

## SERMON UPON MARK II. 17.

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*When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.—MARK ii. 17.*

THE words are Christ's apology for eating with publicans and sinners. They thought no Jew was to eat or drink or converse with publicans, whom they looked upon as the vilest sort of men. Publicans are often joined with sinners in the Jewish scorn; thereby is intended 'sinners of the gentiles,' Gal. ii. 15, 'publicans and heathens,' Mat. xviii. 17; because by reason of their calling they conversed often with gentiles. Their calling was counted sordid; hiring or farming the tributes. It is an Hebrew proverb, Take not a wife out of a family in which is a publican, because they are all thieves. They were wicked sinners in common repute. Now for Christ to be entertained in the house of a publican, and to converse so familiarly with publicans, this the pharisaical strictness and rigorous institution could not endure. The cavil was brought to his disciples and followers. They muttered and whispered about them words that tended to disprove this familiar converse, as not becoming the person which Christ took upon himself. The old hypocrites deal not directly with the master himself, but the young converts. Christ, when he heard it, vindicates his practice—

1. By representing the agreeableness of this converse to his office; represented in a proverb, 'The whole have no need of the physician, but the sick.' Two things are herein represented—

[1.] That sin is a sore sickness; a disease not of the body, but the soul. A mortal disease it will at length prove, unless it be in time cured; and the disease is the more grievous because we are so insensible of it.

[2.] That Christ alone is the true physician of souls. He knoweth our malady and our remedy, and is ready, and offereth his help to cure, if we will but submit to his prescriptions. Now both make up his argument: Where doth the physician's work lie but among the sick?

2. From the end of his commission, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' Where observe—

[1.] The persons with whom he hath to do, 'Not the righteous, but sinners.'

[2.] The way that he taketh, 'He calleth.'

[3.] The end, or means of cure on their parts, 'Repentance.'

[1.] The persons concerned.

(1.) Negatively, 'Not the righteous.' A man may be righteous really or putatively. Really there are none such before the tribunal of God of the sons of Adam. Either men must disclaim their stock or own their guilt. Putatively there are many such; they have a conceit that they are righteous. The pharisees 'trusted in themselves that they were righteous,' Luke xviii. 9. Now men puffed up with a spiritual pride, and a vain opinion of their own goodness and righteousness, are altogether unfit to yield obedience to Christ's call, whereby he calleth them out of their sins. They are so good and holy already, they need no repentance. The heart-whole need not the physician; he hath no work to do among them. They have no need of his skill; they do not value him, they care not for him.

(2.) Positively and affirmatively, 'But sinners.' Those that are really so, and so in their own opinion and estimation; these Christ calleth for; these have work for him to do.

[2.] The way which he taketh for their cure, 'He calleth;' as a teacher from heaven he thus acquainteth them with the way of their recovery. Christ hath a double relation, for the discharge of which he came into the world—as an high priest and apostle, Heb. iii. 1. Both agree in this, that they concern our recovery, or the remedying of our lapsed estate; and that for the discharge of both these offices he came into the world. Both are the highest officer in both churches: Luke xix. 10, 'The Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost;' 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a true and faithful saying, that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' But they differ that the work of the one office lieth with God, the other with man. The one respects the reconciling God to us; so as an high priest he made our peace with God by the merit of his sacrifice: Col. i. 20, 'By the blood of his cross making peace.' The other concerneth the reconciling us to God by the change of our hearts. This he manageth by a call and invitation; partly by himself in person, as a teacher from heaven discovering the way how we may get again into the favour of God, and be restored to his service; partly by his ministers, whom he employeth in his stead: 2 Cor. v. 18–20, 'And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God.' The function and office, *κλήσεως εἰς μετάνοιαν*, of calling men to repentance, belonged to his apostolical office, as a messenger sent from the bosom of God to acquaint us with his heart, how he standeth affected to our recovery. This latter is here spoken of. This he doth by calling.

[3.] The work, or means of cure which he prescribeth, is 'Repentance.' Our misery lay in sin, and we begin our happiness by repentance. Christ did not come to give liberty to any to live in sin; this is to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, Jude 4. As he came to die for sinners and to save sinners, so he came to call sinners to

repentance; the one as a priest, the other as a king, the last as a prophet.

*Doct.* That the special business for which Christ was sent into the world as the great teacher of the church, was to remedy the collapsed state of sinners by calling them to repentance.

I shall prove three things—(1.) That we are all sinners in a lapsed estate; (2.) That he recovereth us out of this lapsed estate by calling us; (3.) The way or means is by repentance.

I. That his work lieth with sinners, when he interposed as a mediator between God and men. This I shall discover in three considerations—

1. That man is now in a lapsed or fallen estate from his primitive integrity, and none are righteous till Christ calleth them. That men are fallen from their primitive integrity, and become sinners, is a truth evidenced by scripture and experience. Scripture: Rom. iii. 23, 'We have all sinned, and are come short of the glory of God;' that is, his glorious image: 1 Cor. xi. 8, 'He is the image and glory of God, as the woman is the glory of the man;' 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord;' that for the term glory. So Eccles. vii. 29, 'God made man upright, but he sought out many inventions.' Man, as he came out of God's hands, was an holy and happy creature, created with a disposition which did enable and incline him to love, please, and obey God; but Adam had his inventions, and his posterity theirs. They would not be at God's finding, but their own, and so plunged themselves in all manner of sin and misery. Thus the sun that shone in the dawning of our creation was soon eclipsed. But experience showeth us this as well as scripture: there is a greater proneness in us to evil than to good, and a manifest disproportion in our faculties to things carnal and spiritual, and this both universal and very early, which is a plain evidence of the degeneration of mankind; and from thence results, as all disorders in conversation, so misery and death. Certainly if we did often and seriously consider what a sinful womb we came from, how deformed and ugly in the sight of God we came from it, how we began our life with crying and weeping, and are all our days obnoxious to wrath and condemnation, and, whatever hath been our portion in the world, yet shortly we must die, and sink into the pit eternally, it would more awaken us. In the general, this is enough to our purpose, that man is in a lapsed estate, under the guilt of sin and desert of punishment.

2. That out of this misery man is unable to deliver and recover himself. Not able to reconcile or propitiate God to himself, or himself to God; not able to redeem himself, or give a sufficient ransom or recompense to God's provoked justice: Ps. xlix. 8, 'For the redemption of the soul is precious, and ceaseth for ever.' There is but one way of coming to this, which is by the death of the Messiah. Not able to change his own heart: Job xiv. 4, 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.' All that we do savoureth of our unclean original. We cannot cure and remedy this evil; otherwise Christ needed not to have died for us. If man had been by other means cured, the heavenly physician needed not come to save them. It is denied to all the living.

3. Those who are sensible of this are nextly called; not sinners as sinners, but sensible sinners. Those that know themselves to be so; sensible sinners, who are willing to return to their obedience to God, expecting their help and discharge from God's grace in Christ. It is opposed to such as are righteous in their own eyes; such as do in some measure feel their sins, are humbled for them, desirous to be freed from them; lost sinners, broken-hearted, and grieved, and wounded for their transgressions, these are respected in Christ's commission: Isa. lxi. 1, 2, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening the prison doors to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' Here is Christ's calling to his ministry, and the exercise of his prophetic office described: Sent to preach the spiritual deliverance from sin and Satan. But to whom? To such as are humbled, and thoroughly touched with a lively sense of their sin; for which purpose God maketh use of legal sorrow to awaken sinners and prepare them before conversion.

II. That Christ recovereth us out of this lapsed estate by calling. There is a twofold calling of Christ by which he calleth men—(1.) Outward; (2.) Inward.

1. Outwardly, by the ministry of the word, by which he inviteth men to come out of their sins, offering grace and salvation in the outward means. Thus John preached repentance: Mat. iii. 20, 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.' When the kingdom of grace was about to be set up by the gospel, the great duty called for was repentance; for the gospel findeth men involved in an evil way, like madmen out of their wits, and they must return to their wits again if they would be capable of it. Now they must change their course if they will receive benefit by it. Thus John preached, and Jesus Christ came with the same form of proclamation: Mark i. 15, 'The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.' The great business to which he called was to be willing to own the benefit offered by Christ, and to return to the duty which they owed to their creator. So his apostles, when sent abroad by him, spake to men in the same note: Acts ii. 38, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you, for the remission of sins;' and Acts iii. 19, 'Repent, that your sins may be blotted out.' They offered pardon and life upon these terms.

2. Inwardly, by the effectual working of the blessed Spirit, inclining and moving their hearts to obey that outward calling in forsaking their sins; and turning to the Lord by true repentance. We have need of a Saviour to help us to repentance as well as to help us to pardon, and God hath exalted him to such an end: Acts iii. 26, 'God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities;' Acts v. 31, 'Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.' He by the gospel giveth leave to repent: Acts xi. 18, 'And when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, That then God also to the gentiles granted repentance to life,' which is a great mercy. The law doth not say, I will not the death of a sinner, but that he turn and

live; but the Lord saith, Do and live, sin and die. This favour was not vouchsafed to angels: Heb. ii. 16, 'For verily he took not on him the nature of angels,' οὐ γὰρ δῆπου ἀγγέλων ἐπιλαμβάνεται—he took not hold of angels. That he giveth us space to repent, as well as leave; that by his providence he may do, and doth, to many that perish: Rev. ii. 21, 'I gave her space to repent, and she repented not.' God is not quick and severe upon every miscarriage. He might have cut us off betimes, as we crush serpents in the egg, and destroy venomous creatures when they are young. But this is not all; he giveth grace to repent, yea, repentance itself, whereby man's heart is changed. This is by his Spirit: 2 Tim. ii. 25, 'If God peradventure will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth.' The evangelical call carries its own blessing with it.

III. The means of application, or the duty on man's part, is repentance; for to that he calleth them here.

Here let me show you these four things—(1.) What repentance is; (2.) The kinds of it; (3.) That this is the way of our recovery; (4.) The suitableness of this qualification to the grace of the new covenant.

1. What repentance is. It is turning of the whole heart from sin and Satan to serve God in newness of life; or a turning from sin because God hath forbidden it, to that which is good because God hath commanded it. There are in it, as in every action, two terms, *a quo* and *ad quem*. We turn from something, and we turn to something.

[1.] The *terminus a quo*; we turn from something. From sin: Acts viii. 22, 'Repent of thy wickedness,' ἀπὸ τῆς κακίας; from thy wickedness, and 'from dead works,' Heb. vi. 1; from Satan. Satan is sometimes made the term, because the sinner falleth to his share: Acts xxvi. 18, 'To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.'

[2.] The *terminus ad quem* is to God, Acts xx. 21; to the truth: 2 Tim. ii. 25, εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας, 'Repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth;' to holiness and newness of life, Rom. vi. 4; to life: Acts xi. 18, 'Then hath God also to the gentiles granted repentance unto life.'

2. The kinds of it. There is a general repentance, which consists in the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, Col. ii. 11, when a man renounceth all sin, and devoteth himself to God; and there is a particular repentance for any provoking sin: Acts viii. 22, 'Repent and pray, that, if it be possible, the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee.' Again, there is a repentance at our first conversion, which is our passing from death to life, or our entrance by the strait gate, Mat. vii. 14; and there is a repentance afterwards, which belongeth to our walking in the narrow way; for after conversion we need it still, and not in our natural estate only. It is not only necessary for a sinner yet unregenerate, yet unreconciled to God, without which he cannot expect any peace with God or benefit by the new covenant, but also for a believer till his full and final recovery. This repentance after conversion is either occasional or constant.

[1.] Occasional, after any offence given, or breach between us and

God, repentance is necessary to obtain pardon of sins after justification, as well as before it. God saith to the church of Ephesus, Rev. ii. 5, 'Repent, and do thy first works.' So ver. 19, 'Whom I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent;' where repentance is put for a necessary means of removing God's rebuke and quarrel from them whom he loveth. The promise is made to believers: 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess and forsake our sins, he is just and faithful to forgive us our sins.' When he wrote to believers, he put himself in the roll: 'If we confess.' Experience of the saints confirmeth the same: Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I acknowledged my sin unto thee.' God was angry with Job's friends till they humbled themselves: Job xlii. 8. Solomon beggeth pardon for the people of God on these terms: 1 Kings viii. 47, 48, 'Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned and done perversely, we have committed wickedness; and so return unto thee with all their heart and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies which led them away captive, and pray unto thee towards their land which thou gavest their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name.' The Lord assenteth to the articles: 2 Chron. vii. 13, 14, 'If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, if my people shall humble themselves, and pray, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven,' &c. God's children may fall into miscarriages whereby they may displease God, though their persons be justified.

[2.] Constant. When we first begin with God, we bind ourselves to forsake all known sin, and to live to God. In grown persons this is confirmed by baptism. Our obligation continueth with our lives. And therefore we must spend our whole time in repentance. And our necessity inferreth it, as well as our obligation. Original corruption remaineth with the regenerate, and we frequently feel the rebellions of the flesh: Rom. vii. 24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?' So long as a man is a sinner, he is called to repentance, and must use this means till his full recovery. Besides, too, it is necessary with respect to our growth. We must grow daily in humiliation and self-abhorrence, and reform the errors of our ways more and more; and therefore we must look upon Christ still calling us to repentance, that, walking in a constant mortifying of sin, he may still lead us to salvation. And by these calls he more and more killeth and weakeneth corruption in us. Therefore as they said, because of the difficulties of the outward reformation, Ezra x. 13, 'This is not a work of one day or two,' so inward repentance is not the work of one, but all our days.

3. That this is the way of our recovery, in order to the enjoyment of the privileges of the new covenant. God and Christ agreed that salvation should be dispensed upon these terms, and the whole frame of the gospel is to invite sinners to repentance. God sent him to heal the broken-hearted, Mat. xi. 28. He interposed as mediator to make way for this.

[1.] This appeareth by the doctrine of the covenant. He hath made a covenant wherein he hath offered pardon and life to the penitent believer: Luke xxiv. 47, 'And that repentance and remission

of sins should be preached in his name to all nations;’ with Mark xvi. 6, ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.’ Repentance putteth us within the reach of the promise, which speaketh pardon to none but those which repent. Some dispute whether it be an equal condition with faith. It is as necessary; but faith hath its special use for some respects. As repentance is a return to the love and obedience of our God, so faith is a thankful acceptance of the benefit of our Redeemer: Acts xx. 21, ‘Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.’ The closing act is faith or acceptance of Christ, yet the person must be penitent. As in marriage, the hearing of the proposal, believing what is heard, the liking the party, living in conjugal society, are terms, but the solemn taking one another is the nuptial knot; so here, consent to take Christ is the closing act of faith, and then there must be a living in obedience afterward.

[2.] The sacraments or seals of the covenant bind to it. Baptism implieth it: Mat. iii. 11, ‘I baptize you with water unto repentance;’ that is, to seal up the covenant of repentance, whereby the party baptized is obliged to his duty, and hath the promise of God to supply us with grace to repent. The Lord’s supper also binds to it. The main benefit there offered is remission of sins, Mat. xxvi. 28, which cannot be had without repentance. We are bound in baptism; but men forget that they were purged from their old sins. Therefore earnest resolutions against sin need often to be renewed, lest we become cold and remiss in them; therefore a special repentance is required before we come to the Lord’s table.

#### 4. The suitableness of the qualification.

[1.] It is much for the honour of God. Christ hath purchased the effects of his grace, to be communicated to us in a way becoming his wisdom as well as his justice. Now it would not be for the glory of God, nor preserve his law and government, if we should be pardoned without submissive confession of past sins, or a resolution of future obedience. Common reason will tell us that our case is not compassionate without it. Who will pity those in misery that are unwilling to come out of it? Repentance is called a giving glory to God: Mal. ii. 2, ‘I will curse your blessings, because ye will not lay it to heart, and give glory to my name;’ Josh. vii. 14, ‘My son, give glory to the God of Israel, and make confession to him;’ Rev. xvi. 9, ‘They repented not to give glory to God.’ Repentance repaireth God in point of honour, giveth him the glory of the justness of his laws and providence. The self-condemning sinner subscribeth to all this; therefore it is suitable to the wisdom of God that a penitent sinner should have pardon rather than an impenitent, or one that continueth securely in his sins, and despiseth both the curse of the law and the grace of the gospel.

[2.] The duty of the creature is secured when he is so firmly bound unto future obedience. Therefore surely a converting repentance is the fittest condition, such as may induce a hatred of sin repented of, and a love to God and holiness. Now our first hearty consent for the future to live in the love, obedience, and service of our creator, with a detestation of our former ways, is most conducive to this end; besides the obligation of the vow itself, or bond of the holy oath into

which they are entered, and the circumstances accompanying it, because this vow and promise is made partly in our anguish, when we feel the smart of sin, then for the soul to resign itself to God: Acts ix. 6, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' And partly when we are in the deepest and freshest sense of his pardoning mercy, when we see at how dear a rate he is content to save us, and upon what free terms to pardon all our wrongs; surely they that are brought back from the grave, and fetched up from the gates of hell, and from under a sentence of condemnation, will be engaged more to love God: Ps. cxxx. 4, 'But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou shouldst be feared.' The woman loved much who had much forgiven her, Luke vii. 47.

[3.] It is most for the comfort of the creature that a stated certain course or remedy should be appointed for our peace, which may leave the greatest evidence upon our consciences. Now what is likely to do so much as this first and apparent change, whereby we utterly renounce, and bitterly bewail, our former folly, and solemnly give up ourselves to God by Christ? Things are evident to the feeling which are serious, advised, difficult, have a notable delight accompanying them; all which concur here. This is the most important action of our lives, the settling of our pardon and eternal interest; a sense of sin, if deep and thorough, will ever stick with us. The heart is hardly brought to this, to submit to God's appointed course: Rom. x. 3, 'For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.' And it is rewarded with some notable tastes of God's love; for he 'reviveth the hearts of his contrite ones,' Isa. lvii. 15, and 'restoreth comfort to his mourners,' ver. 17.

*Use.* Let us obey Christ, and continually carry on the work of repentance with more seriousness. Sin is not hated enough, nor God loved enough, and therefore we have so small a taste of the comforts of christianity. Groans unutterable make way for joys that are unspeakable.

#### Motives.

1. The unquestionable necessity of the duty should move us. Christ's authority is absolute. He telleth us, 'I came to call sinners to repentance.' If he saith so, contradiction must be silent, hesitation satisfied, all cavils laid aside, and we must address ourselves to his work, and never cease till we are past repentance, and that is only when we have no more sin in us, which will never be till we die.

2. The profit should move. It is a duty of great use. By repentance we are put into a capacity to serve and please God; for new creatures are set in joint again, who were disordered by the fall, Eph. ii. 10; and Titus iii. 5; 2 Tim. ii. 2; and by it we are put into a capacity to enjoy God: Acts xxvi. 18, 'To open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.'

3. Nothing can be excepted against this course. (1.) The plea of unworthiness hath no place. It is not the applying a privilege, but the performance of a duty we invite you to. If we did directly call you to accept a pardon, you might question our doctrine. Perhaps you may think you are unworthy to be pardoned, but God is worthy to



be obeyed. Christ calleth you to repentance. (2.) You cannot object the greatness of your sins. Did Christ come from heaven only to cure a cut finger, and not a deadly wound? He calleth sinners, and sinners without exception; sinners of all sorts and sizes. This thought often cometh into our mind, that Christ is a saviour, but not of those who are fallen into such heinous and enormous offences as we have done; as if any disease were beyond the skill of the spiritual physician; as if he could cure a cold or a slight ague, but not the leprosy and the plague. All sinners are called.

4. The plea of weakness doth not lie against the duty neither; for 'he calleth the things that are not as though they were,' Rom. iv. 17; 'Lazarus, come forth,' John xi. 47. Why doth he speak to a dead man? So to the man with the withered hand, 'Stretch forth thy hand,' Mat. xii. 13. Do not say, Lord, this I cannot do. No; go forth in the strength of Christ's call. He calleth not only by the ministry of the word, but the inward operation of his Spirit.

Now for means.

1. Examine thine own heart to find out thy particular sins: Ps. cxix. 59, 'I thought on my ways, and turned my feet into thy testimonies;' Lam. iii. 40, 'Search and try your ways, and turn to the Lord.' Repentance usually beginneth with serious soul-searching; otherwise we spend our indignation upon a notion. Particulars are most affecting. Sin is the common packhorse to bear every man's burden; but sin must be particularly confessed, forsaken, and mortified, that it may be pardoned.

2. Labour to work thy heart to godly sorrow for them: Lam. iii. 20, 'My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled within me.' We should humble ourselves greatly: Job xlii. 6, 'I repent and abhor myself in dust and ashes;' Mat. xi. 21, 'Repented in dust and ashes.' This is spoken according to their national customs. Men most abased are most serious. But our repentance generally is not deep and serious enough, so as will become offences and dishonours done to God by such weak creatures as we are, and so deeply engaged to him. There is not that self-loathing, nor such a measure of godly sorrow, as may either make Christ sweet or sin bitter to us. If it affect the heart so as sin becometh hateful, and there is a price and value put upon God's grace in Christ, then it is right. Oh! therefore, bemoan yourselves to God as Ephraim did, Jer. xxxi. 18.

3. Lay them open before God in humble confession: 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins;' Jer. iii. 13, 'Only acknowledge thine iniquities, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God;' and set apart some special time to do it.

4. Crave and sue earnestly for the pardon of them in Christ's name and for Christ's sake: Eph. iv. 32, 'As God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you;' 1 John ii. 12, 'I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.' All benefits must be asked in his name; much more this, which is the great fruit of his redemption. God himself has taught us to pray for pardon, and to say, 'Take away all iniquity,' Hosea xiv. 4. And take the sacramental pledges out of God's hand for this end.

5. There must be an unfeigned purpose and endeavour to forsake them: Prov. xxviii. 13, 'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy;' Ezek. iii. 11, 'As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?' Hosea xiv. 8, 'Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?' Isa. xxx. 22, 'Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold; thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence.'