of answer and sufficient confutation, and they would reply nothing by way of approbation and consent. At their malicious silence Christ is both angered and grieved. There is an excellent temper and mixture in his affections. In Christ's anger there is more of compassion than of passion; he knew how to distinguish between the man and the sin, and to manifest his displeasure and grief at the same time. The cause of both is assigned in the text, 'for the hardness of their hearts,' ἐπὶ τῇ πωρώσει τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν. He was softened for their hardness.

The point which I mean to handle is the grievousness of the sin of hardness of heart. Christ was grieved with it in the pharisees, and there is not a greater cause of offence to his Spirit.

Doct. That hardness of heart is a grievous sin, very offensive and provoking to Jesus Christ.

I shall—(1.) Open the terms ; (2.) Show you the nature of this evil frame of heart ; (3.) The kinds of it ; (4.) The causes of it ; (5.) The heinousness of it ; (6.) Some observations concerning this spiritual malady.

I. For the terms by which it is expressed, they are two, 'Heart,' and 'Hardness.'

1. 'Heart.' This hardness is sometimes ascribed to the neck ; as Prov. xxix. 1, 'He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' And then it is a metaphor taken from refractory oxen, that will not endure the yoke ; and so it noteth disobedience. Sometimes to the face ; as Jer. iii. 5, 'They have made their faces harder than a rock ;' and so it noteth impudence ; they can no more blush than a rock or stone. But most usually it is ascribed to the heart, as in the text. So Ezek. iii. 7, 'The house of Israel will not hearken to thee, for they will not hearken to me ; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted ;' and so it noteth obstinacy. All go together, an hard heart, an hard neck, and an hard face. Men are first disobedient, then obstinate, then impudent. But it is the heart that we are to consider, which naturally, and in its first sense, signifieth a piece of flesh in the body, which is the chief seat and shop of life ; but morally and metaphorically it signifieth the soul : 1 Sam. xii. 20, 'Serve the Lord with all your heart ;' that is, with all your soul. Now in the soul there are many faculties—the mind, the conscience, the memory, the will and affections ; and they are all expressed by this term 'Heart.' The mind is called heart : Rom. i. 21, 'Their foolish heart was darkened ;' that is, their mind. The conscience : 1 Sam. xxiv. 5, 'David's heart smote him ;' that is, his conscience. The memory : Phil. i. 7, 'I have you in my heart ;' that is, I am mindful of you. But usually it signifieth the will and affections ; as Mat. xxii. 37, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' And this is the faculty in which this disease is seated. Blindness is incident to the mind, searedness and benumbedness to the conscience, slipperiness to the memory, deadness to the affections ; but hardness is incident to the will, that part of the soul by which we choose and refuse good or evil.

2. 'Hardness.' It is expressed by different terms in scripture ; sometimes by *παρώσις τῆς καρδίας*, as in the text, and Eph. iv. 18, which noteth a callous, brawny, insensible hardness, such as is in the labourer's hand or the traveller's heel ; sometimes by *σκληροκαρδία*, or *σκληρώτης τῆς καρδίας*, so it is a metaphor taken from dry bodies, when the parts are more condensed, and so more impenetrable. *Durities est qualitas, densas et bene compactas habens partes, difficulter cedens tactui.* It doth not easily yield to any impressions from without. So it is set forth by the hardness of the adamant : Zech. vii. 12, 'They made their hearts as an adamant stone.' They can no more be wrought upon to receive any impression of grace and reformation than the diamond or flint or hardest rock can be engraved or fashioned to any form by the tool of the artificer.

II. I must open the nature of it. The hardness of heart discovereth

itself by two properties : it is *κῆρ ἀναισθητόν καὶ ἀκίνητον*, an insensible heart, and an inflexible heart.

1. An insensible heart, as a brawny substance or callous piece of flesh, like the labourer's hand and traveller's heel. This the apostle intimateth, Eph. iv. 18, 19, 'Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart : who being past feeling,' &c. In one verse he chargeth them with hardness of heart, and in the first words of the next verse with loss of feeling. Feeling, of all senses, though it be not the most noble, yet it is the most necessary ; there is no life without it ; it is diffused throughout the whole body ; and in what member soever it is lost, there is no more intercourse of vital and animal spirits ; and where it is totally lost, there is no more life. There may be life when other senses are wanting ; a man may be deaf and yet live, blind and yet live ; but if he utterly lose his feeling, he cannot live. Such a dead senseless heart is the hard heart, as appeareth in the wicked by that great security, ease, and quiet which they naturally have, though lying under the guilt of many and grievous sins ; and though they be obnoxious to the wrath of God, yet they are never troubled nor affected with any sense of their condition ; they can sin freely in thought, foully in act, without any remorse and shame. *Ab assuetis non fit passio*. Men are not moved by such things as they are much used to. As they that live by the fall of great waters sleep quietly because they are accustomed to the noise, so men that are accustomed to sin can swear, and be drunk, and commit filthiness, or go on in some other trade of wickedness, and are never troubled. Mithridates through the custom of drinking poison made it so familiar to him that he drank it without danger. *Elementa non gravitant in suis locis*—Elements weigh not in their proper place. A fish in the water feeleth no weight ; sin is not burdensome to wicked men, it is in its own place. This insensibleness is the greater where men will not be awakened out of their lethargic fit by all the means which God useth to them, by the threatenings of his word, or the judgments of his providence. There is a method in God's dispensations ; he threateneth that he may not punish, and punisheth now that he may not punish for ever. Now the children of God are startled at the threatenings, and tremble when they see a storm in the clouds before it falleth ; as Josiah had a tender heart, and melted at the threatening, 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27. And they are said to 'tremble at the word,' Isa. lxvi. 2, and Ezra ix. 4. But wicked men think this is a vain scarecrow ; and though they are most obnoxious to the judgment and wrath of God, yet they have no sense and tender feeling of it ; therefore God goeth on to his second dispensation ; he punisheth now that he may not punish for ever. As Absalom set Joab's barley-field on fire that he might draw him to come and speak with him, so God seeketh to make men serious, to bring them to the throne of grace, and sue out their pardon, by many temporal judgments. But still wicked men start aside, and will not turn to him that smiteth them : Jer. v. 3, 'Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved ; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction.' As the anvil is smoothed into hardness by many blows and strokes, so are men more

insensible of their condition, and will not regard the meaning of God's providences. Well, then, a hard heart is insensible of what they have done against God, or what God hath or may do to them. And so far as we lose our sense and tenderness, so far is the heart hardened.

2. It is an inflexible heart; it is not easily bent to God's purpose; say he what he will, men are as light, as vain, as mindless of heavenly things, as basely wedded to the delights of the flesh as ever, and obstinately, and against all means to the contrary, refuse the counsel of God for their good. Though God hath the highest reasons on his side, and great variety of powerful and alluring motives to gain souls to his obedience, and these represented not only to the ear by his messengers, but to the heart by his Spirit, yet men are so addicted to their own wills and lusts, that they will not suffer themselves to be persuaded by him to accept of his offers and rich mercies in Christ; they will not obey the sweet directions of his word, nor regard the motions and strivings of his Spirit, to let their beloved lusts go, and comply with the will of God.

[1.] They are inflexible to the counsels of his word, where God interposeth in the way of the highest authority, straitly charging and commanding us under pain of his displeasure, and reasoneth with us in the most potent and strong way of argumentation, from the excellency of his commands, and their suitableness to us as we are reasonable creatures; from his great love in Christ, whom he hath given to die for us; from the danger if we refuse him, which is no less than everlasting torment; from the benefit and happiness of complying with his motions, which is no less than eternal and complete blessedness both for our bodies and souls; and all is bound upon us by a strict impartial day of accounts, when we are to answer for our neglects, or else to receive the reward of our diligence. But alas! the hard heart defeateth the end of this whole contrivance. Neither the awe of God's authority, nor the reasonableness of his commands, nor the wonderful love of Christ, nor the joys of heaven, nor the horrors of everlasting darkness, nor the strictness of the last day's account, will work man to a sense of his duty, or gain him to make serious preparation for his own happiness and everlasting salvation. Out of what rock was the heart of man hewn? What will work upon you if this doctrine, upon which God hath laid out all the riches of his wisdom and grace, will not work upon you? Hath God another Son to die for you? a better heaven to bestow upon you? or an hotter hell to scare you withal? Would you have the day of judgment more exact and severe? or greater obligations to all holiness and godliness of conversation than those already propounded? or more charms and persuasiveness added to the gospel? Oh, no! that cannot be. Infinite wisdom hath already stated these things. Or would you have God save you against your wills? or thrust these things upon you without your consent? Surely it is obstinacy, plain obstinacy and hardness of heart, that maketh you stand out against God: Ps. lviii. 4, 5, 'They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.' So Mat. xi. 17, 'We have piped unto you and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.' The sweetest strains of grace move not the obstinate sinner.

If an angel come from heaven, he cannot bring you better arguments, for the gospel is 'the wisdom of God,' 1 Cor. i. 24. If one came from the dead, he cannot present you with more powerful motives: Luke xvi. 31, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.' Oh! why will you not be persuaded? You do in effect say, Let God do or say what he will, he shall not have my heart. Well, then, this unteachableness and unpersuadableness is another property of hardness of heart; and slowness of heart and backwardness to God's work is a degree to it.

[2.] It is inflexible to the motions of God's Spirit. God doth not only invite sinners by the word, but knocketh at their hearts by the pressing motions and impulsions of his grace, and yet they do not open to him to give him entrance. How often have we eluded the importunity of many warm convictions, and baffled many pangs and checks of conscience! Acts vii. 51, 'Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.' Their ears are said to be uncircumcised, as they do resist the counsels of the word; and their hearts, as they do resist the motions of the Spirit, who enforceth truths with a clearer light and conviction upon their hearts. There are many importunate motions and convictions which they slight and oppose. An hard heart goeth to hell with violence; the word standeth in the way, and the Spirit standeth in the way; but still they break through, and so their condemnation is more just; as the prophet said, Isa. vii. 13, 'Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but ye will weary my God also?' Wicked men do not only grieve God's ministers and messengers, but his Spirit, in refusing to accept his gracious offers. The crime would be less if the counsel of the messengers were not enforced by the motions and inspirations of the Holy Ghost. God is not behindhand with a sinner. If the words of men offer occasion of suspicion and prejudice, yet these inward checks and excitements in their own bosoms to be more serious and diligent carry their own evidence with them; and upon such a close application we should be ashamed to give God the denial. But they resist all inward and outward means of reformation; they resist the Spirit as well as despise the minister. But can the Spirit be resisted? Certainly no, when he worketh according to an eternal purpose of grace; for God never made a creature too hard for himself. Yea, it is said even of wicked men, Acts vi. 10, 'They were not able to resist the wisdom and Spirit by which he spake.' The meaning is, they could not hinder his workings, though they thwarted his motions; the light was so clear that they could not hinder the shining of it, nor contradict it, but out of obstinate malice. But how are they said to resist the Holy Ghost? We had need to vindicate the place, because it is usually urged against the efficacy of divine grace. The operation of the Spirit is not irresistible, say they, for the Jews did always resist it. We may grant the whole. Wicked men of an hard heart may resist the common operations of the Spirit, his light and his motions, but the opposition of the elect is overpowered by the efficacy of grace. There is a spirit of resistance in us, but the stronger operation of the Holy Ghost maketh it to give place; we may kick against the pricks till the soul be awakened, and then God hath us at his own beck. Though the grace of conversion be not

common to elect and reprobate, yet the grace that tendeth to conversion is common, and this may be resisted. God may knock at the heart that is never opened to him; they may have excitements, but alas! they are as the rock or adamant to the tool. There is no impression left upon them. *Object.* But if God will use a fainter operation, why are they to blame? I answer—God is not bound, but they are bound to prepare their hearts to receive his motions; let them prove God a debtor, and they may excuse themselves for their disobedience.

III. The kinds of hardness. These will be known by these distinctions—

1. The first distinction is, that hardness of heart is either—(1.) Natural; or (2.) Voluntary and acquired; or (3.) Penal and judicial.

[1.] Natural hardness of heart is a part of inbred corruption, which remaineth with us till God take it away by grace: Ezek. xi. 19, 'I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and I will give them an heart of flesh.' The stone in the heart is a disease that all Adam's posterity are subject unto; it runs in the blood. It is not incident to Nabals only, or such as he was, men of a churlish and crabbed temper. No; all men are sick, and most men die of this disease. We brought with us into the world a strong bent to carnal things, and by consequence an averseness from God; and it is a mighty work of grace if we do not carry it with us out of the world. When Nabal died, his heart was as a stone, and so might yours.

[2.] Acquired and voluntary, when men do wittingly and willingly reject the counsel of God, and strengthen themselves in their natural disobedience and obstinacy; or being invited to faith and repentance by God, out of love to sin resist God's call, and put away the word from them, and refuse to obey: Ps. xcv. 8, 'Harden not your hearts.' It is our own act. And 2 Kings xvii. 14, 'They would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers.' This increaseth our natural hardness, and maketh it grow more and more, till it be stiffened and settled in an aversion to God; as a crooked stick or twig by growing becometh more difficult to be made straight. By every act of sin we lessen our awe of God; and having ventured once, grow more bold to sin a second time. Men when they first put forth to sea are very fearful, but afterwards laugh at storms; so when a man cometh off safe from sin, he will venture again. By every act of disobedience our incapacity to receive grace is increased, and our inclination to carnal vanities is strengthened; by frequent acts we are confirmed in the habit. But nothing increaseth this voluntary hardness so much as refusing grace; as no water is so apt to freeze as that that hath been once heated. God is provoked when we refuse his grace upon a closer application, and the heart is encouraged to continue in sin. So that by their carelessness and delay men are hardening by degrees. Every call defeated addeth one degree of hardness more; and so God is more apt to desert us and forsake us.

[3.] Penal and judicial hardness. This adds to voluntary hardness, as voluntary hardness implies something above natural. Man, as naturally hardened, doth not turn to God; as judicially hardened, he cannot. There is a great impossibility he should. This is God's act; he hardeneth as a just judge, not by infusing evil, but withdrawing

grace. In scripture God is said to harden two ways—(1.) By leaving some in their natural hardness: Rom. ix. 18, 'Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will, he hardeneth.' So it is an act of dominion; he passeth them by. He may do it justly; he is Lord of his own grace, and is not bound to save sinners. This is not an act of justice, but dominion. God doth not act as a judge, but as a Lord; it is matter of favour to soften, not right. (2.) By giving up others to a reprobate sense, which is a penal and judiciary act: Acts xxviii. 26, 27, 'Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed,' &c. There is consideration had of man's sin and foregoing provocations. God punisheth them by their own sin. Men first harden themselves; they go before *peccando*, by sinning; then God cometh after *judicando*, by inflicting this judgment of hardness of heart on them. They harden themselves, and God leaveth them under their hardness. As Jeroboam stretcheth out his arm against the prophet and then God layeth a judgment upon him, that he could not pull it in again to him, 1 Kings xiii. 4, so men hardening themselves, God layeth this judgment upon them, that they shall not return to any softness.

2. The next distinction is, that hardness of heart is either total or partial. Some are in the state of hardness, others complain of it as their present frame. There is a difference between hardness of heart and an hard heart. Some hardness of heart is in God's children: Mark vi. 52, 'They considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened;' and Mark xvi. 14, 'He upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart.' Original hardness of heart is not altogether taken away by grace. Much of the heart of stone, or old averseness from God and holy things, remaineth with God's children; but yet they are not wholly insensible, and wholly inflexible to God's purpose; their hearts are bent to his testimonies, though ever and anon they are apt to fall back to the old bias. Therefore David prayeth, Ps. cxix. 36, 'Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.' The children of God do often complain of deadness and unaptness for holy things; yet there is not in them that obstinacy, impenitency, and hardness of heart, that is in the wicked: Rom. ii. 5, 'But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath.' In the one it is bemoaned, in the other not; in the one it ariseth from negligence and drowsiness, in the other from flat disobedience and enmity to God. When God's children give too free a contentment and license to the flesh, they have not that sense, that liveliness in prayer, that readiness to obey, that delight in the word, as at other times; but the other are contemptuous and scornful, and do not set their hearts this way, to please God or enjoy his favour. In the wicked there is a careless security, no sense of their eternal condition; they banish it out of their thoughts: Amos vi. 3, 'Ye put far away the evil day.' If it intrude upon them, they look upon it as a melancholy interruption; they seek to put off what they do not put away; yea, there is a plain reluctancy and opposition to good things, and a contempt of God's messages. But in the other

there may be some hanging off from God, for original sin is not quite done away, especially under a distemper occasioned by carnal liberty : Luke xxi. 34, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life ; and so that day come upon you unawares.' A christian is a compound creature ; he hath hardness as well as softness. When their hardness prevaieth, for the present they mourn less for sin, and do not tremble at the word, and are not affected with providences, slight the warnings and motions of the Holy Spirit, are more dead in duty, find not alike savour in the promises, and duties seem more irksome to them. An hard heart maketh their work seem hard and tedious.

3. The next distinction is, that hardness of heart is either felt or unfelt.

[1.] Felt, as by men under a preparative work, and in God's children for hardness there may be in them ; yea, it is their condition as long as they are in the world. Grief for hardness is a good sign that there are some tender parts left. An heart judicially hardened can never feel that hardness, nor grieve for it ; but the children of God fear it as the greatest evil, and complain of it as the greatest burden, and so accordingly strive against it. Thus Ephraim bemoaned himself, and his obstinacy and inflexibleness : Jer. xxxi. 18, 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus : Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke : turn thou me, and I shall be turned ; for thou art the Lord my God.' There is hope of cure when they are sensible of the disease : they fear it in themselves and others as the greatest evil : Heb. iii. 12, 13, 'Take heed, brethren lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God : but exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' Of all judgments, the judgment of the hard heart is worst. They complain of it as the greatest burden : Isa. lxiii. 17, 'O Lord why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear ? They find much deadness and dulness of spirit ; they are not affected with God's presence in duties, nor with his providences in the world. This is their complaint and burden, Lord I have a stiff neck, that will not easily be brought under the strict duties of religion, to meditate and to pray in private ; I have a proud stubborn heart, too hard for me to take down. Thus do they complain of these things, and strive against it. As a man that hath a stone in the bladder, he useth good means to soften it, and is careful of his diet, so are God's children sensible, and therefore fearful and careful, often bemoaning themselves.

[2.] Unfelt ; so it is in wicked men, who never consider the frame of their hearts, or bemoan themselves because of spiritual evils. The heart of stone is not sensible of itself ; and so God's children for a while may be under great desertions and the guilt of heinous sins, and be insensible ; after gross falls they may lie in hardness for a while, till God rouse them up again. Great falls are like a blow upon the head, that stuns us and amazes us for a while, and it is some good while ere we recover again. David's conscience was not presently awakened. Spiritual lethargies are long fits. David lay ten months from the con-

ception to the birth of his child, and yet all this while did formally use God's ordinances and public service. Nathan comes to him after the child was born : 2 Sam. xii. 14, 'The child that is born unto thee shall surely die.' And he never relented till Nathan came to him, as appeareth by the title of the 51st psalm, 'A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone into Bathsheba.' All this while grace was not dead, but in a deep sleep. The least sin maketh way for hardness of heart, much more sins against conscience ; there is a more long sequestration then. God will not let you enjoy the comforts and effectual presence of his spirit. These blows and wounds will leave you for dead for a long while.

SERMON II.

And Jesus looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.—MARK iii. 5.

IV. THE causes of hardness of heart.

1. Ignorance. The blind mind and the hard heart always go together : John xii. 40, 'He hath blinded their minds, and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts.' Men are first unteachable, then unpliant. Obstinacy begetteth at sottishness of conceit. He that knoweth not what he ought to do careth not much what he doth. The children of God never feel hardness in their hearts but when the light in their minds is unactive or obscured ; there is a kind of darkness for that time. We see that the most carnal wretches, when they come to die, are sensible ; when the mind is cleared from the fogs of lust, and conscience is awakened, then they feel a great weight of sin upon them. Light always begets tenderness, as in a clear vessel the dregs do soon appear. Well, then, either they are ignorant, or have but a naked theory, not the lively light of the Spirit ; and hence it is that their hearts are hardened.

2. Unbelief ; for it is faith that maketh all truths active and lively. The great motives and arguments of religion are mainly fetched from things to come. Now it is not enough to know the things of the world to come, but there must be an hearty assent to them, as if we did see them before our eyes. Things that are at a distance are as nothing to us, as the stars appear as so many spangles, they lose much of their greatness. Men sin, and no evil cometh of it, therefore they grow bold and senseless in sin : Eccles. viii. 11, 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.' They grow remiss and slack in their duty. The reward is not by and by : Mal. iii. 14, 'Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts ?' We are for a present good. Now, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. xi. 1. It maketh

things present as if we did see them with our eyes, as if the judgment-seat were set and the books were opened. Those that hardened their hearts did not believe what God said was true, Heb. iii. 7-18. If men did believe there were an heaven, and hell, and judgment to come, they would not lie in their sins, they could not be unpliant to God's motions. All disrespect of promises and threatenings cometh from unbelief. Christ did chide his disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart, Mark xvi. 14. What is the reason that though we preach the law and the judgment of God so much to you, and beseech you to come in and receive Christ, and you shall be saved, and this time after time, and day after day, and yet the word hath no effect upon you, you are as ignorant and careless as ever? The reason is you do not believe. Certainly the word would work otherwise than it doth if you did believe it. If one should tell a man that such an earthly potentate, if he would but come to him and visit him, would raise him to great honour, it would be the first thing he would do. Truly so, if you did believe that coming to Christ were the only way to happiness, you would mind it more seriously than you do. Again, if you did believe that the word of God is true, that God is a just God; if the drunkard did believe that drunkards should be damned; or the adulterer did believe that no adulterer shall inherit the kingdom of God; or if the vain person or the gamester did believe that they must give an account of their misspent time, and idle words, and vain communication, they would not sport themselves in their sins as they do. If men did believe that God calleth when and whom he listeth, they would not defer their repentance and put off the motions of the Spirit, but would strike while the iron is hot, and let out the sails when the wind bloweth. But men do not believe, and therefore go on in their sins as they do. Tell men of earthly things, of a commodity which, if they would but buy, it would yield an hundred for one, surely they would not neglect the market. We press men to renounce but a little ease and carnal pleasures, and to use diligence to get Christ into their hearts, and they shall have a hundred for one; but men want faith, therefore Christ lieth by as a refuse commodity. There is nothing breedeth hardness of heart so much as unbelief of what God can and will do.

3. Custom in sinning. As an highway is trodden hard by long travelling in it, so the heart by long custom groweth more obstinate every day. In sin there is not only a fault, guilt, but a blot, a stronger inclination to the practice of the same sin again; as a brand that has been once in the fire is more apt to burn again. Every new oath is as oil to the tongue, to make it more glib and fleet in the repetition of that oath or vain speech. There is a natural tenderness in men whilst young, at least, a lesser degree of hardness, which will get strength by use and age if not in time cured: Jer. xiii. 23, 'How can ye do good that are accustomed to do evil?' Water when it first freezeth will not bear the weight of a pin, but afterwards by continual freezing it cometh to bear a cart-load.

4. Hypocrisy. Take it for dissembling, whereby we deceive others; or formality, whereby we deceive ourselves. For dissembling: the pharisees were a dissembling generation, and they are the famous instances of hardness of heart in the first gospel days. Hypocrisy is a

constant lie, and every lie is a sin against light. When men take a religion out of design, their pretences condemn them. Men sin, and are secured against the stroke of the word and checks of conscience by their fame and plausible appearance. Then for formal performing of good duties: Prov. vii. 14, 'I have peace-offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows.' I do this and that, I read so many chapters a day, and keep to my church. Men think they have done enough though they have done never so little. Hardness of heart is often occasioned by the ordinances. Now how do ordinances harden? They may harden partly as they irritate corruption, but chiefly as they are trusted in. Duties soundly done humble men, as new wine rendeth and breaketh old bottles all to pieces. But when formal duties are used as a sleepy sop to stop the mouth of conscience, the heart is insensibly hardened. Every man must have a religion to lean to. Conscience, like the stomach when it hath no solid food, draweth wind.

5. Pride and stubbornness against God. Men scorn to be controlled: Exod. v. 2, 'And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go;' Neh. ix. 29, 'They dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear;' Jer. xiii. 15, 'Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken.' Men scorn to submit to ordinances, to be checked by God's messengers, and say, What have we to do with them? In this light of christianity the contempt is cast upon the messenger, though indeed the heart riseth against the authority of God himself. One great cure of hardness of heart is seriously to meditate on God's power: Deut. x. 16, 17, 'Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked; for the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward.' Do you know what God is? Will you contend with him? You will fail in the enterprise; you cannot be hard-hearted if you would, in the issue of the combat. Pride is the root of all sin. What is the reason men dare sin? They think they shall carry it out well enough for all God, and so suffer their lusts to perk above the commandment.

6. The deceitfulness of sin: Heb. iii. 15. 'Lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' Now, how doth sin deceive us, and so harden the heart?

[1.] By general invectives. We all cry out of sin, and complain of sin, and yet all this while regard it in our hearts. We make sin a notion, and so defy it in the general, when in particulars we love it all the while; as many ignorant people defy the devil but hold the crown upon his head, for he is the ruler of the darkness of this world. The devil careth not for ill words so he can keep possession of the heart. We make sin the common packhorse to bear all our burdens. Men content themselves with empty declamations or forms of satire and invective, yet the heart liketh it well enough, and so is insensibly hardened; they are not serious and particular. Men look upon matters of religion as abstracted ideas and matters of fancy. Oh! take heed of this.

[2.] By delaying: Acts xxiv. 25, 'Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.' Christian, it is but a deceit; take heed thy heart be not hardened by it. What reason hast thou to presume of that which God can only give? If Cæsar had read the letters overnight to prevent the conspiracy, he had been safe. What security have you, either of time or grace, but your own presumptions? and he that is security to himself is a fool. It is true all may be redressed by repentance, but this is not in thy power, and thy hardness by delaying increaseth every day.

[3.] It cometh lapped up in carnal baits of profit and pleasure, to gratify our lusts and interests. Sin pretends great advantage; but be not deceived, it will harden thy heart, and destroy thee; it cannot profit thee.

[4.] It hath many colours wherewith to beguile a man. It presents itself in another dress than its own; and therefore we have need to have our eyes about us: Prov. xxviii. 14, 'Happy is the man that feareth always: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.' Many sins lie secret, unrepented of, and so the heart is hardened.

[5.] It will increase upon thee; it groweth to a custom by degrees; it is of a bewitching nature, and soaketh into a man insensibly, from thought to consent, then to action, then to reiteration, then to custom. First men excuse sin, then justify it, then glory in it, and in time they grow senseless and confirmed in a habit of sin, and are loath to quit it. At first temptations seemed horrible; the first committing of sin much perplexed the soul; but in time it is not so burdensome, yea, it is become pleasing and delightful. Be not deceived and hardened by saying, It is a little one, and my soul shall live; unless we take it betimes, as Peter went out immediately and wept bitterly, it cannot easily be subdued. Sampson knew that Delilah had purposed to betray him into the Philistines' hands, and yet he could not leave her. Though sin cost men temporal and eternal life, yet they cannot give it over.

[6.] That God will be merciful; this is another thing whereby we are deceived, a presumption of impunity: Ps. l. 21, 'These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.' So Deut. xxix. 19, 20, 'And it came to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst.' Be not deceived; mark what follows: 'The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.' Take heed of the deceitfulness of sin. These are the causes of hardness of heart.

V. The heinousness of it.

1. It is a contending with God, *θεομαχία*, a fighting with God. The hard heart is the greatest enemy God hath on this side hell. That there is a contest between God and a hard heart who shall have the better, the instance of Pharaoh sheweth, God sendeth a message to him, and meeteth with a repulse. His message to Pharaoh was, Exod. v. 1, 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go.' And

this proud creature hath the boldness to deny him: ver. 2, 'And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.' And he standeth it out after many warnings and foregoing judgments. And he doth not stand alone, but hath more fellows in the world: Neh. ix. 29, 'They dealt proudly, and hearkened not to thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear.' Every command of God, every offer of grace, is a message from God: 'To you is the word of this salvation sent,' Acts xiii. 26; and it should be respected with as much reverence as if an angel himself were the messenger. Only here is the difference; God saith to Pharaoh, 'Let my people go;' to us he saith, 'Let sin go.' It is pity he should have the repulse. Sin will be as bad an inmate to the soul as the Israelites were a snare to Egypt; they were fain to thrust them out at length, and were glad they could be so rid of them. I say, this is the contest between God and his creatures, whether sin shall go or tarry, whether Christ shall be accepted or no? He sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh; and he hath sent prophets, apostles, pastors, and teachers to us. Let idols, images, and false worship go; swearing, sabbath-breaking, adultery, murder, disobedience to parents, lying, covetousness, let it all go; there should not be a hoof left. This is God's message. Now, if you will try it out, you shall see 'whose word shall stand, God's or yours?' Jer. xlv. 28; his threatenings, or your vain and delusive imaginations? If you put it to the trial, you have more boldness than an angel: Jude 9, 'Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil (he disputed about the body of Moses), durst not bring against him a railing accusation.' An angel durst not use one passionate word, and will you dare to set up other gods, to profane the sabbath, to swear, lie, or be drunk, and to say, We will not let these things go, let God say or do what he will to the contrary? The contest on God's part is managed for a long time in a mild condescending way. He beseecheth his own creatures: Jer. xiii. 15, 16, 'Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken: give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.' Be not obstinate; it is better that you should take down the stoutness of your hearts than that I should pull it down. Let me have the glory of this conquest voluntarily; I shall carry it at length. You dream of happiness and pleasure; alas! you cannot enjoy these vain delights long. Come, leave them, and I will make you as happy as heart can wish, but if not, take that that followeth; you will stumble into the dungeon of hell, and then be as miserable as almightiness can make you: Job ix. 4, 'He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; whoever hardened himself against God and prospered?' You will never get the day of God; if you contend with him, there is nothing to be expected but blows. You may indeed overcome him, but it is not by resisting, but stooping; a tender heart overcometh him: Jer. xxxi. 20, 'Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him,

saith the Lord;’ and Isa. lvii. 18, ‘I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts to him, and to his mourners.’ But an hard heart is no match for God; it is ever foiled in the enterprise: if they yield not to his mercy, they are consumed by his wrath. Pharaoh would contend with God, but found his maker too hard for him at last; so Julian the apostate. Ezek. xxii. 14, ‘Can thy heart endure, or can thy hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it;’ and 1 Cor. x. 22, ‘Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?’ It is a foolish contest; it ever endeth with our destruction.

2. It is in itself the sorest of all judgments. When other means are urged in vain, God giveth them up to hardness of heart; it is one of the chains of darkness, in which captive souls are held unto eternal judgment. A stormy conscience, that lieth under the power of perplexing despairing fears, is not so bad as an hard heart. They are both chains of darkness, despair, and obstinacy, as in the devils; but in men, despair may make way for repentance. God hath them in the briers; many are brought to heaven by the gates of hell. God hath begun with them, but left these. Again, it will end in despair. The heart that is not sensible now will then be sensible enough. We read of ‘the worm that never dieth, and the fire that shall never be quenched,’ Mark ix. 44. In hell men will remember how every sabbath God did stretch out the arms of his mercy to embrace them, and they would not; how Christ offered a plaster of his own heart’s blood to cure them, but they refused it, and made light of it; how the Holy Ghost put many good motions into their hearts, but they rejected these thoughts, and would not be interrupted in their ease and false peace. Oh! the deep wounds and stings these thoughts will occasion when it is too late!

3. It never goeth alone, but bringeth other judgments along with it. Pharaoh had plague upon plague: Zech. vii. 12, ‘They made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his Spirit, by the former prophets; therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts;’ more than ordinary displeasure. So Prov. xxix. 1, ‘He that, being often reprov’d, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.’ They shall be destroyed, not afflicted only, and that without remedy; there shall be none to help. And Rom. ii. 5, ‘After thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.’ God will harden his heart against you, shut up his bowels against you in your greatest straits; when his patience is quite spent, God will retaliate: Zech. vii. 12, 13, ‘They made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, &c. Therefore it is come to pass, that, as he cried and they would not hear, so they cried and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts.’ There is a time when the stoutest-hearted sinner, who careth least for God, shall stand in need of his help, and would give the whole world for one favourable look from God. But, oh, no! not a glimpse, not the least answer. God’s children meet with sad suspensions sometimes: Cant. v. 6, ‘I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.’ He seemeth

not to hear their prayers when they are dead to his counsels ; he will make them sensible of their unkind, ungracious treating of him.

4. It is the great hindrance in the spiritual life ; it depriveth you of grace. The Spirit of God will not animate a stony heart ; a body of flesh is only fit to be animated with a living soul ; so the heart of flesh, or tender heart, by the Spirit of God : Ezek. xi. 19, 20, ‘ I will give them one heart, and I will put a new Spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances, and do them ; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.’ So Isa. lvii. 15, ‘ Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’ There is God present with his graces. God hath two places of special residence—the highest heaven, and the humblest heart. In the one is the presence of his glory, in the other of his grace. When the spirit is humbled and softened, it is a fit pillow for God to rest on ; the hard heart hindereth us in duty, it is an hard heart that maketh our work hard. If once the will were gained, all things would be easy in religion : Rom. viii. 7, ‘ The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ It is not subject to God, but averse from him.

VI. The observations concerning this spiritual malady.

1. With spiritual hardness of heart there may be a natural and sinful tenderness. Some men have a natural softness and sweetness of spirit as to commerce with men, yea, rather a faulty easiness, yet they are very hard-hearted as to God ; as Zedekiah : Jer. xxxviii. 5, ‘ The king is not he that can do anything against you.’ He was easily drawn by company and evil counsel. Usually it is so ; an hard heart is like wax to the devil, but as a stone to God, hardened against goodness, but exorable and easy to be entreated by sin and Satan. If the devil do but whist, they find an irresistible power in his temptations. If carnal men do but hold up the finger, it is a strong cord to draw them to excess. The looks and speeches of the harlot are enough to cause them to follow, though it be like an ox to the slaughter : Prov. vii. 21, 22, ‘ With much fair speech she caused him to yield ; with the flattering of her lips she forced him : he goeth after her straightway as an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks.’ God may plead and tell us of grace and glory, but we mind it not. A diamond is not wrought upon but by its own dust. On the contrary, men may have a stout heart in dangers that are very yielding and trembling in point of sins : Prov. xxviii. 14, ‘ Happy is the man that feareth always ; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.’ David could encounter lions, bears, and giants, yet in what a weeping humble posture is he when he hath to do with God ! It is good to be a coward in sin, puling and weak-hearted as to any contest with God.

2. Small sins harden as well as great sins ; it is hard to say which most. It is confessed for the present little sins do not deaden and harden the heart so much as great ; as a prick of a pin maketh a man start, but an heavy blow stunneth him, and leaveth him dead for a while. David, when he cut off the lap of Saul’s garment, and had some revengeful

intention against his soveriegn, he quickly perceived his error: 'His heart smote him,' 1 Sam. xxiv. 5. But when he committed the foul sin of adultery, he lay insensible for a long space of time. But on the other side, little sins do by degrees harden. Great sins are apparent and liable to the judgment of conscience, but we neglect small sins, and so a custom groweth upon us, and we are insensibly hardened by our carelessness and constant neglect of our souls. A surfeit or violent distemper maketh us run to the physician, but when a disease groweth upon us by degrees, it proveth mortal ere we regard it; therefore we should make conscience of daily failings: Heb. iii. 13, 'Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' Great falls, as they astonish us for the present, so they awaken conscience afterwards, and so we regard that and other sins; as when a great sound hath awakened us out of a deep sleep, we easily hear lesser sounds; but men slide into a carnal frame of heart unawares. *Qui nunquam delirat, semper erit fatuus.* We would never grow wise but for some notable acts of folly. Chrysostom saith that we should be more watchful of small sins than of great. Nature abhorreth these, but the other slide into us. A little leak unespied drowneth the ship as well as a great breach. If we would look more to small things, so many great mischiefs would not ensue.

3. Sins of omission harden as well as sins of commission, yea, sometimes more; a neglect of duties as well as the practice of gross sins; because they use not the means whereby the heart may be kept soft and in a due remembrance of God and their duty to him. An instrument never so well in tune, if it lie by, it soon groweth out of kilter. In every sin of commission there is a sin of omission, but not the contrary. A man may be civilly harmless, inoffensive, and yet have a very hard heart, if he hold no communion with God, and neglect the means whereby the heart may be kept tender. The neglect of good duties is a more general means of destruction than the commission of evil. Men are estranged from God by the neglect of the word and prayer: Ps. xiv. 4, 'They call not upon the Lord;' attend not upon the means of grace with that life and seriousness they ought to do.

4. None are so confident of the goodness of their hearts as those that have an hard heart; for the more any spiritual disease increaseth upon us, the less it is felt. There is hope, whilst there is some complaining of sin, that there is some tenderness left. The hardest heart must needs be the most confident, because they use no recollection and reflection upon themselves: Jer. viii. 6, 'No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?' What am I, what have I done? Yea, they slight their danger, take up every vain pretence and allegation to maintain their carnal peace and quiet: Deut. xxix. 19, 'And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: the Lord will not spare him,' &c. Broken-hearted christians are sensible of the holiness of God, and what an hard matter it is to hold communion with him, and observe their own weakness and unworthiness; and therefore they complain of the badness of their hearts, that there is no greater bent towards God, and are always suspicious of their spiritual condition.

5. Hardness of heart is most apt to creep upon us in times of ease and prosperity. Solomon saith, Prov. i. 32, 'The prosperity of fools shall destroy them;' and Rom. ii. 4, 5, 'Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? but after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath.' Usually in the times of God's goodness and patience, men are besotted with the pleasures of the flesh, and then lose their feeling. Nothing bringeth a brawn upon the heart so much as sensuality and an inordinate use of the creatures; it taketh away the heart; and usually in a prosperous condition men grow sensual and careless. Pharaoh himself, when under the rod, could speak as good words as another; but when he was well at ease, then his hardness returned upon him; as metal in the furnace is very yielding and melting, capable of any impression, but out of the furnace it returneth to its wonted firmness and consistency. The greatest plague was upon his heart when he wanted other plagues. Men do well in their wickedness, enjoy themselves with comfort, and then fear nothing. We see in the brute creatures, when they are in good plight, they grow more fierce; so doth man that aboundeth in ease and pleasure; his worldly happiness maketh the heart gross and senseless. We had need to take heed of an hard heart at all times, but especially when we are like to be corrupted with ease and pleasure. A sensual heart will be senseless.

6. Hardness of heart is a grievous sin at all times, but then most sinful when most unseasonable; for time is an aggravating circumstance in all things, so in this. Now when is it unseasonable? In times of judgment and times of gospel grace.

[1.] In times of judgment: 2 Chron. xxviii. 22, 'In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz.' There is a brand set on him. Certainly the times we live in are extraordinary times. We have seen many changes and great effects of God's anger for sin; we have now many spiritual judgments upon us, error and blasphemy, great divisions and breaches among God's people, and scandals of them that profess the gospel. An hard heart now is most unsuitable; it is like a garland of rosebuds in a day of mourning. Clearly upon some the strokes of God's providence have lighted very sore; if they shall add hardness of heart to their other plagues, who will pity them? When all the corrections of an angry God cannot draw any sensible and serious thoughts from them, how sad is this! I tell you, christians, it looketh like hell to continue sinning under suffering, and to be obstinate against God and the counsels of his grace for your salvation; it speaketh much of a spiritual plague added to temporal judgments. If we did persuade you to a party only, it were more excusable; but when we press you to come to Christ, and you still remain obstinate and hard-hearted, this is sad. If the ministry were only used as a state engine to engage you in such a faction and design, you might have something to plead for yourselves. Pardon me for dealing thus freely with you; we are debtors to all, Rom. i. 14. Would you be troubled if the base should rise against the honourable? It were a judgment certainly; but what are you to

God? Poor base worms! will you contend with your maker? You would complain of it as an heavy burden, and strange inversion of all states and conditions, if men of mean and low fortunes should be at the top, and have power and domination over the ancient gentry and nobility of the land. Be it so; but I would have you to consider in the mean time what an horrible presumption it is, and how God may take it, that you stout it out against the fear of God. Alas! there is a greater distance between you and him than between you and your fellow-creatures. For you to contest it with God, to swagger it and outbrave his ordinances, to contend with his Spirit! how may God complain of this, if it be so grievous to you to be outbraved by your fellow-creatures!

[2.] Times of light and great gospel grace. An hard heart in gospel days is the very reproach of ordinances. Many think the ministry and ordinances useless things. Why? Because there is so little success. You make them useless, and then there will not want those that decry them apace: 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2, 'We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain; for he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.' An hard heart should be a thing now quite out of fashion. In a time of ignorance, or a time of restraint of preaching, when visions are not open, or under a dead sleepy ministry, God might dispense with what he will not under a clear discovery of his will. But now, when the doctrine of the gospel is so clearly opened, and Christ so freely tendered, now to be estranged from the fear of God is as unsuitable as if we should revert to the fashions of barbarism, or those kind of clothes or dresses which our ancestors wore before they were reduced to this pitch of civility whereunto we are now arrived. You would laugh at garments of an antique fashion, and if the gallants of the age should put on the dress of Adam, or be clothed with skins newly taken from the beasts offered in sacrifice; a blind mind and a sottish obstinate heart is more uncomely in the eye of God. Will you be strangers in Israel, and lose the blessings of the times by refusing the stricter ways of God?

7. Hardness of heart groweth and increaseth on us more and more, if we let it alone: Zech. vii. 11, 12, 'But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear; yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets.' There are so many degrees mentioned; first they grow slight and careless, and do not care to hear what you say; then they refuse to obey what they have heard; then they grow sermon-proof; they can hear, and have no benefit by it. As long as the word doth any way affect a sinner, there is some hope; but within a while conscience smiteth not, and men have gotten the victory over their fears and scruples; and thus they go on from natural to voluntary, and from voluntary to judicial hardness of heart, and so are a ready prey for the devil.

8. Dilatory excuses are the last refuge of an hard heart. When they can no longer withstand a conviction, they adjourn and put off

the compliance with God's will, and so elude the importunity of the present conviction. Felix his heart boggled: Acts xxiv. 25, and as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and said, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.' Mind the present season, when God is affording opportunities of getting grace: Heb. iii. 7, 8, 'To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts;' Ps. cxix. 60, 'I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.' Zaccheus, Luke xix. 6, 'He made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.' Peter and Andrew, Mark iv. 20, 'They straightway left their nets and followed him: Paul, Gal. i. 16, 'Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.' If God hath given you any will and inclination for the present, it is an advantage. Sin, the longer it continueth, the stronger it groweth. He that doth not go over at the fountain-head will not be able to go over when the stream groweth broader; and the farther he goes downward, the broader still he findeth it. Every day's impenitency bringeth on a new degree of hardness. Would a man that is to drink that which to his knowledge is poisoned put the more into his cup, and then take it off, out of a presumption that at length he shall find an antidote? Alas! thou mayest be poisoned and dead before the antidote comes.

SERMON III.

And Jesus looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.—MARK iii. 5.

USE 1. Of trial. Is this your state? Take the two properties to judge by—insensibleness and inflexibleness.

First, A hard heart is insensible; insensible of providences, of the word, and of the state of the soul.

1. Insensible of providences.

[1.] Of mercies: either of the author of mercies; they never look up to the God of their mercies: Hosea ii. 8, 'She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold;' as swine, that feed upon the acorns, but never look up to the tree from whence they fall: Cant. iv. 1, 'Behold thou art fair, my love; behold thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes.' As doves peck, and look upwards. It is a sign of a tender heart to see God in every mercy. A drowsy and inattentive soul never heedeth it, is wholly swallowed up in present enjoyments, and looketh no further. It is our privilege above the beasts to know the first cause; other creatures live upon God, but they are not capable of knowing God; they glorify God in their kind, but we may know him. Idolatry and sottishness had never crept into the world if men had owned the first cause; or of the end of mercies, which is to draw in our hearts to God: therefore they are called cords of a

man: Hosea xi. 4, 'I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love;' Esther vi. 3, 'What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this?' 2 Sam. vii. 2, 'Then the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.' When the heart is urging to duty upon this score, God hath been good to me, he hath given me food and raiment; what have I done for God? Now the heart is hard when we are not sensible of his daily providence and gracious supplies in this kind: 2 Sam. xii. 7-9, 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?' David had lost his awe of God, because he had not a thankful sense of the mercies of God.

[2.] Of corrective providences. The body is a tender part with wicked men; when they are straitened for bodily conveniences, they will complain; yet the hard heart is still insensible of judgments. They are insensible of the author or deserving cause; they do not look upward nor inward; and though doctrinally right in these things, yet they do not seriously consider it, and recall it to mind. Opinion is one thing, and consideration is another. Wicked men may take up good opinions, but they do not consider the force and consequence of them.

(1.) They do not see the hand of God in them: Isa. xxvi. 11, 'Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see.' They look on these things but as a chance: 1 Sam. vi. 9, 'And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coasts to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil; but if not, then we shall know that it was not his hand that smote us, it was a chance that happened to us.' If men own God's hand, they should take up the matter with him; but they own it doctrinally, though not practically. A godly man hath explicit thoughts of God. Job doth not say, 'The Sabeans and the Chaldeans, but, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away,' Job i. 21. They do not complain, when they are crossed, of chance, but the Lord is angry; and when they are stricken, they consult with him, and humble themselves before him. Wicked men are sensible of the smart of the rod, but not of the hand that holds it.

(2.) They do not see the deserving cause of them, which is sin: Lam. iii. 39, 40, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.' If sickness cometh, if a relation be taken away, if an estate be blasted, a waking conscience looks to the cause; they would see the mind of God in the rod. When Israel fell before the men of Ai, Joshua looketh out for the troubler; so do God's children.

2. Insensible of the power of the word; they have no taste, no feeling of the powers of the world to come: Jer. xxiii. 29, 'Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' There is a breaking and a melting power in the word.

[1.] What law-work hath been wrought on you? what shakings of heart, and feeling of the powers of the world to come? Have you

been roused and startled out of your natural condition? Many will assent to this truth, that all are miserable by nature; but wast thou ever sensible that this was thy case, and accordingly affected? Wert thou ever feelingly convinced of thy misery? Otherwise we do but learn these things as a parrot learneth them, by rote. What feeling have you of your cursed estate by nature? Have you had any experience of the terrors of the Lord? You know the misery of man by nature, but have you ever felt it?

[2.] What gospel-work hath been wrought on you? what taste have you had of the good word of God? what experience of the efficacy of the Spirit? 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.'

3. Insensible of the state of the soul; they never look after it. If the body feel but the scratch of a pin, or want but a night's sleep, we complain presently; but the poor soul, though oppressed with lusts and unfit for duties, is never minded nor regarded, and they have no heart to pray for a release out of that spiritual judgment. To own the plague of our own hearts argueth tenderness: 1 Kings viii. 38, 'Which shall know every man the plague of his own heart.' When we complain of lusts more than fevers, and indisposition of soul more than weakness of body, the languishing of grace more than outward consumption, the stone in the heart more than the stone in the bladder and kidneys. We find Ephraim bemoaning himself, being ill at ease for an untoward heart: Jer. xxxi. 18, 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.' Did you ever complain of the hardness of your heart, and lay it before God? Do you not bemoan your spiritual distempers when lazy and backward? Where is your relish for the word? your delight in spiritual things? Isa. lxiii. 17, 'O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?'

Secondly, A hard heart is inflexible. That will be known where it is more gross.

1. By a refusal of the word, when men will not give God the hearing: Zech. vii. 11, 12, 'But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear; yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets.' They refused to hear, either to vouchsafe their presence or attention: Acts xiii. 46, 'Ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.' The case is clear in these, whereas to others it is doubtful; what needeth more dispute in the matter?

2. By an unteachableness, so as not to apprehend ought that is spiritual. To be ignorant is one thing, to be unteachable is another: Ezek. xii. 2, 'Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house;' Acts xxviii. 26, 'Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.' They do not see what they do see; they have no spiritual discerning, though a grammatical knowledge: Job v. 14, 'They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope

in the noonday as in the night.' They are simple in the midst of rational advantages; as the disciples: Luke xxiv. 16, 'Their eyes were holden, that they should not know him. They see the general truth, but make no application. When a man is shown a thing, and he minds it not, but his mind is on another object, that man may be said to see and not to see, because he doth not regard it. Or a man that hath a matter come before him, he heareth it, but his mind being otherwise employed, he regardeth it not; in which sense he may be said to hear and not to hear. Not to apply is not to regard; in seeing rationally and literally, he doth not see spiritually, with any life and power. There is a literal knowledge, and there is a spiritual knowledge; the literal knowledge is that which the hard heart may have. It is said, 2 Cor. iii. 3, 'Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us; written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart.' It is an allusion to the law of Moses. Consider it in the letter, as separated from the Spirit, and only as a law written in stone, wherein there is a naked direction of life, but no power; so a stony heart may see, but in seeing they see not. But the Spirit of Christ writeth it on the mind and heart, and maketh the heart docile and tractable: Rom. vii. 6, 'That we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.' The letter of the law only manifested duty, but gave no power to perform it; it discovered corruption, but gave no strength to subdue it; it was written in tables of stone, to show the hardness of man's heart. But now the law, when it cometh in upon us with a spiritual light, softeneth and strengtheneth the heart, and maketh it docile and pliable to God's counsel.

3. By an unwillingness to be admonished in public or private; if in public, the greater the evil. Private admonition is a kind of charge, a closer application. To storm against private admonition argueth an ill spirit, when men are loath to be disturbed in the ways of sin. But much more against public admonition, where the application ariseth not so much from a personal charge as from their own consciences. When men cannot endure sound doctrine, it is a dangerous crisis, that which the prophet Jeremiah speaketh of, chap. vi. 10, 'To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken; behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach, they have no delight in it.' Surely men delight in Satan's arms when they are loath to be plucked from thence. Satan hath made his nest there, and is loath to be disturbed: 2 Sam. xxiii. 6, 7, 'But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands; but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear.' The sons of Belial are compared to thorns that cannot be touched with hands, but rend and tear those that meddle with them. Men are angry that they cannot quietly enjoy their lusts. Plausible strains are very suitable to a carnal heart, or tame lectures of contemplative divinity; but sound doctrine, that rendeth and teareth the conscience, is not endured.

4. By scoffing at the word. The chair of the scorner is a preferment in sin: Ps. i. 1, 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth

in the seat of the scornful ;' Jer. xxiii. 34-36, ' And as for the prophet, and the priest, and the people that shall say, The burden of the Lord, I will even punish that man and his house. Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, and every one to his brother, What hath the Lord answered? and what hath the Lord spoken? And the burden of the Lord shall ye mention no more; for every man's word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the Lord of hosts our God,' &c. The prophets used to begin their prophecies with 'The burden of the Lord;' and they would in mockery demand, What burden they had from the Lord for them? Now shall we hear again of the burden of the Lord. Saith God, 'Every man's word shall be his burden;' that is, you shall dearly pay for this scoffing language; your words shall be your burden. But these marks may not be close enough, let me propound other things.

[1.] Did you ever lay down the buckler before God, and say, I have done foolishly; I will do so no more? Were you ever feelingly convinced, and your lusts powerfully subdued? Did you ever say, as Paul, Acts ix. 6, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' Every man carrieth on his opposition against God till he be brought to yield by a mighty Spirit breaking in upon him. When were the wings broken that you could fly no longer? the will subdued, that you said, Lord I have too long stouted it out against thee, so that you were willing to be at peace with God? Isa. xxvii. 5, 'Let him take hold of my strength that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me.' Were you ever forced to cry quarter? Didst thou ever apprehend God ready to smite and give fire upon thee, and then in a submissive posture did entreat him to stay his hand?

[2.] What effect hath the word upon you? Isa. lxvi. 2, 'To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.' It is a great part of sensibleness to tremble at the word. What meltings and yieldings of heart do you express? Doth it put you upon recourse to God? 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27, 'Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes and weep before me, I have even heard thee, saith the Lord.' Didst thou ever humble thyself before the Lord, to clear up matters between God and thy soul, and to get thy doubts resolved, and thy lusts mortified?

[3.] What pliability has there been in thee to the Holy Ghost's motions? A man that hath a tender heart yieldeth to the motions of the Holy Spirit: Ps. xxvii. 8, 'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' There is a quick echo to God's voice: Isa. vi. 8, 'I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send? and who will go for us? Then said I, Here I am; send me.' There is not only a readiness to obey, but he offers himself to the work. When we grow lazy and backward in holy things, and hang off, it is a high degree of hardness of heart.

Use 2. Exhortation.

1. To press us to beware of hardness of heart; it is a grievous sin, I shall use three arguments—

[1.] It depriveth you of grace. (See before, p. 205.)

[2.] It unfitteth you for duty while we are under the power of it. An hard heart is forced and superstitious. With what coldness and formality did David pray during the suspension of God's grace! We come into God's presence with great backwardness and reluctance while we are under the power of a hard heart.

[3.] It fitteth for judgment. The heart groweth harder and harder, and the mind blinder and blinder, till it be cast into an utter indisposition and impossibility of repentance. Hardness of heart turns a man into a beast, nay, into a devil; and according to our sin so is God's wrath: Rom. iii. 5, 'After thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.'

2. To press us to come out of this evil frame of spirit. Arguments—

[1.] As long as the heart is hard you are very remote from the comforts of the gospel. Christ came 'to heal the broken-hearted,' Luke. iv. 18. So Mat. ix. 12, 13, 'They that be whole need not the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' You are full of sin, but not sick; as a toad is full of poison, but the toad is not sick, because it is natural to him. Will a physician go about to cure a toad? Men lie under a great weight of sin, yet they sleep, and eat, and drink, and trade, and look as well as ever, feel no pain, nor anything to trouble them. These men have no need and will to be cured, and, of all men, are most properly said to be dead in trespasses and sins; they neither break an hour's sleep, nor abate one draehm of their carnal delights, but are heart-whole. The physician hath no desire to meddle with them that will not take what he prescribeth, as carnal men will not submit themselves to God's directions.

[2.] You are very remote from the work of the gospel. As God maketh a way for his anger, so he maketh a way for his mercy and grace. The heart is fitted and prepared for the Spirit's residence. It is softened before it is quickened: Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27, 'I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.' The vital spirit is not infused till the body be organised and formed. God made Adam out of the dust of the ground, and then breathed into him the breath of life. The Spirit of grace coming into the tender heart maketh way for itself.

Now for the cure of it, I will recommend unto you two means, two graces, and two ordinances.

First, Two means, light and love.

1. Light: Jer. xxxi. 19, 'Surely after that I turned I repented; and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.' Men that know not the nature and danger of sin are little troubled about it. Where there is no knowledge there is little conscience. When the troops of Syria were smitten with blindness, they were easily led into the midst of their enemies, 2 Kings vi. 18, 19; and when they thought themselves at Dothan they were in Samaria. Ignorance,

because it is not always accompanied with gross acts, is little thought of; but it is a bloody sin. If men did know God and themselves more, they could not be satisfied with their condition. Ignorance is the greatest cause of hardening.

2. Love. I do not consider it as a grace, but as an argument to melt the soul. It is a forcible argument and a kindly argument.

[1.] It is a forcible argument. Saul relented when David had an advantage against him, and spared him in the cave: 1 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17, 'Saul lift up his voice and wept; and he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.' To make the heart relent, it is good to study God's kindness, not only how he hath spared us, but how he hath blessed us.

(1.) For temporal mercies, creation and providence. For the mercies of creation: We all condemn the rebellion of Absalom for rising against his father. God made us out of nothing; none so much a father as God, and yet we rebel against him. If we had lost a limb, an eye, a tooth, or an arm, would we injure him that could restore us these things? God gave them to us at first; how should the thoughts of this soften our hearts! Then for the mercies of providence: Nathan mentions God's mercies to David to humble him: 2 Sam. xii. 7-9, 'I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?' It is God that feedeth and maintaineth you, and preserveth you. Men stand upon their honour in the world, to be true to their interest, not to be unthankful to their preservers. Now God giveth us life and breath and all things. You value these things when they are given you by men, much more should you when they are given you by God. Is water the worse because it cometh from the fountain and not from the cistern? Water is purer in the fountain. We have more reason to value mercies when they come from God, that so great a majesty should look after you: Ps. cxiii. 6, 'Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth;' that God that standeth not in need of you, as man doth of the meanest; that God whom you have offended, whose favour you are so much concerned about. In a small gift from a king, the favour is valued: we are continually fed and maintained at the expense and care of his providence.

(2.) For spiritual mercies; they melt the heart. What great love Christ showed in the business of our salvation, what he left, what he suffered, what he purchased!

(1st.) What he left. That love that is accompanied with self-denial is accounted the highest. How many degrees did the sun of righteousness go back! *ἐκένωσιν ἑαυτὸν*; Phil. ii. 8, 'He humbled, or emptied himself.' There was a veil upon his godhead: when 'he was rich, for our sakes he became poor,' 2 Cor. viii. 9. In the fulness of the Godhead he abstained from the use of it. Did Christ leave heaven, and wilt not thou leave thy lusts? Was he made the Son of man, and wilt

not thou be made the son of God? It was his abasement, but it is our advancement.

(2d.) What he suffered. We are more affected with what men suffer for us than with what they do for us. *Cubitus sine manu*. To show the stump of the arm where the hand was lost was an effectual plea: Zech. xii. 10, 'They shall look upon me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.' Sin doth most affect the heart when we consider the wrong done to Christ by it. *Amor doloris causa*—The more a man loveth another, or apprehends that he is loved of him, the more he is grieved that he hath any way injured him. Your sins strike at Christ, and have pierced him; shall not your hearts be pierced when his head was pierced with thorns, his hands and feet with nails, his heart with sorrows? Can you look upon Golgotha with dry eyes and a careless stupid heart? Think that you heard Christ say, Behold, is any sorrow like to my sorrow? Will you still go on in your rebellion against me? Is all nothing, all that I have done and suffered for you?

(3d.) What hath he purchased for us? He gave himself a ransom and price, a ransom to free us from death and hell. We would love a man that should get a pardon for our lives when we are condemned to die: 1 Thes. i. 10, 'Even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.' There was never any such wrath past or present; it is a thing to come, when we shall stir up all his wrath. And a price to purchase for us the favour of God, and our eternal abode with him in heaven. Heaven is called 'the purchased possession,' Eph. i. 14. If we were to be annihilated, or to spend our time in some obscure place, it were mercy; but to be for ever with the Lord, and to be filled up with God, who can express the greatness of this mercy? And all this is freely offered to you in the gospel. Things that concern us affect us; and therefore surely this should melt the heart: Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren by the mercies of God.' What! shall not mercy prevail? Joel ii. 13, 'And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.' Surely God's graciousness and readiness to receive returning sinners should work upon us. An hammer will easily break an hard stone against a soft bed; but if it be laid on an hard solid body, that will not give way underneath, strike as hard as you will, it is kept from breaking; so smite thy soul on the gospel, hell and damnation may be the hammer; but then lay thy soul upon the gospel and gospel considerations, then it breaketh all to shatters. Strike thy soul with the blows of God's wrath against the law, and it resists still; all doth but make us desperate; but now remember the mercies of the Lord, how freely he inviteth returning sinners, and this breaks the heart to pieces.

[2.] It is a kindly argument; the heart is not till then kindly humbled for sin as sin. An apprehension of wrath is one thing, godly sorrow is another thing; the former is necessary, but not enough: 2 Kings xxii. 19, 'Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake

against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me, I also have heard thee, saith the Lord.' Threatenings may terrify, but this melts the heart, and begets a serious remorse for sin, as offensive, displeasing, and grievous unto God: 2 Cor. vii. 10, 'For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death;' Ezek. vi. 9, 'And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives; because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols; and they shall loath themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations.' Not only for the evils which they have suffered, but which they have committed; for the evil that is in sin, not for the evil that is after sin: 2 Chron. xxxii. 26, Hezekiah, 'humbled himself for the pride of his heart.' Not only for the inconvenience and mischief done thereby, but because God was offended. That christian Niobe wept much 'because she loved much,' Luke vii. 47.

Secondly, There are two graces—faith and fear.

1. Faith. As reason maketh a difference between a man and a beast, so doth faith between a man and a man. It is faith bringeth us under the power of a truth, and maketh light active. Three times Christ reproached his disciples for hardness of heart, and still the cause given is unbelief: Mark vi. 52, 'They considered not the miracle of the loaves for their hearts were hardened;' Mark viii. 17, 'Why reason ye because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?' Mark xvi. 14, 'Afterwards he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them because of their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.' A man is dull, stupid, and senseless till faith maketh light break in upon the heart with power; till then he will not make use of his eyes, ears, or memory. All affections follow persuasion. Faith persuadeth of death, and hell, and judgment to come. We would not trifle away the day of grace if we did believe the goodness of God offering favour and life eternal in Christ. *Hæc audiunt quasi somniantes*—Men entertain these things as a dream, and are only a little troubled for the present, till they thoroughly believe them.

2. Fear. It is always made a preservative against hardness of heart: Isa. lxiii. 17, 'O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?' Fear argueth a constant sense of God's presence, and a deep respect to him, so as that we are loath to offend him; it makes the soul to walk as in God's company, and therefore it is kept humble: Prov. xxviii. 14, 'Happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.' It will make us tender of offending God, and yielding to our own corruptions, though never so secret. Who is the man that is opposed to him that hardeneth his heart? 'He that feareth alway.' Carelessness breedeth senselessness; but now, when we are continually watchful, and say, Shall I thus and thus offend God? the heart is kept in a good frame.

Thirdly, There are two ordinances—the word and prayer; for water, if never so scalding, will return to its natural coldness.

1. The word: 2 Chron. xxxiv. 19, ‘It came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes;’ and ver. 27, ‘Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me, I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord;’ Heb. iii. 7, 8, ‘To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.’ A conscionable hearing the word will prevent hardness of heart: Jer. xxiii. 29, ‘Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?’ There is the double work of the word—legal and evangelical; the breaking and the melting power of it. There is a great deal of difference between breaking the ice with a staff, and thawing or melting it: break it in one place, and it freezeth in another; melting is more universal. There are legal breakings and gospel meltings; there sin is discovered, here it is subdued. But then you must use the word as an ordinance, receive it in faith and obedience; use it in obedience, when you are discouraged in point of faith: Luke v. 5, ‘Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.’ But use it not only in obedience, but in faith; you must hear the word, not only as a moral lecture or legal discourse, or as a means of literal instruction, but evangelically, waiting for the power and presence of God.

2. Prayer. God will be specially owned in this work. No creature in the world can soften and turn the heart, but only God. He that made the heart can only change it: Ezek. xi. 19, ‘And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh.’ It is God only that gives a teachable mind, a pliable will, and ready affections. Go, then, and practise this duty; beg of God to give you a heart more pliable to the work of grace, more capable to be renewed, more soft and ready to receive the impressions of grace, and be earnest with him for this.

I shall now give you some further advice.

1. In the first place, begin with conversion to God; look for a change of state. Repentance in particular cases is neither right nor acceptable, as long as men do not mind conversion to God, and a change of state by regeneration. When the tree is good, then the fruits are answerable. Get the heart of stone taken away, and then labour to preserve a tender frame. It is a fruitless course to look after a good frame, till we are brought into a good estate. Natural hardness is the cause of habitual hardness; till that be taken away by regeneration all cometh to nothing.

2. Be tender how you use your light. Men wax bold by sinning against light, and seem to get a victory over their consciences. When the candle is put out, lust will be stirring. Light and reason is God’s bridle on man to keep him in awe. Well, then, use your light tenderly. If it be but an half light, search further; if it be a full light, walk by it. If you are children of the light, you will have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.

3. After you have sinned, take up betimes ; as Peter went out, and wept bitterly ; for sin will fret, and soak in more and more.

4. Use frequent recollection and communing with your hearts. Man hath reason, and can talk with himself. God, that cannot err, surveyed every day's work, and found it good. Cast up your account at the foot of every page. He that runneth in debt, and never casteth up his accounts, will sink at last. A man is insensibly hardened for want of searching and ransacking his conscience ; there is no serious repentance without it : Lam. iii. 40, ' Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.' God will search you if you leave the work to him.

5. Improve afflictions. It is a means God hath appointed to shake us out of our security. We are apt to be lulled asleep with the delights and pleasures of sin till we feel the sharp rod of afflictions : 2 Chron. xxviii. 22, ' And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord : this is that King Ahaz.' They are monsters of nature and hopeless wretches that are not reclaimed by afflictions. God sets a brand on Ahaz, like a dogged servant that will not stir, beat him never so much. Unprofitableness under the rod is an ill presage. In hell sinners are always suffering and always sinning.

6. Beware of those things which are both steps unto, and causes of, hardness of heart ; for one degree is the cause of another ; as when sin is committed without remorse, and swallowed without grief.

7. Beware of extenuating sin, of having less thoughts of it, and being less troubled about it. At first it seemed a horrible thing, a burden too heavy for us ; but afterwards it grows less light, and the heart more insensible, and sin more delightful. The burden of sin increaseth in the children of God as light and acquaintance with God increaseth. That which they made nothing of at first groweth very heavy.

8. Keep grace in a constant exercise. Let the fire be kept always in that came down from heaven, 2 Tim. i. 6, ' Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God that is in thee.'

9. Frequent the society of God's people. Want of care of our company is a great fault ; for company hardeneth in sin or humbleth. The very example of God's people will be a great help to you ; how tender they are, how watchful, what meltings of heart they have in prayer, how they make conscience of the least sin, how they complain of themselves, Oh ! what a hard heart have I ! Coals lying together keep fire. This is a means to keep us tender : Heb. iii. 13, ' But exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.'
