

SERMONS UPON EXODUS IV. 21.

SERMON I.

I will harden his heart, that he shall not let my people go.—
EXOD. iv. 21.

I HAVE spoken of hardness of heart as it is proper to man. I shall now speak of that judicial hardness which is inflicted by God; a notable instance whereof we have in Pharaoh, that was raised up that God might in him make his power known; that is, he was born into the world, and advanced to royal dignity, that the world may know what God can do against an obstinate contradicting creature. And accordingly it is applied by the apostle: Rom. ix. 17, 'For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.' Therefore it is an instance worth the viewing.

In this place God acquainteth Moses of it aforehand, to fortify him against all discouragements. He was to deal with an obstinate creature, but it was that which God had foreseen and foredecreed: 'I will harden his heart, that he shall not let my people go.'

The point or head of doctrine is, God's hardening of sinners. You may take it in the form of a proposition, for the help of the weakest.

Doct. God himself hath a hand in the hardening of obstinate sinners.

About fourteen times is the hardness of Pharaoh's heart spoken of; and thrice it is said, 'He hardened his own heart:' Exod. viii. 15, 'When Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had said.' So ver. 32, 'And Pharaoh hardened his heart at that time also, neither would he let the people go;' and again, chap. ix. 34, 'And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, and the hail, and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and all his servants.' In all the other places it is ascribed to God himself. Man hardeneth, and then God hardeneth. When God blindeth a man, he first closeth his own eyes; and when God hardeneth a man, he first contracteth a brawn and stiffness upon his own heart. Pharaoh in hardening himself is charged with two things—sighting of the judgment: chap. vii. 23, 'And Pharaoh turned and went into his house, neither did he set his

heart to this also.' And contempt of the threatening : chap. viii. 15, 'He hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had said.' And the very same thing also is said to be of God : chap. vii. 13, 'He hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had said.'

For the clearing of this, I shall—(1.) Give you some observations from the story ; (2.) Show you how God hardeneth ; (3.) The causes of it.

I. I shall give you some general observations from the story ; for in the story of Pharaoh we have the exact platform of an hard heart.

1. Between the hard heart and God there is an actual contest who shall have the better. The parties contesting are God and Pharaoh. (See the first Sermon on Mark iii. 5.)

2. The sin that hardened Pharaoh, and put him upon this contest, was covetousness and interest of state. Jacob's seventy souls that he brought down to Egypt were grown to six hundred thousand fighting men, besides children ; and to let such a company of men go, whom they used as slaves, besides the prey of their herds and flocks, seemed hard to Pharaoh. Which is not only an item to magistrates, to retain nothing which God hateth out of interest and reason of state, but also to private christians. Whatever of gain and advantage we may fancy in sin, it will at length prove a certain loss. If God send a message for our right eye, we must pluck it out ; or for our right hand, we must cut it off. It is dangerous to deny God anything. If he demand Israel, and all the flocks and herds, let them go ; the sweetest interests, the dearest pleasures, the most gainful employments, if they are unlawful, let them go. There is an usual contest between interest and duty, between pleasure and obedience, between profit and the command ; but it is better our own faith should give the command, the victory, than God's power : 1 John v. 4, 'This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.' He had before spoken of keeping the commandments, ver. 3, and presently he speaketh of 'victory over the world.' The world is the great enemy of the commandments ; and till it be overcome, a christian can have no comfort, but still be contesting with God, as Pharaoh was, and slighting every message.

3. This contest on Pharaoh's part is managed with slights and contempt of God ; on God's part, with mercy and condescension. On Pharaoh's part with slights and contempt of God : Exod. v. 2, 'And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel do ? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.' Words of profane contempt. 'Who is the Lord ?' as if he should say, Am not I king of Egypt ? who is my peer, much less my superior and my lord ? 'I know not the Lord.' Ere God hath done with Pharaoh he shall know him to the purpose. Mark the words, 'I know not ;' and then, 'I will not.' Hardness is the usual effect of blindness. Errors of mind go on to errors of heart. I will not know, I will not hear of it ; I care not for such a duty, nor will I weigh or consider what is God's will concerning me. The eye affecteth the heart. Pharaoh did not consider what it was to deal with God, and then doubleth the burdens of the Israelites. But now, on God's part

it is managed with sweetness and kindness. God from the beginning foreknew the hardness of Pharaoh's heart, and therefore might have swept him away of a sudden, but he giveth him frequent warnings and convictions. He would have men convinced ere they are punished. Foregoing mercy sheweth the righteousness of ensuing wrath. In all the progress of the story the first miracles were before him, the next upon him. And every judgment is threatened before it be executed ; God telleth what he would do to warn Pharaoh. In one plague it is notable that God doth not only threaten the judgment, but sendeth a gracious warning to bid him take his cattle out of the fields: *Exod. ix. 19*, 'Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field ; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die.' To show that God delighteth not in the ruin and destruction of the creature, and to make Pharaoh the more liable to condemnation, and to spare such among the Egyptians as had some fear of God remaining in them, but chiefly to harden Pharaoh the more: *Exod. x. 1*, 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might show these my signs before him.' Moses might say, Lord, therefore let me never go to Pharaoh ; but saith God, 'Go in unto him, for I have hardened his heart.' God continueth the means, though he denieth grace ; and the wicked must be admonished, though they will not be reformed. In the hardening of sinners, God usually observeth this course : by mercies and the means of grace they are convinced and hardened at the same time ; there is still new matter of glorifying God, and hardening the creature.

4. The first plague on Pharaoh's heart is delusion. Moses worketh miracles, turneth Aaron's rod into a serpent, rivers into blood, bringeth frogs, and the magicians still do the same ; God permitteth these magical impostures, to leave Pharaoh in his wilful error. It is probable that what the magicians did was not real, but a mere delusion of the senses ; but the Lord doth not discover the cheat, because his present aim was not to shame Satan, but to harden Pharaoh ; therefore he suffered the devil to imitate the true miracles without discovery. It is sad when men choose false teachers to themselves, and God suffereth them to be blinded : *Hosea iv. 17*, 'Ephraim is joined to idols ; let him alone.' They may have some parts, plausible elocution, gifts of prayer ; there may be common effects wrought by them ; these things blind men, and their hearts are set upon familism and antinomianism ; let them alone: *Exod. vii. 22*, 'The magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments, and Pharaoh's heart was hardened.' This was one means of hardening his heart, the magicians wrought the same miracles that Moses and Aaron did. God suffereth men to be hardened by their own choice.

5. God was not wanting to give Pharaoh sufficient means of conviction. The magicians turned their rods into serpents, but 'Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods,' *Exod. vii. 12* ; which sheweth God's supereminent power. They could not deliver him from the frogs, though they could bring frogs. God may suffer the devil to add to the judgment, but to relieve them is an act of mercy : the magicians could add

to the plagues, but they could not deliver him from them ; the devil can sooner bring a plague than remove it. This was warning enough ; there was difficulty enough to harden them, and light enough to convince them. Again, the magicians were nonplussed in their art : *Exod. viii. 18*, ‘ And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not.’ They sought to bring forth lice, and could not, being hindered by God’s will. They that could bring forth frogs could not bring forth lice ; the greater the possibility, the more are the magicians abashed ; this was an easy miracle. All colour of excuse is taken away from Pharaoh ; they confess, ‘ This is the finger of God,’ *Exod. viii. 19* ; and yet Pharaoh’s heart was hardened ; as many will not be won to the truth by the confession of those that led them into the mistake. Nay, afterwards the magicians themselves were smitten with boils : *Exod. ix. 11, 12*, ‘ And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils ; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them.’ If the hard heart go to hell, it is not for want of light, but grace. We may wonder as much at the success as at the plagues. To what a height of obstinacy will man come if he be let alone to plagues ! for all this while Pharaoh’s heart was hardened.

6. Observe, in one of the plagues Israel might have stolen away, whether Pharaoh would or no : *Exod. x. 22, 23*, ‘ And Moses stretched forth his hand towards heaven, and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days ; they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days ; but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.’ They were not only deprived of the light of heaven, but of candles and torches ; the air was condensed with thick clouds, and the mists and vapours so thick, that they would easily have damped them, and put them out again. Now whilst they were under the power of three days’ darkness, the Israelites might have stolen away, and have gone three days’ journey in the wilderness before they could have made any pursuit ; but God had more miracles to be done. When he hath to do with a hard heart, he will not steal out of the field, but go away with honour and triumph. This was to be a public instance, and for intimation to the world : *1 Sam. vi. 6*, ‘ Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts ? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed ?’ The Philistines took warning by it, and it will be our condemnation if we do not.

7. In all these plagues I observe that Pharaoh now and then had his devout pangs. In an hard heart there may be some relentings, but no true repentance. We have him confessing, *Exod. ix. 27*, ‘ I have sinned this time : the Lord is righteous ; and I and my people are wicked ;’ and *chap. x. 16, 17*, ‘ I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you : now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and entreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only.’ So *chap. xii. 32*, ‘ Be gone, and bless me also.’ Hardened sinners may have their gripes and sensible touches, and so some faint purposes of reformation. But that which was defective, and sheweth it was not true repentance, was—

[1.] Because it was only extorted by present horror : Job xxvii. 10, 'Will he always call upon God?' A still will send forth water as well a fountain, but it is by drops, and by force : Prov. v. 11-13, 'And thou mourn at last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed ; and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof? and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me?' The lecher hath his penitent moods. A malefactor on the rack will confess freely. Vows of men are very frequent. Oh! that men would be such when they are well as they promised to be when they were sick!

[2.] Because the aim of all was ease and safety. Pharaoh's cry is not, Take away iniquity, but, Take away this plague. Offers of nature after ease are found in hypocrites. Esau sought the privileges of the birthright with tears, *quia perdiderat, non quia vendiderat* ; not because he sold it, but because he had lost it. Nature may be sensible of present evil.

[3.] Because it was vanishing. The good motions of an hard heart are of no long continuance ; they pass through, and are gone like a flash of lightning. Pharaoh's remorse for the frogs and grasshoppers was as a cloud soon blown over. Till there be sound repentance, remorse must needs be short, for it is an displeasing penance. Water heated is the colder afterwards, because it is rarefied ; after it hath thawed a little, it will freeze the harder. Pharaoh after every respite was hardened anew ; it is the temper of those that are doomed to destruction.

[4.] Because his purposes came so short and lame of what God expected. An hard heart, when it cannot prevail against God, would fain compound with him. First he gave leave : Exod. viii. 25, 'Go ye, sacrifice to God in the land ;' then ver. 28, 'I will let ye go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness, only ye shall not go very far away ;' then chap. x. 11, 'Go now, ye that are men, and serve the Lord.' Their children were to remain for hostages. Then, ver. 24, 'Go ye, serve the Lord, only let your flocks and your herds be stayed ; let your little ones also go with you.' Their cattle were to remain for a pawn, and their flocks and their herds for a forfeiture if they returned not, and a recompense for the damage of Egypt. But God would not abate him a hoof. An hard heart yieldeth to God by halves. Pharaoh hucketh with him ; first they might sacrifice in the land ; then go a little way, three days' journey ; then he would keep their children, then their flocks and herds. An hard heart never yieldeth to God his whole demand ; the devil is loath to let go his hold. How do men huck with God in duties contrary to their affections or prejudicial to their interests? 2 Kings v. 18, 'In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon ; when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.' They have their reservations, and in this and that thing they will be excused. These are but deceitful pangs. Pharaoh doth often eat his words, and retract every grant.

8. In process of time his hardness is improved into rage and downright

malice: *Exod. x. 28.* 'Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in the day thou seest my face thou shalt die.' Vessels, when they come to the lees, they grow sour and tart; so Pharaoh began to run dregs. Or as beasts by long bailing grow mad and furious, so it was with Pharaoh. Men first slight the truth, and then are hardened against it, and then come to persecute it. A river, when it hath been long kept up, swelleth and beareth down the bank and rampire; so do wicked men rage when their consciences cannot withstand the light, and their hearts will not yield to it.

9. At length Pharaoh is willing to let them go. After much ado God may get something from a hard heart; but it is no sooner given, but retracted; like fire struck out of a flint, it is hardly got, and quickly gone: *Hosea vi. 4,* 'Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.' Many may have some show of goodness, at least at some times, who yet are little the better, and their condition nothing the better; it proveth a great snare and neck-break to them; its unsoundness is presently seen in its inconstancy.

10. The last news that we hear of hardening Pharaoh's heart was a little before his destruction: *Exod. xiv. 8,* 'And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel.' Pharaoh begrudgeth his own grant, as if he had yielded too far. Hardness of heart will not leave us till it hath wrought our full and final destruction. God always besotteth when he meaneth to destroy. Never any were hardened but to their own ruin. As God, that loveth his own, loveth them to the end, so God, that hateth those that are hardened, hateth them to the end. Pharaoh is first plagued and then destroyed. This is the upshot of all: *Job ix. 4,* 'Who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?' The beginning is imposture and delusion, the middle obstinacy, and the end ruin.

11. How God hardeneth. It is a point that needeth explication. God is not and cannot be the author of sin; if God should cause it, man should sin of necessity, and then his punishment would not be just, he being under force. God hath not brought upon any necessity of sinning; and God, that is good, cannot be the cause of evil. If God were the immediate author, it would be no sin, for whatever God doth is good.

How then doth he harden the heart? I answer—(1.) Negatively; (2.) Affirmatively.

1. Negatively. In the explication of this matter we must avoid both extremes; some say too much of it, others too little.

[1.] We must not say too much, lest we leave a stain and blemish upon the divine glory.

(1.) God infuseth no hardness and sin as he infuseth grace. All influences from heaven are sweet and good, not sour. Evil cannot come from the Father of lights. God enforceth no man to do evil.

(2.) God doth not excite the inward propension to sin; that is Satan's work. He persuadeth it not; it hath neither command, nor approbation, nor influence, nor impulse from heaven. In all these ways we must look upon man's sin. All sin is a child begotten by that incubus of hell on the corrupt soul of man; it is poured out as milk into the womb of their hearts, and there it is curdled as cheese.

[2.] We must not give it too little. God doth not harden by bare prescience, because God foreseeth other sins, and yet they are not ascribed to God; he is not said to kill, or to steal, or to do wrong, as he is to harden. There is a difference between God's concurrence to this sin and others. It is not only by way of manifestation, that is, by his plagues and judgments he declareth how hard it is. God hardened Pharaoh, say some, that is, by frequency of judgments showed how hard his heart was. The prayer by which we deprecate this evil sheweth the meaning of it. We would not say, Lord, show not how hard I am by thy many judgments upon me; but, Lord harden not my heart, lead me not into temptation, incline not my heart to any evil thing. And it doth not hold good in other instances: Deut. ii. 30, 'Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the Lord thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate.' There was no such long process to make it evident they had hard hearts. So Josh. xi. 20, 'For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should not come against Israel in battle.' So that there is somewhat besides an evident manifestation to the world by continued judgments that it is hard. Nor is it by a mere idle permission (for there is besides that his decree, and a judicial action of providence), as if God were like the heathen's Jupiter, who was feasting in Ethiopia while things were out of order in Greece. Or at least such think God hath no more to do than a man that standeth on the shore and seeth a ship ready to be drowned when he might have helped it; there is somewhat more than so. Nor is it merely by desertion and suspension of grace. It is true this is a part, but not all; as a captain leaving his soldiers in the midst of a battle, may be said to leave them in the enemies' hands. God concurrereth not only by way of permission and patience, but by way of action and power; not making hardness, but doing and willing the things whereby the sinner is hardened. Besides his decrees, there is his judicial sentence, and an active providence in order thereunto. Many things concur to the hardening of the heart, all which God willeth and intendeth, but justly. The wicked take these occasions of their own accord; Satan tempteth out of his own malice; but all this cannot be done without the will of God; there is at least a permissive intention. If there were not God's overruling it, then he were not God omnipotent; there is a supreme power overruling and ordering everything that is done in the world. It was God's will that Pharaoh should be hardened, that he might dispose of it to the ends of his providence: Exod. ix. 16, 'And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.' If there were only a naked idle permission, then it may be said that he suffereth the heart to be hardened rather than hardeneth it, which is the phrase used.

2. Affirmatively, how God doth harden. The inward way is wonderful; as God's drawing sinners is secret, so is his hardening. But if you ask me by what means it is accomplished? I answer—

[1.] By desertion, by taking away the restraints of grace, whereby he letteth them loose to their own hearts: Ps. lxxxii. 12, 'So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.' Man in regard of his inclinations to sin is like a greyhound

held by a slip or collar ; when the hare is in sight, take away the slip, and the greyhound runneth violently after the hare, according to his inbred disposition. Men are held in by the restraints of grace, which, when removed, they are left to their own swing, and run into all excess of riot. Thus God took away his good Spirit from Saul : 1 Sam. xvi. 14, ' But the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.' Take away the pillar that sustaineth the house, and then the house falleth of itself. God taketh away his grace, and then all runneth to ruin ; as darkness ensueth upon the withdrawing of light. Now herein God is not to be blamed.

(1.) Because he is debtor to none. He may give his grace to whom he pleaseth, and withhold it as he will ; he is not bound to give or continue, but is free to bestow or withhold. Man sinneth when he doth not hinder sin, because he is bound to hinder it all that he can : Neh. xiii. 17, ' Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath-day ? ' When the people profaned the sabbath, and they did not restrain them.

(2.) He knoweth how to make the best of any evil, to turn the greatest evil into the greatest good, which man cannot do, and ought not, being under a rule. We must not do evil that good may come of it : Rom. iii. 8, ' And not rather, as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say, Let us do evil, that good may come ; whose damnation is just.'

(3.) There is an actual forfeiture. God is so far from being bound to continue grace, that he is bound in justice to withdraw what is given. When men stop their ears, God may shut them. But—

[2.] By tradition. He delivereth them up to the power of Satan, who worketh upon the corrupt nature of man, and hardeneth it ; he stirreth him up as the executioner of God's curse ; as the evil spirit had leave to seduce Ahab : 1 Kings xxii. 21, 22, ' And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith ? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also ; go forth and do so.' There is a permissive intention, not an effective ; Satan is the efficient and instrument, God is the judge ; he permitteth Satan to excite and stir up their evil natures : they grieve his Spirit, and then God withdraweth, and leaveth them to an evil spirit ; as in Saul : 1 Sam. xvi. 14, ' But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.' The light of the Spirit of the Lord is gone, and then Satan filled him with rage and fury and cruelty. It is said, ' An evil spirit from the Lord,' because he was sent from God to punish him for his sins.

[3.] There is an active providence, which disposeth and propoundeth such objects as, meeting with a wicked heart, maketh it more hard. God maketh the best things the wicked enjoy to turn to the fall and destruction of those that have them. Sometimes natural comforts : Jer. vi. 21, ' Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will lay stumbling-blocks before this people ; and the father and the sons together shall fall upon them, the neighbour and his friend shall perish.' Their

table is made a snare, and an occasion and preparation and means to ruin them. They harden themselves by despising the goodness and patience of God : Rom. ii. 4, 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' Sometimes corrections and chastisements ; these produce nothing but a greater contumacy ; as a resty horse, the more he is spurred forward, the more he goeth backward ; or as a fierce bull or bear groweth mad with baiting. In what a sad case are wicked men left by God ! Mercies corrupt them, and corrections enrage them : as unsavoury herbs, the more they are pounded, the more they stink. Sometimes by spiritual ordinances and advantages ; the most spiritual means do them no good : Isa. vi. 10, 'Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and convert and be healed.' He that bringeth in the light blindeth the owl. Water poured on lime maketh it burn the more ; so do the means of grace hurt wicked men, irritating their corruptions, or they resting in them. Sometimes by withdrawing the word and means of grace and prayers of his people : Acts xix. 9, 'When divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them ;' Jer. vii. 16, 'Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me, for I will not hear thee.' Do not any longer strive between me and them. Sometimes by disposing and ordering the deceits of false teachers : 2 Thes. ii. 10, 11, 'They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved : and for this cause God gave them up to strong delusions, that they should believe a lie ;' Job xii. 16, 'The deceived and the deceiver are his.' This doth not fall out without a providence. The water runneth its own course, but the miller maketh use of it to drive his engine. As all things work together for good to them that love God, so all things work for the worst to the wicked and impenitent. Providences and ordinances ; we read of them that wrest the scriptures to their own destruction, 2 Peter iii. 16. Some are condemned to worldly happiness ; by ease and abundance of prosperity they are entangled : Prov. i. 32, 'The prosperity of fools shall destroy them ;' as brute creatures, when in good plight, grow fierce and man-keen. If we will find the sin, God will find the occasion. I shall instance in Judas ; Christ had reproved him for begrudging Mary's bounty, and ye read, Mark xxvi. 16, 'From that time he sought opportunity to betray him.' He was offended with Christ's reproof. Judas was hurried on with wrath and avarice ; and when men are resolved, God in his providence suffereth them to have a fit opportunity. The priests, alarmed with the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, by which many were drawn to believe in him, were thinking how to seize on him, and Judas comes in the nick, and asketh them, What will ye give me, and I will betray him to you ?

Use. Let us take warning by Pharaoh's example, that this great judgment light not upon us. The Philistines, that were otherwise a blind and stupid people, yet were affected with it. Dagon was broken in pieces, and they were smitten with emrods once and again, and they begin to consult what to do. Their diviners told them, 1 Sam.

vi. 6, 'Wherefore do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?' God delighteth not in judgment, and therefore he hath made a precedent once for all; here is Pharaoh set up, that all succeeding ages may stand in fear. God would not have us learn to our bitter cost, but take example by others. *Qui alieno malo non sapit, gravius punitur*—He that will not take warning by others shall be more grievously punished. In judgments it is better to take example than to become examples. If thy life should be nothing else but Pharaoh's story acted over again (for certainly there is an exact parallel between this case and the course of every obstinate sinner), how great will thy doom be! God was angry with Belshazzar because he was not warned by Nebuchadnezzar's example: Dan. v. 22, 'And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this.' You have known and heard of the way of God with Pharaoh; God hath a quarrel with some of you for your lusts and vanities; do you think to bear it up against warnings with peace and quiet? Your lusts may not bring you to present ruin, that you may be the more hardened in them; but be sure that God will have the best at last; and then I leave you to judge what will be your condition when you fall under the weight of his displeasure. Have you not some qualms of conscience sometimes about your eternal condition? doth not conscience say, Surely I am not so careful to make my peace with God as I should be? Upon every such stirring you are the more estranged from God if you do not improve it. Conscience will repeat over these warnings to you when you lie upon your death-beds; and then you will sadly howl over your neglects, and wish your magicians and old companions far from you; then you will send for Moses and Aaron, and it may be too late. When God is showing mercy, the last mercies are the best, and the farther he goeth the sweeter he is; and when God is punishing, the last punishments are the sorest, and the farther he goeth the more bitter.

I will propound two considerations—

1. From the evil of an hard heart.

[1.] It is a contest with God, not only with his greatness and power, but also with his goodness and mercy, and therefore it must needs succeed ill with us. Before God breaketh out with fury he treateth with us in a mild condescending way; he beseecheth his own creature: Jer. xiii. 15, 16, 'Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken: give glory to 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.'

[2.] An hard heart makes us rebels to God and slaves to everything else; for we are wedded to some inferior thing; we are our own Pharaohs, and will not let ourselves go: 2 Tim. iii. 4, 'Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.'

[3.] It is in itself the sorest of all judgments.

[4.] It never goes alone, but brings other judgments along with it.

[5.] It is the great hindrance of the spiritual life. (See Sermon on Mark iii. 5.)

2. From the parties whom it may befall, not only the open wicked, but in some measure God's own children; for God may harden two ways—as a judge, and as a father; by way of punishment, and by way of correction. By way of punishment again two ways—totally and finally. Some are totally hardened, and have nothing of a soft heart in them, and yet not finally; the dreadful sentence of obduration is not yet passed upon them, as it may be upon others, and that during life, when God leaveth them to their own hearts' counsels, without any check or restraint of providence, or purpose to reclaim them. These three kinds I must then speak of—God's hardening the wicked in general, his final hardening, and his hardening in part his own children.

SERMON II.

I will harden his heart, that he shall not let my people go.—
 EXOD. iv. 21.

FIRST, Of God's hardening wicked men in general as a judge. The causes of it are—

1. Ignorance; for light and love make the heart tender. Light is that which we are now to take notice of. Light begets tenderness, as it discerneth sin, and maketh us sensible of it, especially the lively light of the Spirit: Rom. vii. 9, 'I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' Sense of guilt and punishment soon flashed in his face; as in a dungeon the worms crawl as soon as light is brought in: Jer. xxxi. 19, 'After I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.' Instruction breedeth remorse, and awakeneth men out of their stupid security; but while men continue in their ignorance they are stupid and senseless. Now thus men may be for a long time, and yet afterwards God may make the scales fall off from their eyes, and 'open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God,' Acts xxvi. 18. However, affected and vinceable ignorance, when men are willingly ignorant and err in their hearts, that is, when men have powerful and enlightening motives and yet remain ignorant, this is very dangerous. And for the present, that ignorance is one cause of their hardening is evident, because the worst usually when they come to die are sensible; their mind is then cleared from the fogs and steams of lust, and conscience being awakened, they then feel their load, and a great weight of sin lying upon them, and most wish they had lived in a more strict and ready obedience to God's will.

2. Unbelief. There is an hardness of the heart against the light and offers of the gospel, when Christ is tendered, but not received, and the cause of that is ignorance, affected ignorance; and there is an hardening of the heart against the truth once received, out of love of

their temporal peace, liberty, and safety of life and estate ; this cometh from unbelief, and want of a sufficient sense and sight of the world to come ; which hardness is caused by the veiglement and importunities of the flesh, craving its satisfactions in the present world, and denying or disbelieving the blessedness to come. If men did believe heaven and hell, they would be more pliable to God's motions, and more deaf to the importunities of the flesh ; but that this is a cause of hardening appeareth by Christ's chiding his disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart : Mark xvi. 14, ' Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.'

3. Sinning against light, either by way of omission or commission. This provoketh God to give us over to more hardness of heart. By way of commission is easily granted, but it is also by way of omission : James iv. 17, ' To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' They will find it to be sin in the sad effects of it. (See Sermon on Mark iii. 5.)

4. Custom in sinning. (See Sermon on Mark iii. 5.)

5. Small sins may occasion this judgment, and harden the heart as well as great sins. It is not easy to say which doth most ; indeed great sins get into the throne presently, but small sins insensibly and by degrees : Ps. xix. 13, ' Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins ; let them not have dominion over me,' A small sin may get the upperhand of a sinner, and bring him under in time ; and after that, it is habituated by constant custom, so that he cannot easily shake off the yoke, and redeem himself from the tyranny thereof, as if a man be addicted to any vanity and foolish delight. These do not exercise dominion over the enslaved soul till they have gotten strength by many and multiplied acts. But presumptuous sins by one single act weaken the Spirit, and give a mighty advantage to the flesh, even almost to a complete conquest. So that for the present little sins do not harden the heart so much as greater. (See Sermon on Mark iii. 5.)

Now all these causes concur to the hardening of the heart, and making it as a stone, but yet out of these stones God can raise up children to Abraham.

Secondly, Of God's final hardening, when God leaveth men to perish, and will no more treat with them. Now here I shall show—(1.) That there is such a dispensation ; (2.) The causes of it.

1. That there is such a dispensation.

[1.] It is an usual dispensation for God to leave men to perish in their sins, and that irreversibly, even before death, and will be entreated no more for them. It appears by many places of scripture : Rev. xxii. 11, ' He that is unjust, let him be unjust still ; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.' Those which remain obstinate after many warnings and calls, it is usual with God to give them over to their lusts, that they may be ripe for hell : Ezek. iii. 27, ' He that heareth, let him hear ; and he that forbeareth, let him forbear ; for they are a rebellious house.' As if God should say, Let them now do what they will, I am at a point. Now sometimes their condition is irreversible, which is clear, because when God hath given them over, how shall they repent,

and break off their sin? God's oath is passed: Ps. cxv. 11, 'Unto whom I swear in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest.' God standeth sworn to condemn and destroy them. If they should have any anguish of conscience and remorse stirred up in them, God will have no regard to it: Prov. i. 26, 27, 'I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you;' Hosea v. 6, 'They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord, but they shall not find him, he hath withdrawn himself from them.' When men have neglected God's seasons, and begin to be surprised with death, then they would fain have comfort and pardon; but instead thereof the Lord puts them off. No; you would have none of me: Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12, 'But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me: so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust, and they walked in their own counsels.' Instead of compassion they are mocked, and turned over to their evil courses and carnal company: John viii. 21, 'I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins.' That this may be before death appeareth because grace is confined to a season: Isa. lv. 6, 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.' And that season is not always as long as life: Luke xix. 42, 'If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.' The day of grace is bright but short. We may mourn over many thus; when the measure of their iniquities is filled up, God giveth over calling and expecting and waiting for their repentance. It is true the time is not to be known by any man of himself, nor by others concerning him; we cannot state the number of calls, because circumstances are diverse, and light breaketh in with warnings in a different degree. There is a great deal of variety in the Lord's dispensations, therefore all must use the means, and warn we must to the last. We can only say in the general, that after God hath done with them, and expects no good from them, he may let them live for the glory of his justice; as after God had hardened Pharaoh's heart, yet he continued his life, that he might show his power in him: Exod. ix. 16, 'And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.' You may survive your final hardness, as a monument of God's justice in the world.

[2.] It is a just dispensation. It is just with God to take the refusal and be gone, and to cease to deal with your hearts any more, when, after all the melting entreaties of his grace, you cast him off; he commands, and you will not obey; he is willing, and you are not willing; he entreats, and you will not hearken; he wishes: Deut. v. 29, 'O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!' he laments: Ps. lxxxix. 13, 'O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!' and you will not join with him. He is grieved that his offer of grace is not received, and you will not lament. It is but just that a man should be left to his own choice, that a man should miss of that salvation which

he cared not for; that if, after warnings, convictions, and entreaties, he will be filthy, he should be filthy still. In hell conscience will acquit God; *ἐγὼ ἐμοὶ τούτων αἰτία*, I have been the cause of all this to myself.

[3.] It is a merciful dispensation to the rest of the world. We are told of these things beforehand, not that we may despair, that is an ill consequence; but that, as we love our souls, we should take heed of resisting grace, and turning our backs upon our own mercies. It is a merciful and fatherly warning to strike in betimes, and own the God of our mercies. Delay is that that undoeth all the world. Now this is the best cure of delay.

2. The causes of it.

[1.] Sinning away the light of nature. By nature men have some knowledge of good and evil. There are *κοῖναι ἐννοιαί*, some common principles, as that God is, and must be worshipped, that we must do wrong to none, nor pollute ourselves with promiscuous lusts. The heart of a pagan would rise against it: Rom. ii. 14, 15, 'For when the gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts.' Now, when men hold the light of nature 'in unrighteousness,' Rom. i. 18, when they hold poor truth fettered and bound that it cannot break out into an holy conversation, this provoketh God to give them up to hardness. There are many sins which nature discovereth, and may be avoided upon such reasons and considerations as nature suggesteth. Now, when men put the finger into nature's eye, or will not suffer reason to exercise any dominion, but let loose the reins to lust, God leaveth them to a carnal and sottish heart. Though by the light of nature men cannot convert to God, yet by the light of nature men may practise many duties and avoid many sins. The gentiles were left to an unsound injudicious mind. When men fall into foul sins against the light of nature, conscience loseth its feeling and tenderness: Eph. iv. 19, 'Who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.' Hearts prejudiced against the things of God may grow to very stones.

[2.] Refusing God's many calls: Prov. xxix. 1, 'He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' God may bear with us a while after one or two or more reproofs, but when we are often reprov'd and often convinced, and yet will not be reclaimed, God may give us over. The exact date of Christ's patience, or the number of his calls ere the fatal period of final induration cometh, we know not; but when it is often, you are in danger. Take heed of forfeiting your own mercies by refusing the most earnest motions of the word and Spirit. When God importuneth to be heard and obeyed, his Spirit being thus resisted and refused, God will be at length wearied, and will not give as much grace as before: Isa. lxiii. 10, 'But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit; therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.' *Sæviti infelix amor*. Gen. vi. 3, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh.' The heathens did acknowledge that the *τόπικοι θεοὶ*, the gods of cities and nations, did for the provocation of

the inhabitants forsake their altars and temples. The more calls and convictions we resist in this kind, the more difficult and improbable is the reducing a sinner to God; every day he groweth more wicked and profane. To resist the clamours of conscience is sad, but to weary and grieve the Spirit is dreadful: Ezek. xxiv. 13, 'In thy wickedness is lewdness; because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee.' God sets them over the fire till their hearts begin to be warmed, and then lets the sun remain on them.

[3.] Gross hypocrisy. This is a constant lie, a contempt of God, an habitual and customary stifling and smothering of checks of conscience; for their form and profession sheweth what they should be, and if they were what they seem to be, all would be well. Men have light enough to take on the form of religion, and sin enough to resist the power of it. And therefore their judgment is the greater; for their whole life being a constant rebelling against the light, they are left to perish by their own deceivings: 2 Thes. ii. 10, 11, 'Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie.' The carnal christian being not brought to true faith and sincere repentance, God giveth them up that they may be deceived by every vain pretence.

[4.] Apostasy from grace received. Men are not only warmed, but begin to have a taste. They that take up with some profession of the things of God, but afterwards fall away again to looseness and vanity and worldliness, they are more left by God than others: Heb. vi. 4-6, 'For it is impossible for them who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance.' For they dishonour him more, and bring an evil report upon God. The devil hath more power over them; as a prisoner that hath made his escape, if he be taken afterwards, hath more chains put upon him: 2 Peter ii. 21, 22, 'For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them: for it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.' They themselves are made more incapable of ever owning the ways of God again; it is impossible they should renew themselves, it groweth up into wilful malice: Heb. x. 26, 'For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.' Grace will not pardon them, the Mediator will not intercede for them. *Apostatæ sunt maximi osores sui ordinis*—Apostates hate the ways they have professed: Hosea v. 2, 'The revolvers are profound to make slaughter.' None so cross and malicious and perverse in their cause.

[5.] Sottish despair (there is a raging despair, and a sottish despair; the one is when conscience is terrified, the other when it is stupefied), when to custom in sinning there is added a passionate will: Jer. ii. 25, 'Thou sayest, There is no hope; no, for I have loved strangers,

and after them will I go ;' Jer. xviii. 11, ' And they said, There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.' Προάρησις οὐκ ἐστὶν ἀδυνάτων, men do not use to consult about things that are impossible. It is said of the Israelites, Exod. vi. 9, ' They hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit and for cruel bondage.' Lust is so deeply rooted that they cannot help it ; the case is desperate, they are at a point ; as we use to say, Past cure, past care ; they grow out of heart, and so lie down under the power of their lusts ; they resolve to persist in their sins, to live as they list, and it is to no purpose to speak to them.

Thirdly, Of God's hardening as a father, in a way of the highest fatherly anger and displeasure. This may be so : Isa. lxiii. 17, ' O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear ? ' This is a partial hardness. There may be desertion in point of grace, though some tenderness left in the understanding, that discerneth good and evil ; in the conscience, that is dissatisfied in its present state ; in the will, that owneth the ways of God ; so that there is a general purpose to please him in all things. Yet the heart groweth dead and stupid ; there is an inaptness for holy things ; they are less sensible of the evil of sin ; they have not such delight in the word, nor rejoicing in hope, nor freedom for prayer, nor patience under afflictions, nor complacency in communion with God. And it is sad when it is so, when to sense there is little difference between them and the wicked ; there is hardness in a stone, and hardness in a piece of wax. I will show the causes of this, and the means to cure it.

1. The causes of this are—

[1.] Sinning against conscience. There are sins of daily incursion and sudden surreption ; and there are sins of presumption, into which God's children may in some rare cases fall, but then they make great waste and havoc in their souls ; as David's great sin, by which he lost that free spirit, and was forced to beg a new creation, as if all were to begin again : Ps. li. 10–12, ' Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me ; cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me ; restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me by thy free Spirit.' Many are the mischiefs which come by such sins. Partly God's love is obstructed, that he is not so ready to do them good : Isa. lix. 2, ' Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear ; ' that is, the good-will and favour of God is, as it were, bound up, and hindered from showing itself in all those gracious effects which otherwise it would put forth for our comfort and peace. He doth not actually pardon their sins, nor make them partakers of spiritual benefit sin so ample and full a measure as otherwise he would ; but holds his hand, and cuts you short in spiritual blessings, which otherwise he would plentifully dispense unto his people. Partly they exceedingly weaken the work of grace which is wrought upon their hearts. Their faith is more dead, their love is more cold than it was, hope is languid, the spiritual life is interrupted, and at a stand ; though the seed of God remains, yet it cannot put forth itself with such vigour and efficacy. Yea, they may never recover such a portion

of the Spirit as they had before: 2 Chron. xvii. 3, 'Jehoshaphat walked in the first ways of his father David,' as having some note of blemish in his latter ways. These sins, in short, as a wound in the body, let out our blood and strength. As a prodigal, that hath once broken after he hath been set up, is not trusted with a like stock again, so God's children may not recover that largeness of spirit and fulness of inward strength and comfort which they had before; as many after a great disease do not regain that pitch of health which formerly they had, but may carry the fruits of their disease with them to their graves. Partly because acts are intermitted. When the soul is distempered, it is unfit for action. Either duties are omitted, or else done in such an overly manner as doth increase our distemper, and harden us the more. In what a sorry fashion did David worship till God awakened his conscience by Nathan! Prayer is interrupted: 1 Peter iii. 7, 'As heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.'

[2.] Grieving the Spirit: Eph. iv. 30, 'And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. All sin is a grief to the Spirit, especially filthiness and bitterness. Compare this with ver. 29, 31, 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all malice.' Now the grieving of the Spirit makes a great breach in our grace and comfort, as the Spirit is our sanctifier and comforter. To speak only of the last: When the Spirit is grieved, we have not such a sense of God's love: 'For the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us,' Rom. v. 5. We have not that liberty and confidence in prayer we once had: 1 John iii. 21, 'Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.' Nor those lively hopes of glory and final redemption, in that text, Eph. iv. 30, 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.' Nor that comfort in reproaches, nor courage in afflictions, nor strength to resist sin, nor that readiness and cheerfulness in obedience that once they had. So that a christian is like Sampson when his locks are gone; all delightful communion with God is suspended, and a christian doth not act like a servant that is in his master's favour.

[3.] Carnal liberty. When a man giveth too much contentment to the flesh, the spirit or better part is in bonds: Ps. cxix. 37, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.' A man that lets loose the reins to worldly vanity will soon find hardness coming on his heart, and see a need to ask quickening grace: Luke xxi. 34, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life.' Worldly comforts over-affected or immoderately used clog and enslave the heart, and so we are more unpersuadable and disobedient to the motions of his Spirit, and the counsels of his grace. Therefore, if we will take heed that our hearts be not hardened, let them not out too freely to worldly things, lest they be withdrawn from God; but rejoice here as if you rejoiced not, that you may keep up your liberty to God.

[4.] Pride and self-sufficiency : 2 Chron. xxxii. 31, 'Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.' Paul was permitted to be buffeted, that he might be kept humble : 2 Cor. xii. 7, 'And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.' When you trust to yourselves, God leaveth you to yourselves ; and then we are as a glass without a bottom, broken as soon as out of hand : James iv. 6, 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.' It is not so much understood of a moral humility, or a lowly carriage towards men, as of an evangelical humility, which consists in brokenness of heart, or a sense of our unworthiness and weakness ; these are influenced by grace, but others are left to fall and miscarry by their own presumptuous confidence. And therefore, if we would not incur any degree of this judgment, we must take heed of pride and spiritual security. Those that feel the daily and hourly necessity of grace have more of the supplies of the Spirit, they are oftener waiting upon God : Ps. xxv. 5, 'On thee do I wait all the day.' Christ hath taught us to beg daily bread, daily pardon, and daily strength against temptations, that he might engage us to be often with God, and keep in a constant dependence on him, that the heart might be kept more awful, tender, and serious.

[5.] Carelessness and spiritual sloth. When we carelessly entertain the motions of his Spirit, and lie upon the bed of ease, he is gone : Cant. v. 2, 3, 'I sleep, but my heart waketh : it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled : for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on ? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them ?' and ver. 6, 'I rose up to open to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone.' God's children may stifle many a pressing conviction and motion in their souls, hang off from the throne of grace and other good duties, and upon every frivolous pretence keep away from God. This unkind and ungracious dealing will cost them dear. Neglect of the means of grace quencheth the Spirit : 1 Thes. v. 19, 20, 'Quench not the Spirit ; despise not prophesyings.' Therefore we should be more diligent in the use of means : Mark iv. 24, 'Unto you that hear shall more be given.' We must more carefully obey the sanctifying motions of the Spirit if we mean to avoid hardness of heart.

2. The means to cure it.

[1.] Bewail the evil, and complain of it before God, who alone can help us. We complain of hard times, of the hard dealings of men, of hard duties. *Durus est hic sermo*, this is a hard saying, and who can hear it ? But we seldom complain of that which we should most complain of, hardness of heart. The Lord is pleased with these complaints : 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.' Spiritual distempers must be most laid to heart. God's children in some degree are inflexible and insensible ; there is too great

touchiness, and impatience to be admonished, too much disobedience to the Spirit's sanctifying motions; they are too often benumbed with the delights of the flesh, and cares of the world.

[2.] Hasten your repentance and return to God: Ps. cxix. 60, 'I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments;' Gal. i. 16, 'Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.' To press this, let us consider these things—

(1.) How soon God may take an advantage against us we cannot tell. He hath not told us at what number of calls he will depart, and give us over to our own hearts; but he hath bid us not to delay, and lose the present season: Heb. iii. 7, 8, 'To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.' The command is as express for the time as for the duty; there is no season like the *τὸ νῦν*, the present season. It is but a flattering presumption to think that God will always stand waiting. Felix had but one call that we hear of, and he fooled it away to a more convenient season.

(2.) Every day spent in an unregenerate condition brings us nearer to destruction, and puts us upon a greater disadvantage: Rom. xiii. 11, 'Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.' *Apari*, we may say; now is our damnation and final impenitency nearer.

(3.) Every call sets us yet nearer still. Sins are ripened by every call, as iron oft heated and oft quenched is the harder. When men are often sermon-scorched, they prove at length sermon-proof. The holy God will not cast his pearls before swine: Isa. lv. 6, 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.'

(4.) A presumptuous going on in sin, upon a supposition that we shall repent at last, is the very next door and step to hell. You wittingly continue under the devil's power. Life is uncertain. God may take you away in the act of sin, as he did Zimri and Cosbi, Korah and his accomplices; or he may deny that space to call for mercy that you think of, for death doth not always give warning; or by an apoplexy, or lethargy, or some stupefying distemper, he may deprive you of the use of your reason. Let this rouse and awaken you out of your fond presumptions.

[3.] Beware of tendencies to it, when the heart begins to harden; as—

(1.) When you are not sensible of God's withdrawals, when there are any suspensions of his grace, the comfort and conduct of his Spirit, and the soul is stupid. It is sad not to be sensible of the accesses and recesses of the Spirit: Mat. ix. 25, 'The days shall come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.' Grace stands in a continual watchfulness and observation of all God's dealings. Felt desertions are grievous, but not so dangerous as those that are unfelt. It is some good degree of grace not to be quiet without God.

(2.) When you scorn at reproof, when you are not only actors, but defenders of sin, and bear up yourselves impudently and stubbornly in your transgressions: Jer. 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 are of an unteachable, untractable disposition; they

think we rail when we do reprove. The devil hath then two victories—one by the scorn and opposition that is cast on the reprove, and the other by the hardening of the heart of the fretting and reprovèd sinner; that anger that should be turned upon the sin is turned upon the reproof.

(3.) When ordinances grow powerless. You live under ordinances, and receive no profit by them; you have much means, and can see no fruit: Isa. vi. 9, 10, 'Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.' The word is powerful; if it softens not, it hardens.

(4.) When our worldly comforts are apt to prove a snare to us: Mal. ii. 2, 'I will curse your blessings, yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.' When your table is made your snare, your meat becomes your poison, your estate is but as golden fetters to bind and chain your heart to the world; your honours blow you up. When you do not take comforts as the mercies and blessings of God, to praise him for them, and to devote yourselves in the strength of them to his service.

(5.) When corrections go away without fruit: Jer. v. 3, 'Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return.' God will have an account of every dispensation; afflictions are upon the register as well as mercies. Christians should never advance more in christianity than under the cross.

(6.) When we are lazy and loath to admit Christ into the heart. It being thronged with creature comforts, we keep him at the door knocking, and will not open to him: Rev. iii. 20, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock;' Cant. v. 3, 'I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?' This laziness and spiritual security is a cause and beginning of hardness of heart.

(7.) When trivial and slight temptations prevail against the sense of our duty; when for a piece of bread, and handfuls of barley they will transgress, and sell the righteous for a pair of shoes; when they are as a stone to God's counsels, but as wax to all other things.

(8.) When the heart grows vain and frothy; for a slight heart will be an hard heart; or God gives men over to a reprobate sense and an injudicious mind. These are the forerunners of hardness of heart, which we should beware of, and carefully watch against.