

SERMON UPON PHILIPPIANS IV. 8.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.—PHIL. iv. 8.

HERE is a general rule for the regulating of our conversations. In it observe—

1. The bounds of our duty are fixed, in seven¹ things—true, just, honest, pure, lovely, of good report, if any virtue, or if any praise.

2. The accuracy and care that we should use not to transgress these bounds: ‘Think on these things,’ *τὰντα λογίζεσθε*; diligently take heed to them, that you may practise them.

Doct. That christianity doth adopt moralities, or precepts of good manners, into its frame and constitution.

Here I shall inquire—(1.) What these moralities are, as they are here set forth to us in the text; (2.) In what manner christianity doth enforce them; (3.) For what reasons.

First, What are these moralities?

1. ‘Whatsoever things are true,’ *ἀληθῆ*. This concerneth both our speeches and our actions.

[1.] For our speeches; that they be free from lying and falsehood: Eph. iv. 25, ‘Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another.’ Lying is when men wittingly and willingly, and with a purpose to deceive, speak that which is false. The matter of a lie is falsehood, and the formality of it is an intention to deceive. Now this we may do two ways—either by way of assertion or promise. The lying assertion is concerning what is past and present; thus Ananias lied to the Holy Ghost when he brought part of the price instead of all: Acts v. 3, ‘But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?’ The promissory lie is when we promise that which we mean not to perform: Prov. xix. 22, ‘The desire of a man is his kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar.’ That which men should desire is to be in a capacity to show kindness or do good; for greatness in the world is valuable upon this account, as it giveth a man a power to show kindness to others. But many that covet the praise and reputation of it are

¹ Eight.—Ed.

very forward in promises, but fail in performance. Now a poor man that loveth you, and will do his best, is a surer friend than such great men as only give you good words, and sprinkle you with a little court holy water. But this should be far from a christian, for he is to keep his word, though it be to his hurt: Ps. xv. 4, 'In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord: he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.' Lying is a sin most contrary to the nature of God, who is truth itself; but the devil is called the father of lies. And it is most contrary to the new nature: Eph. iv. 24, 25, 'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour;' Isa. lxiii. 8, 'And he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie.' It is most contrary to human society, for commerce is kept up by truth.

[2.] For truth in actions. We should always keep the integrity of a good conscience: Ps. xxxii. 2, 'Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, in whose spirit there is no guile;' 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversations in the world, and more especially to you-ward.' And truth, sincerity, and candour should be seen in all that we do. Satan assaults you with wiles, but your strength lieth in downright honesty: Eph. vi. 14, 'Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.' This will give you courage in the day of sore trial, and comfort in the very agonies of death: Isa. xxxviii. 2, 3, 'And Hezekiah turned his face towards the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.' Therefore we must carry ourselves sincerely, free from hypocrisy and dissimulation, whether towards God or men.

2. The next boundary is, 'Whatsoever things are honest,' *σεμνά*, grave and venerable, free from scurrility, lightness and vanity, in word or in deed. Religion is a serious thing, and accordingly leaveth an impression upon the heart, and maketh them serious that profess it. The apostle would have the christian women to carry themselves as women professing godliness: 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10, 'In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array, but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.' And surely all christians should be of a modest and good behaviour. A garish levity will not become them that live in constant communion with a great God. This cannot but make the heart more awful and serious, especially in the more aged: Titus ii. 2, 'That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.'

3. 'Whatsoever things are just,' *δικαία*, giving to every one what is due, and doing to others as we would be dealt with ourselves. Therefore we must defraud no man of his right; whether superiors: Mat. xxii. 21, 'Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.' Or inferiors: Col. iv. 1, 'Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, know-

ing that ye have a master in heaven.' So also to equals, not invading each other's rights, not detaining from them anything that is theirs: Rom. xiii. 8, 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.' That is a debt still owing, and still to be paid: Mat. vii. 12, 'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.' The rule of justice, of doing to others as you would they should do to you, standeth on these suppositions: The actual equality of all men by nature; did not he that made you make them? And the possible equality by providential disposure; you may stand in need of them as they do of you, and be under them as they are under you.

4. 'Whatsoever things are pure; therefore nothing that is obscene or unchaste should be seen in or heard from a christian. *Ἄγνα* signifieth chaste and clean, as well as pure: Eph. iv. 29, 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.' Rotten communication argueth a naughty heart, as a stinking breath doth rotten and putrid lungs. So also for actions; nothing filthy or unclean should be done by us: Eph. v. 12, 'For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.' A christian is ashamed to speak what others are not ashamed to do; but God seeth in secret, and his law is our rule, and his eye should be enough.

5. 'Whatsoever things are lovely,' *προσφιλή*. There are certain things which are not only commanded by God, but are grateful and acceptable to men. Such are a loving, affable carriage, peaceable behaviour, meekness, lowliness of mind, charity, usefulness: Rom. v. 7, 'For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.' The apostle telleth us of some things which are 'acceptable to God and approved of men,' Rom. xiv. 18. Now these things a christian must make conscience of: Rom. xii. 17, 'Recompense to no man evil for evil; provide things honest in the sight of all men.' What are those? To live charitably and peaceably: 1 Thes. v. 15, 'See that none render evil for evil unto any man, but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.' As in the body there is something that is lovely, and appeareth so to all men, so in the soul. Now these are things which we should look after. When the disciples lived christianly and in peace and charity, they had favour with all the people: Acts ii. 46, 47, 'And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.' Therefore by this lovely carriage we should commend our profession to the world.

6. 'Whatsoever things are of good report,' *ἔνφημα*. This is another boundary; for there are some things which have no express evil in them, but they are not of good fame, as generally condemned by the wise and sober. Now a christian is first to look to his conscience; but because the honour of God and the credit of his profession is concerned, he must avoid those things which have an appearance of evil: 1 Thes. v. 22, 'Abstain from all appearance of evil.' And the rather because

they are not over-tender of their conscience who are lavish of their name. Indeed a christian is not to hunt after the applause of men, yet he is to do his duty, so that the holy profession be not blamed, nor evil spoken of for his sake. It is a good and short decision of Aquinas, *Gloria humana bene contemnitur, nihil male agendo propter ipsam, et bene appetitur, nihil male agendo contra ipsam.* Then we rightly condemn the applause of men when we do nothing ill to gain it; and then we rightly desire it when we do nothing ill to forfeit it. It is to be contemned if we must do evil to gain it: 2 Cor. vi. 8, 'By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report, as deceivers, and yet true.' Be contented with the glory that cometh of God only, else we do not believe in Christ: John v. 44, 'How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?' You cannot be the servants of Christ if you honour men. As for our own credit, we must be content to be evil-spoken of for the gospel's sake and our duties' sake. And it is well deserved by doing nothing on our part to hazard it. So 1 Peter ii. 12, 'Having your conversation honest among the gentiles; that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.' We are to stop the mouth of iniquity, and to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; not justly to cause our names to stink and be unsavoury, but live down the reproaches of the world, as much as in us lieth, and bring the holy ways of God into request.

7. The last limitation is, 'If there be any virtue, or any praise.' I join both these things together, because they are linked to one another. That is, if they found anything praised and esteemed in the world, provided it be a virtue. Many things gain applause in the world which yet are not virtuous and praiseworthy; as the revenging of an injury, zeal for a man's faction: Gal. i. 10, 'For do I now persuade men or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.' So for peaceable compliance with sin, and good-fellowship: Luke xvi. 15, 'And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed amongst men is an abomination in the sight of God.' Now christians should abhor such things, though never so much cried up in the world: there is a praise of such things, but they are not virtues. Or else you may understand this limitation thus: If there be any virtue, that is, something lower than grace, any good thing among the heathens with whom they conversed, they should take it up, and adorn religion with it. So if there be any praise: Among good things some are more eminent; others, as they are not disproved, so they are not praised. Now any such praiseworthy or commendable action they should imitate, and adorn their profession with it. The gifts of the Holy Ghost are called graces, but these commendable actions are called virtues.

Well, then, these are the general heads of christian duties, which they should seriously think upon, and propose them to themselves for the regulation of their conversations, that they might do nothing but what was agreeable to truth, equity, sobriety, exact justice, purity, chastity, and virtue. This for the first question.

Secondly, In what manner christianity doth enforce them. This is to be regarded, because there is a great deal of do about morality, which some press to the neglect of faith and the love of God. Some make their whole religion to be a mere morality, and so turn christianity into morality; whereas a good christian turneth his morality into religion, all his second-table duties into first-table duties: Heb. xiii. 16, 'But to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' Sacrifice is a duty of the first table, yet alms is called a sacrifice well-pleasing unto God. But to make this more fully appear, let me show you—

1. That christianity deriveth all good conversation from the highest fountain, the Spirit of God.

2. From the truest principles, faith in Christ and love to God.

3. It directeth it by the highest rule, the will of God.

4. And to the highest end, the glorifying and enjoying of God. All else is but bastard morality, apocryphal holiness, that is not thus deduced.

1. It deriveth all these things from the highest fountain, the Spirit of sanctification, by which we are fitted for all these duties: Eph. v. 9, 'For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness and truth.' These commendable virtues are also in a christian, as the fruits of the Spirit: Gal. v. 22, 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.' And till we live in the Spirit, we are altogether unfit to do anything acceptably to God. No virtue is truly saving and acceptable but what floweth from the grace of regeneration.

2. It maketh them to grow out of their proper principles, faith in Christ and love to God.

[1.] Faith in Christ. The apostle telleth us, Heb. xi. 6, 'Without faith it is impossible to please God.' Not only without the general faith of God's being and bounty, but also without faith in Christ: Rom. vii. 4, 'We are married to Christ, that we may bring forth fruit unto God.' As the children that are born before marriage are illegitimate, so all that justice, temperance, and charity, which doth not flow from faith in Christ, is but mock grace and bastard holiness.

[2.] Love to God: Gal. v. 6, 'Faith worketh by love,' and therefore maketh us tender of doing anything that may displease or dishonour God: Titus ii. 11, 12, 'The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world.' If you understand it of objective grace, then the gospel teaching is by way of instruction, as a man teacheth a learner; or if of subjective grace, it is by way of persuasion and powerful excitement, or both; that morality is not kindly unless founded on the gospel, and never so thoroughly promoted as by the principles laid down there. Now, no wonder they that never felt the force of faith in Christ and love to God upon their souls do so much cry up bare morality. Well, then, Christ healeth our souls by his Spirit, and the Spirit worketh by faith and love, which are the true principles of grace in the heart.

3. It directeth it by the highest rule, which is God's mind revealed in his word, the absolute rule of right and wrong. . Alas! what partial

directions are there elsewhere! but Ps. xix. 7, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.' Others have, *ἔργον νόμου*, 'The work of the law written in their hearts,' Rom. ii. 15. What cold enforcements! Now they that cry up right reason in defiance of scripture, and would refer us to another rule, they are not thankful for this blessed revelation.

4. It is aimed at the highest end, the glorifying of God and the enjoying of God. The pleasing and glorifying of God: 1 Cor. x. 31, 'Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;' Phil. i. 11, 'Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.' And the enjoying of God: Acts xxiv. 14-16, 'But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets. And have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.' They have a care of all this justice, charity, temperance, in order to the attainment of everlasting happiness in the vision and fruition of God. Others mind nothing but their interests in the world: Acts xxiv. 26, 'He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: therefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.'

Thirdly, For what reasons.

1. Because grace doth not abolish so much of nature as is good, but refines and sublimates it, by causing us to act from higher principles and to higher ends. As the apostle saith that Onesimus was dear to Philemon, 'both in the flesh and in the Lord,' Philem. 16, so if anything be pure, good, lovely, praiseworthy in the eye of nature, christianity doth not abolish, but establish it. Therefore a christian should come behind none in these praiseworthy qualities. The law of God requireth this at our hands on better terms. He that sinneth against nature and grace too is worse than an infidel: 1 Tim. v. 8, 'But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel;' Rom. xiv. 17, 18, 'For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men.'

2. Because these conduce to the honour of religion. The credit of religion dependeth much on the credit of the persons that profess it: Ezek. xxxvi. 20, 21, 'And when they entered unto the heathen whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land. But I had pity for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen;' 2 Sam. xii. 14, 'Howbeit because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die;' 2 Peter ii. 2, 'And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.' If they should be false, unjust, turbulent, unclean, what will men think of God and Christ, and the religion which he hath established? *Christiane, ubi Deus tuus?*—O christian! where is thy God? said a heathen to a christian when

committing uncleanness. Titus ii. 10, 'Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.'

3. Our peace and safety is concerned in it; partly because the world is least irritated by a peaceable, just, and good conversation; it doth mollify their spirits and mitigate their fury: 1 Peter iii. 13, 'And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?' That is, when he bridled his tongue, seeketh peace, and doeth good. And partly because God puts a conviction upon the consciences of wicked men: 1 Sam. xxiv. 17, 'And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.' And so wicked men are restrained by reverence, and are afraid to meddle with unstained innocency. And partly because when we do not bring trouble upon ourselves by our own immoralities, God taketh us into his special protection. It followeth upon the text, ver. 9, 'These things which ye have both learned, and heard, and seen of me, do, and the God of peace shall be with you.' You may expect much of God's gracious presence when your conversations are so harmless and innocent; and he will free you from many external vexations, or give you inward tranquillity of mind.

4. Because these things flow from that internal principle of grace which is planted in our hearts by regeneration: Mat. iii. 8, 'Bring forth fruits therefore meet for repentance;' Acts xxvi. 20, 'That they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.' What is regeneration on God's part is repentance on ours. Now there are certain effects proper to this change, and that is the grave, just, temperate, and holy living. And certainly where those effects are not, there the cause itself is wanting; for how can we evidence that our conversion and repentance is real and sound, unless we bring forth fruits answerable? What evidence can we have of the new nature but by newness of conversation? or of a change of mind, but by a change of life? We judge of others by their external works, for the tree is known by its fruits; and we judge of ourselves by the internal and external works together. If within there be a love of God, faith in Christ, hatred of evil, delight in that which is good, a deep sense of the world to come; and all this discovered in an holy, sober, and grave conversation, this completeth the evidence, and maketh it more satisfying.

5. All the disorders contrary to these limits and bounds, by which our conversations are regulated, are condemned by the holy and righteous law of God, which is the rule of the new creature; and therefore they ought to be avoided by a good christian, who hath a tenderness upon him of offending God in the least thing: Ps. cxix. 161, 'My heart standeth in awe of thy word;' Prov. xiii. 13, 'Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed, but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' They dare not transgress in the least things: Mat. v. 19, 'Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so to do, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.' As not in their spiritual duties, so not in moralities: Mat. xxiii. 23, 'Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith: these things ought

ye to do, and not to leave the other undone.' Hypocrites make a business about small matters, and neglect weighty duties. Yet the sincere, by the discharge of greater duties, are not freed from the obligation to do the smallest duties; both stand by the same authority.

6. These moralities are not small things; the glory of God, the safety of his people, the good of human society, and the evidence of our own sincerity being concerned in them. The apostle chargeth atheism and disrespect of God on the neglecters of these things: 1 John iii. 10, 'Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God; neither he that loveth not his brother;' Gal. v. 14, 'For all the law is fulfilled in one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'

Use 1. If religion doth adopt moralities into its frame and constitution, we must not leave them out of our practice and conversations; for 'we are the epistle of Christ,' 2 Cor. iii. 3. We are to 'hold forth the word of life;' Phil. ii. 26. That which is just must be suitable to the rule: Titus iii. 8, 'This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works; these things are good and profitable unto men.' God would not have us omit any part of his will.

Use 2. Here is an answer to those that ask, Wherein must we be holy, and show our obedience unto God? Besides what concerneth the sanctification of the heart, here we are told plainly what concerneth the regulating of the conversation. When the heart is once renewed, then moralities must have their place and our exact care.

Use 3. That christians should be known to be the best sort of men in the world, abstaining not only from those things which the law of God forbiddeth, but the custom of nations, that no blemish may lie upon our profession.
