

## SERMON UPON MALACHI III. 17.

---

*And I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*—MAL. iii. 17.

THESE words are part of the promise which God maketh to them that fear him, or to those who are good in evil times. In them take notice of—

1. The blessing promised, that God will spare them.

2. The manner of this indulgence, amplified and set forth by the carriage of a father to his son; wherein a double reason of this indulgence is intimated—

[1.] Propriety, 'His own son.'

[2.] Towardliness, or obedience, his son 'that serveth him.' Parents are not severe to any of their children, especially the dutiful.

[1.] Propriety, 'His own son.' A faulty child is a child still, and therefore not so easily turned out of the family as a servant. We often forget the duty of children, but God doth not forget the mercy of a father. A prodigal child hath some encouragement from his relation, though his manners be not answerable: Luke xv. 18, 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father; but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.' A father will not be severe to a returning prodigal, as God is not to penitent sinners.

[2.] But this is not all; it is not a prodigal son, a rebellious son, that is here considered, who by Moses' law might be turned out of doors and stoned: Deut. xxi. 18-21, 'If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, that will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and when they have chastened him, will not hearken to them; then shall his father and mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he shall die.' Such a law did God make against disobedience to parents. And if children put off all respect of natural duty, parents were to put off all bowels and compassion towards them. But this is not the case here; it is a good child that is here spoken of: 'His own son that serveth him.' When a son is dutiful for the main, a parent will not be harsh and

severe to him upon every failing. Whatever men are to slaves, or to the children of others who serve them, yet they cannot so divest themselves of the heart of a parent as to be inexorable to their own children, and correct them severely for a lesser fault. This is the expression that God useth to set forth his indulgence and compassion towards them that fear him.

*Doct.* That God's sparing his children, notwithstanding their manifold infirmities, is one of the choice privileges of them that fear him.

I shall discuss this point in this method—(1.) I will show you what it is to spare; (2.) That this is a choice privilege; (3.) The grounds and reasons of this indulgence or sparing that he useth towards them; (4.) The qualification of the persons.

I. What it is to spare them. It is seen on two occasions—when he cometh to accept them, and when he cometh to afflict them; in accepting their imperfect services, and not correcting them at all, or correcting them in measure and in mercy.

1. Sometimes sparing is spoken of in scripture with respect to some judgment to be inflicted, and so it is an act flowing from mercy, withdrawing or moderating deserved judgments; for we by sin deserve the sharpest dispensations of God's anger and wrath, and so God is said to spare, as withholding or withdrawing the judgment: Joel ii. 17, 'Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach.' Sometimes as moderating, when he doth not stir up all his wrath; as it is sweet to find mercy remembered in wrath, and that he will moderate the judgment to us, and make it more sufferable: Ezra ix. 13, 'Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve.'

2. At other times sparing is spoken of with respect to a duty to be accepted. We need to be spared in our best actions, they being defective and defiled. Nehemiah prayeth, Neh. xiii. 22, 'Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.' He speaketh this when he had procured God's holy ordinances to be duly observed; he pleadeth no merit before God, but desireth rather to be spared and forgiven, for he was conscious to his own many failings. Well, then, God spareth when he forgiveth our sins, and pardoneth the manifold imperfections of our services.

II. That this is a choice privilege. So it will appear to be if we consider—(1.) The holy nature of God; (2.) The strictness and purity of his law, both as to the precept and sanction; (3.) Our incapacity of appearing in the judgment; (4.) The sense which conscience hath of sin. All these must be considered, because usually men heal their wounds slightly, and afterwards they fester into a more dangerous sore. And again, we are not affected with God's pardoning mercy, because we do not see with what difficulty it is brought about.

1. The holy nature and justice of God. His nature inclineth him to hate sin, and his justice to punish it: Josh. xxiv. 19, 'Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God, he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins. This he speaketh not to discourage them, but that they might not have slight thoughts of God and his service, as if he would be put off with anything, and would lightly and easily pardon their errors: Hab. i. 13, 'Thou art of purer eyes than

to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity;’ that is, without taking vengeance of it. The least sin is an offence to God so pure and holy: 1 Sam. vi. 20, ‘Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?’ that is, this God who is so jealous of his institutions. All this is mentioned to show that God doth not make little reckoning of sin, and that which lesseneth the benefit of pardon in our thoughts is usually some abasing of the nature of God. It is not from magnifying his mercy, as it is discovered in Christ and the new covenant, but from some wrong conceit of God, as if he were not so just and holy as he is represented to be: Ps. l. 21, ‘These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself.’ Because he doth not always inflict punishment, they think sin is no such great matter, and not so hateful to God as indeed it is. Oh no! God, that is so willing to spare his people notwithstanding their infirmities, doth not cease to be holy, nor his law leave off to be righteous; therefore this is the means to heighten this privilege.

2. The purity and strictness of his law, both as to the precept and sanction.

[1.] The precept, which reacheth to the soul and the operations of every faculty, thoughts, purposes, and desires, as well as words and actions. Therefore when David had admired the purity of the law, he adds, Ps. xix. 12, ‘Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.’ Oh! the multitude of our errors that we know, and the multitude of them we know not! But God knoweth them. How imperfect is our obedience! How many times have we transgressed this holy law of God! Many failings we do not observe, and those which we do observe we are not able to enumerate. If we were to be judged by this law, the holiest and the humblest, the most penitent and believing soul, and the soul that most loveth God, cannot abide the trial; and were it not for this promise and its fellows, what could we look for but eternal ruin?

[2.] As to the sanction, the law saith, ‘The soul that sinneth shall die,’ Ezek. xviii. 4. Now this being the sentence of God delivered in a righteous law, how shall we escape it? Surely it cannot fall to the ground; unless some provision be made, it will eternally take place. This should the more affect us, because it is often verified in the course of God’s providence: Rom. i. 18, ‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;’ Heb. ii. 2, ‘For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.’ Now, when others are punished and we are spared, surely we ought to be affected with his severity towards them, but towards us goodness.

3. Our incapacity of appearing before God by reason of the multitude of our sins. There are none of God’s children but have a great and vast debt upon them; and if God should call them to an account, and should not spare, not one of them could stand or appear in court: Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, ‘If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.’ There is not a man to be found who hath not some fault and failing which would render him incapable of God’s favour. If he should

proceed in just severity against us, who could stand? Not, Who among the wicked? but, Who among the regenerate, or the people of God? so many are the frailties and slips of their lives; and Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.' It is impossible for such a frail, sinful, imperfect creature as man is to appear before God's exact tribunal with any comfort and hope. But he will not charge them on us with severity, but spare us with mercy.

4. The sense which conscience hath of these sins.

[1.] Consider it in its old natural bondage, somewhat of which yet remaineth while sin remaineth. So conscience accuseth of the sins that are committed: Rom. ii. 15, 'Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.' And fears the death threatened: Rom. i. 32, 'Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death.' Now can it be appeased unless the Lord spare, or set up some way of grace which alloweth pardon for our failings? And if the Lord spare, it should be as welcome to us as a pardon to a condemned man.

[2.] Consider it as it is enlightened and renewed by the Holy Spirit. It is true it doth not produce such a fear of wrath as before, but a greater apprehension of the evil of sin, because of the increase of light and love, both which entender the heart. As their light and love increase, so doth their trouble about sin: Rom. vii. 9, 'For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died;' and ver. 24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' They are ashamed of that folly and filthiness and unkindness that is in sin, and are grieved for the relics of corruption: Ezek. xvi. 6, 'And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live.' So Rom. vi. 21, 'What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.' Therefore if God will spare, and not impute their trespasses to them, they are more apprehensive of this mercy, than possibly others can be. None see so many sins, and none see such heinousness in sin, and are more deeply affected with it. In a clear glass of water the least mote is espied. They have a greater dread of God's holiness, a more sincere respect to his law, a greater reverence for the sentence of it, a more firm belief of his threatenings, a more earnest desire to please him, and so a greater grief for offending him. Therefore if he will pardon and pass by their infirmities, they are the more apprehensive of the privilege.

III. The grounds and reasons of this indulgence or sparing which God useth towards them.

1. God's merciful nature, which inclineth him to pass by the infirmities of his saints. This appeareth by the description of God given to Moses, when the Lord proclaimed his name: Exod. xxxiv. 6, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.' Since this is the description which God giveth of himself, therefore it deserveth to be weighed by us.

The first notion is merciful, whereby God's nature inclineth him to succour those that are in misery by reason of sin. The next is gracious, which implieth his self-inclination to do good to his creatures, without any precedent obligation on their parts. The third is long-suffering, or slowness to anger; he is not hasty to revenge the wrongs done him by the creature. He often pitieth wicked men, so far as to prevent the temporal punishment, and spareth them long when he might destroy them. The last is, 'abundant in goodness and truth;' that is, expressing his kindness and bounteous nature many ways; not at one time and in one sort only, but upon all occasions, and in all ways wherein we stand in need of his help, and therefore will deal tenderly with his people: Micah vii. 8, 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.' If we had a due sense of the nature of God, we should have much relief against the evil merit of sin, and a greater hope that he will deal in a fatherly manner with us. He had told them of great things God would do for them; now in the apprehension of the sensible sinner, it is sin chiefly which standeth in the way of their mercies; therefore God will pardon sin in his people in such a wonderful way as shall exceed all their thoughts. He will not call them to a strict account for them, and though he beginneth to reckon with them, yet he will spare them, and moderate his anger, and be reconciled to them. It shall not go on to eternal wrath, nor over-long temporal evils; and all because of the pleasure which he taketh in showing acts of mercy rather than acts of vengeance.

2. The satisfaction of Christ, 'Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God, Rom. iii. 25. In him God will satisfy his justice, and accept of the believing penitent. He spared not his Son that he might spare us: Rom. viii. 32, 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all;' Isa. liii. 10, 'It pleased the Lord to bruise him, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.' In the same verse Christ's bruises and our salvation are called 'the pleasure of the Lord.' The Lord was willing of both, and well content with both.

3. His gracious covenant, which may be considered—(1.) As to the terms or conditions it requires; (2.) As to the penalties which God hath reserved a liberty to inflict.

[1.] As to the terms or conditions propounded. It requireth perfection, and accepteth of sincerity. It requires perfection: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' Surely the covenant of grace requireth perfection, for the righteous law is adopted into the frame of it as the rule of our duty; otherwise our defects were no sins, and otherwise allowed failings were consistent with sincerity; and where shall we then stop? otherwise we were not obliged to strive after perfection; for it were only a work of supererogation, not of necessary duty to press towards the mark. Therefore certainly it doth invite us to the highest degree of goodness, and maketh perfection itself our duty. And there is mercy in it, that our duty and happiness may agree, and we may not have liberty to be bad

and miserable, but ever bound to our own felicity, which consisteth in an exact conformity to God, and the most perfect subjection to him. But yet it accepteth of sincerity. If our hearts be upright with God, and set to obey, please, and glorify him, and we make it our main work so to do, God will not enter into judgment with his servants, nor be strict to his children, nor condemn those that love and fear him: 2 Chron. xxx. 18–20, ‘But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.’ Therefore he taketh not advantage of our infirmities to ruin us. Indeed, as the covenant commanded perfection, it noteth our infirmities, to humble us, in order to our cure; but as it accepteth of sincerity, Christ looketh not to our infirmities as a judge, but as a tender physician, to rid us of them, and free us from them more and more.

[2.] As to the afflictions and penalties, which God hath reserved a liberty to inflict, notwithstanding the new covenant, they all infer his sparing of us; for they are but temporal evils, when we have deserved eternal; and the temporal evil is sent to prevent eternal. It is true they are merited by our sin, but yet they turn to our good; they are in themselves the effects of God’s displeasure, and parts of our misery, but by them he speaketh to the conscience of a sinner, and sealeth instruction to our hearts, that we no longer deal perversely; for the rod hath a voice: Micah vi. 9, ‘Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.’ In short, they are in themselves, and in their own nature, evils of punishment; but their property is changed, and so they are acts of God’s faithfulness: Ps. cxix. 75, ‘I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me;’ and they are sent to us as a needful medicine: Isa. xxvii. 9, ‘By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin;’ and are profitable acts of God’s fatherly discipline: Heb. xii. 10, ‘For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.’ Mercy turneth them to our benefit. It is our part to seek after the benefit; it is God’s part to give it, and to remove the affliction, and that is his sparing. *Hic ure, hic seca, modo in æternum parcas*; or, Burn me, or cut me, or do what thou wilt with me here, so thou spare me as to eternal punishment, said one of the ancients.

4. From his comfortable relation to us. He is our Father, and a father will not be severe to his children, partly out of instinct of nature, which inclineth the brutes to their young ones, till they can shift for themselves; and partly from reason, which should guide men, they being our own flesh, blood, and bone, a new and second self; the child is the father multiplied, and the father continued; and partly out of conscience of God’s command, who hath enjoined this duty on parents, to be tender of their children. Now if God be our Father, and will take the relation upon himself, he will do whatever this relation implieth: Ps. ciii. 13, ‘Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth those that fear him.’ Yea, whatever is in the creature is ascribed to God *per modum eminentiæ*—by way of eminency; *tam*

*pater nemo*—no one is so much a father as God: Luke xi. 13, 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' So in the present case—

[1.] There is sparing as to acceptance. A father, if there be any blemish in his child, he will pity it, and cover it. He accepteth in good part the willingness of his son to serve him, though he, through weakness, fail in the exact manner of performance; so our heavenly Father accepteth of a willing and honest heart, though we come short of that perfection required in the law. His choice servants have had their blemishes, yet their merciful Father giveth them this commendation, that they have walked before him with a perfect heart. So doth God to David, Asa, and Jehoshaphat: 1 Kings xv. 5, 'David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything which he commanded him, save only in the matter of Uriah. The brand of that wilful sin sticketh upon him, but other things are passed by.'

[2.] There is God's sparing as to punishment and correction. It is true that God hath reserved a liberty to scourge his children, but still he doth it as a father: Heb. xii. 6, 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' To spare the rod is to spoil the child, but still he useth it as a father; which is seen, partly because he cometh to it unwillingly. There are tears in his eyes, as it were, when the rod is in his hand: Lam. iii. 33, 'He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.' And partly because he doth it in measure, and with great moderation. In chastising his people, he dealeth otherwise with his people than others, to whom he hath not the like respect or relation. He debateth with them in measure, or with much moderation, meting out their sufferings in a due proportion: Isa. xxvii. 8, 'In measure when it shooteth forth thou wilt debate with it; he stayeth the rough wind in the day of the east wind.' He dealeth with them as a father, with others as a judge; with the one out of love, with the other out of vindictive wrath: Jer. x. 24, 'O Lord correct me, but with judgment, not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.' With his people not according to the strict rule of law and justice, but according to his wisdom and love. And lastly, because he soon relenteth.' 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.' What! is my dear son, my darling child, in such a sad condition? are these the moanings of Ephraim? surely I am mindful of him, my bowels are towards him, as those of a mother towards her tender child. Thus God showeth himself a father.

IV. The qualification of the persons to whom God maketh this promise, in the context, 'They that feared the Lord and thought upon his name;' those whom God owneth for his peculiar people. See the same qualification, Ps. ciii. 13, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth those that fear him.'

1. It is necessary for them; for the best need to be spared, as a father spareth his own son that serveth him, or else what would become

of them? If they were not under such a pardoning covenant, how could they maintain any peace in their own souls, being guilty of so many daily failings, which they resent more tenderly than others do fouler faults? and that they are also more sensible of the effects of his anger in his providence; for they dare not despise the chastening of the Lord, but have a greater reverence for their Father's anger than the rest of the world have; and therefore the Lord expresseth his indulgence, for their comfort and satisfaction. Those that walk most closely with God, and exactly according to rule, need peace and mercy: Gal. vi. 16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.' We still stand in need of mercy, free and undeserved mercy, that our failings may be pardoned, our persons and duties accepted, our afflictions moderated, and we may be accepted and go to heaven at last.

2. It is peculiar to them. There is a conditional offer of pardon to the wicked if they will repent, but fatherly dealing and indulgence is assured to those who are admitted into God's family. He hath a paternal affection towards them, and they have filial dispositions towards him; and though he doth express his common goodness and bounty to all his creatures, yet his special and fatherly love is to his saints, to whom he hath given a new being and an holy nature. The whole commerce that is between God and them, on God's part is fatherly, on their part childlike; on God's part in a way of grace and love, pardoning their sins and frailties; and their carriage is loving and obedient unto God. Love is at the bottom of God's dispensations towards them, and at the bottom of their duty unto God. He loveth them as a father, and they love him as dear children. Fatherly benefits are fullest, sweetest, and surest, and filial duty is the choicest. Now those that are not children cannot look for a child's portion. Certainly the obstinate and impenitent are excluded: Deut. xxix. 20, 'The Lord will not spare him, but 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.' But if any fear him and serve him, they may hope for his mercy: Ps. cxlvii. 11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.' They that live in a constant obedience to his commands, and an holy trust and affiance in him, not by any tenure of merit in themselves, but free and undeserved mercy in him, they are spared, they are accepted, yea, they are blessed, and God delights in their welfare.

3. It is congruous, proper, and suitable; for this is God's end in sparing, that he may be revered and feared: Ps. cxxx. 4, 'But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' He intended forgiveness as a new foundation of obedience, love, and thankfulness; that we should love him more, because forgiven; be the more holy because pardoned; as 'she loved much because much was forgiven her,' Luke vii. 47. Contempt and commonness of spirit in dealing with God is the worst use we can make of it. Therefore if there be no love to God, nor reverence of him, nor delight in him, if you take the more liberty to sin upon a hope that God will spare you, and not be so severe to you, though you indulge yourselves in pleasing the flesh, these abuse his grace, and turn it into wantonness; some

more openly, others more secretly ; as they are leavened with this taint, they draw encouragements from it to sin and folly ; whereas the true temper is, to 'fear the Lord and his goodness,' Hosea iii. 4; to have a deeper reverence of God because of his goodness in the new covenant; and his pardoning mercy should be the great engagement to gospel obedience.

*Use 1.* Is caution and warning to the people of God, that they do not entertain jealousies of God, as one that watcheth all opportunities and advantages against us to punish us, as if he seemed to be glad at our halting. No; this is a blasphemy against his holy and gracious nature, and a flat contradiction to the discoveries and expressions of his love in his covenant. Yet such thoughts are wont to haunt us. Job's words import little less: Job iv. 16, 17, 'For now thou numberest my steps; dost thou not watch over my sin? my transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity.' He speaketh as if God severely marked, and would strictly call his people to an account for all their sins. This apprehension of God's severe dealing is very natural to us in our sore affliction; for Job so speaketh as if God had strictly marked all his sin, and kept the record sealed up in a bag, to make out his process against him.

*Object.* But what other thoughts can we have when troubles come thick and threefold, and God seemeth to be reckoning with us for our transgressions?

*Ans. 1.* God's sparing mercy may sometimes be concealed, and not always visibly expressed to the sense of the believer, and faith should see mercy in God's heart when his hand is heavy and smart upon us: Job x. 13, 'These things hast thou hid in thine heart; I know that this is with thee.' What things? Life, and favour, and gracious supports, and visits of his love, mentioned in the former verse. God's children encourage themselves with his hidden favour, though to appearance God covereth himself with wrath and frowns. His present severity cannot persuade them that all his mercy is lost, and clean gone and forgotten. They can see it in God's heart, though they see it not in his hand, and it be not visible to their own sense. Though they feel him as an enemy, yet they will trust him as a friend. They know he will spare them, even then when he pursueth them with the strokes of his wrath; for articles of faith are not to be laid aside because of the contradiction of sense.

2. There is some sparing even in his striking; for if he bring one evil to prevent a greater evil, to save us from eternal misery, that is mercy. He striketh for a while that he may spare for ever: 1 Cor. xi. 32, 'For when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.' A man would be pulled out of the deep waters, though it be by the hair of his head, and his arm broken in the rescue. If he take away any good thing from us to bestow some greater good, we have no cause to complain; for surely the greater should be preferred before the lesser, and the felicity of the soul in grace and glory should be preferred before the good of the body. God had neither spared nor saved any if he had not blasted their worldly happiness. Surely God doth not envy to us our worldly comforts, but taketh them from us when they are likely to do us hurt.

*Use 2.* To show us the privilege of them that fear God, or have a sonlike and childlike affection to him. He speaketh not here of the first grace infused into the penitent, but of those that are already admitted into his family. Surely their privilege is exceeding great.

1. They need not be discouraged in their duties though they be imperfect. God will not call them to a strict account. Christ, when he feasts with his spouse, 'he will eat the honey with the honeycomb,' Cant. v. 1; he accepts all heartily. He that forgave all their sins at first will excuse their infirmities. They shall be tenderly dealt withal, and their failings passed over, as a parent passeth over an escape in an obedient son. Alas! if God did not spare us for our best works and choicest services, who could stand? Our duties need a pardon as well as those actions which are downright sins, for they are mixed with sin.

2. That he will spare us as to afflictions and judgments.

[1.] Sometimes God may spare others for their sakes, as he offereth to spare Sodom if there were fifty righteous persons found in it: Gen. xviii. 26, 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, I will spare all the place for their sakes.' Afterwards the number was brought down to ten, ver. 32. So God gave to Paul the lives of all that sailed with him in the ship, Acts xxvii. 24, though in that imminent danger, for his sake.

[2.] When he cometh to reckon with the nation, or the community in which they live, he many times spared them, and they are not swept away in the common judgment: Isa. iii. 10, 'Say ye to the righteous, It shall be well with him.' God will put a difference between them and others; not always, but when he pleaseth. God may protect them in calamitous times. The Lord knows how to do it, how to make distinctions: 2 Peter ii. 9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.'

[3.] If they are involved in the common judgment (as two dry sticks may set a green on fire), they may see some moderation and glimpses of favour: Hab. iii. 2, 'That in the midst of wrath God remembers mercy.' Either it is sanctified, or they are supported under it, or the evil is mitigated.

[4.] If the worst fall out, yet they are spared, because they are not cast into hell. If they are not exempted from temporal judgments, yet they are delivered from wrath to come; and that should satisfy christians: Heb. x. 39, 'We believe to the saving of the soul;' 1 Peter i. 9, 'Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Though the body and its interests be endamaged, yet the soul is saved, which is our great hope.'

*Use 3.* Is to instruct us in our duty with respect to this choice privilege.

1. Let us be affected with the love of God, that he will spare us as a man spareth his own son. If God should deal with us according to the merit of our sins, and be strict upon us, what would become of the best of us. Surely God seeth all our failings: Heb. iv. 12, 'All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do;' and doth disallow them, and is displeased with them: 2 Sam. xi. 27, 'But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.' If you deny

the first, you deny his being ; if you deny the second, you debase his holiness and righteousness. And his law condemneth them as worthy of punishment: Gal. iii. 10, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' Whence then cometh our safety? From the new covenant founded in Christ's blood, by which the sentence of condemnation is vacated: Rom. viii. 1, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ.' This sentence is repealed by a new act of God's great mercy and favour in the new covenant.

2. Let us believe the certainty of it on the grounds before mentioned, viz., the merciful nature of God. The design of the gospel is to represent him amiable to man: 1 John iv. 8, 'God is love.' The satisfaction of Christ: 1 John iv. 10, 'God sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.' His gracious covenant: Ps. xxv. 10, 'All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant.' His fatherly goodness: Jer. iii. 4, 'Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?'

3. Keep your qualification clear. Besides the ransom, our uprightness must be interpreted: Job xxxiii. 23, 24, 'If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom.' If we do not continue to fear God, or abate our reverence towards him, we lose our comfort. Therefore, if you would stand right in God's favour, our love and fear must be increased towards this good God; and if he will stand upon the exactness of his law, we must not stand upon our own interests and the gratifications of the flesh. We should not spare any beloved lust or interest, so we may please and glorify God.

---