

SERMON UPON PROVERBS III. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

PROV. iii. 17.

IN the context you have an exhortation to get spiritual and heavenly wisdom. The argument is first generally propounded, and then particularly amplified.

1. Generally propounded : ver. 13, 'Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.'

2. Particularly amplified—

[1.] By the worth and excellency of wisdom : ver. 14, 15, 'The merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold,' &c.

[2.] The utility and profit : ver. 16, 'Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour.' She is represented as a queen, having both hands full of blessings : 'In the right hand length of days, in the left hand riches and honour.' He speaks *pro more fœderis*, according to the manner of the covenant, wherein temporal things are explicitly promised, though spiritual and eternal things are implied : 'In her right hand length of days.' What do men desire more than to live long and happy? Wisdom will teach us to live for ever : 'And in her left hand riches and honour ;' all good things in this world, so far as not to hinder us of the things of a better world, shall be vouchsafed to us.

[3.] The third argument is in the text, the pleasantness of wisdom ; which is added to sweeten the difficulties in attaining to it, or pursuing after it, or exercising the virtue of it in the regulation of our lives and actions. It is hard to get it, and then to exercise it ; but it is recompensed with an answerable sweetness : 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.'

Where note—(1.) The subject, ways, paths ; the general course or particular duties which wisdom prescribeth ; (2.) The predicate, pleasantness, peace. They are not only pleasant, but safe ; they are accompanied with spiritual sweetness, and produce solid tranquillity in the mind of man.

Doct. That the man whose actions and ways are guided by heavenly wisdom enjoyeth true peace and delight.

I. For stating the point—

1. By wisdom is meant the heavenly doctrine revealed in the word of God, especially the gospel or salvation by Christ ; for this is called

'The wisdom and power of God,' 1 Cor. i. 24; and it is said, the holy scriptures, 'through faith in Christ Jesus, do make us wise unto salvation,' 2 Tim. iii. 15. He is a fool that is wise to other things and is not wise to the saving of his soul, for he is wise in trifles, and neglects necessary things. Well, then, the ways and paths of wisdom are the ways and paths of faith and holiness. Faith is necessary to solid rejoicing; for it is said, 1 Peter i. 8, 'In whom believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;' and Rom. xv. 13, 'The God of hope fill ye with all joy and peace in believing.' And holiness concurrerth necessarily; for it is not only a godly man's duty, but his delight; and it is rewarded with joy and peace: 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 conversation in the world.' Some degree of comfort followeth every good action; before our full and final reward we have the solace of a good conscience during our service.

2. That these delights are not carnal delights, but spiritual. Man is ever inviting himself to some delight; the oblectation of his mind cannot lie idle, but usually consults with flesh and blood in choosing his delights, and careth for the body more than the soul. But bodily delights and pleasing the sense were our old slavery: Titus iii. 3, 'Serving divers lusts and pleasures.' These draw down the mind, and dull our desires and endeavours towards better things; therefore here we need not use the spur, but the bridle, and must refrain ourselves, because these delights corrupt the mind; and such a kind of peace is not the quiet and repose of the soul in God, but the numbness and deadness of conscience; carnal security, not a true peace. But the delights and peace which wisdom inviteth us unto are chaste and rational, such as ennoble the soul, and raise it to God, and do not put it in vassalage to sense. When our joy runneth out in a spiritual channel, there is no excess in it, no snare by it. The pleasures of sense are base and dreggy, but these are heavenly and spiritual.

3. It supposeth that the man be renewed and recovered out of the common apostasy; for while a man remaineth in it the beast rideth the man, and nothing is sweet and pleasant but what gratifieth sensual appetite. Regeneration and change of heart is necessary to taste the pleasures which are in the paths of wisdom; for nothing is pleasant to men but what is suitable to their natures; and we use to say that one man's pleasure is another's pain. Distempered souls are not capable of this peace and delight, for every man's gust is according to his constitution: Rom. viii. 5, 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.' Therefore the carnal man, that is wedded to his vain delights, is an incompetent judge of the pleasantness that is in the paths of wisdom. Will he that is wholly addicted to the flesh ever judge that there is more delight in the exercises of godliness than in the foolish pastimes of the world; that it is better to be mourning for sin than rejoicing in the creature; and that the congregation yieldeth a more solid pleasure than the theatre; and that it is better to be mortifying the deeds of the body by the spirit than to court the senses? If his judgment may be convinced, he will never yield to it in his practice. He doth not live by these rules and measures.

II. Let me now prove that the true peace and pleasure is nowhere else to be found but in obedience to heavenly wisdom.

1. I prove it from the matter of this peace and joy, and that is wisdom, heavenly wisdom, which leadeth us to faith in Christ, love to God, and an holy and heavenly life. And what is the consequent of these things but the pardon of all our sins, the assurance of the love of God, and the lively foresight and foretaste of endless glory and blessedness?

[1.] The wisdom that cometh from above doth teach us faith in Christ, as the whole scripture manifesteth: Acts x. 43, 'To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.' Well, now, can any man be truly cheerful till his sins be forgiven? Alas! if conscience were but a little awake, in the midst of all his mirth he would see a sharp sword hanging over his head by a slender thread, and that all his jollity is but like dancing about the mouth of the bottomless pit, into which he is tumbling every moment. Nay, let him stifle conscience as much as he can, yet he can never totally get the victory of it; for he hath his pangs, and qualms, and hidden fears, if you dig him to the bottom; and stinging remorse of conscience, which, though not always felt, are soon awakened. No; this man can never be truly merry. Suppose none of this as yet ever felt, yet this you must grant, that he cannot be a man, recollect his ways, or use any sober consideration why he came into the world, and whither he is a-going (which every one that weareth the heart of a man should sometimes do), but his trouble is revived, such trouble as soureth his contentments, and puts a damp upon all his mirth. On the other side, a man that hath made it his business to enter into God's peace by Jesus Christ, and is humbly and broken-heartedly suing out his pardon in his name, and hath the justice and faithfulness of God engaged to him, that so doing he shall be pardoned, hath not this man true and solid cause of rejoicing? Yes; certainly his great care is over, his wounds are healed, he hath got rid of the great sore that burdened and made his soul sit uneasy before: Mat. ix. 2, 'Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.' His great trouble is gone, and the root of all misery is taken away: Rom. v. 11, 'We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.' A condemned malefactor can never be heartily comforted with a feast his friends give him before execution, but with a pardon which his prince gives to reverse the sentence of death passed upon him. Or thus; it is little comfort to give a man going to execution a posy of flowers, and bid him smell to that, and cheer his heart with that; but you cheer him indeed if you bring him not only a reprieve, but a pardon. So when God is reconciled, and all your sins are forgiven you, this is solid comfort and peace.

[2.] Again, wisdom inviteth us, and calleth us to the love of God; for 'Faith worketh by love,' Gal. v. 6. Though before we stood in dread of a condemning God, now we should be deeply possessed with the goodness of a pardoning God. Well, then, those that love God may assure themselves that he will 'love them, and manifest himself to them,' John xiv. 21-23. Do we believe this certainly? It is true. Now if all the world loveth, and God hateth, you can have no solid peace, for you must at length fall into his hands. If you had all the world at will,

you may have it with God's hatred, who can make you miserable whenever he pleaseth. He can blast you with diseases, fill you with disquiets of soul, embitter all your comforts. But suppose you had the love of God, then what wanteth to your solid satisfaction and peace? That is the sweetest thing that ever was felt: Ps. iv. 6, 7, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us; thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time when their corn and wine increased;' Ps. lxxiii. 3, 'Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.' This is marrow and fatness; one drop of it sweeteneth all our crosses, and it is the life of all our comforts.

[3.] Wisdom inviteth to an holy and heavenly life, or to all those ways and means whereby we may come to enjoy God at last; and this breedeth the lively foresight of that fulness of joy and glory which ravisheth the soul. Is it nothing to you to live for ever with God, and to see his glory, and to be perfected in holiness and happiness? This is the end of the ways you walk in. Alas! others can never have solid comfort; they know where they are, but they know not where they shall be. When they die, they must go into an unknown world; yea, which is worse, to an unknown God, of whose love they never had any taste or experience, and therefore cannot deal with him when they come into his presence. But those that have lived always in the sight of a world to come, and kept themselves in the way that leadeth thither, they have solid rejoicing: Rom. v. 2, 'We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.' What though they be ill-treated for the present? things will be otherwise in heaven: Mat. v. 12, 'Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.' Well, then, from the whole, the only satisfying delights of man can be nowhere but in the pardon of sins, love of God, and the foresight of endless glory, which is alone had in the paths of wisdom.

2. From the manner how it is obtained: 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and her paths are paths of peace.' It is by walking, not by speculation. It is a ravishing thing to understand heavenly doctrine, and to see the apt proportion and due connection between ends and means; especially when we have it not only upon tradition, but our own search and study: Prov. xxiv. 13, 14, 'My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to thy soul, when thou hast found it; then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.' There is a comparison between the delights of the body and the delights of the soul; what honey is to the body, that is wisdom to the soul. There is a ravishing sweetness in the study and contemplation of truth; when by searching, reading, hearing, meditating, we have found it out, there is an incredible delectation. Alas! wisdom and knowledge to the ignorant and foolish world seemeth as wormwood, but to the diligent, painful student it is as the honey and honeycomb. A man in his study hath truer pleasure than the greatest epicure in the most exquisite enjoyments of sense; especially when this contemplation is employed about divine truths, as salvation by Christ, reconciliation with God, and eternal life. But the pleasure of contemplation is nothing to the pleasure of practice. Why?

[1.] Because practice giveth a more experimental knowledge of these things, for there they are confirmed and verified in ourselves. We have not only a sight, but a taste. We have a sight by contemplation, but we have a taste by practice; and are more deeply and intimately acquainted and affected with these things: 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.'

[2.] The taste of these things is kept upon our hearts by serious obedience and practice. If there be any taste by speculation, it is very vanishing: it leaveth the heart little the warmer; but here it abideth and remaineth with us: John xv. 11, 'These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and your joy might be full.' They were cheered when they heard Christ's comfortable promise; but when they were in the pursuit and practice, it filled their minds with more durable pleasure; it abode in them in a more full and constant manner. It is a flash of joy that is stirred up by contemplation, but this of practice and fruitful obedience is a constant, solid, and uninterrupted joy; it doth not die away so soon as the other.

[3.] Every holy action is rewarded by peace of conscience: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.' Not every act of contemplation, for that is an imperfect operation till the effect succeed, and so far as to be our common practice.

[4.] Our title to the heavenly inheritance is more clearly made out by practice. By knowledge we know what to seek after, but by practice our right is confirmed. Knowledge directeth us in our duty, but serious practice assureth our interest, and so our contentment is doubled: John xiii. 17, 'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.' Knowledge and speculation doth not prove the sincerity of our hearts, but it is practice that hath the blessing in the bosom of it.

[5.] By practice our will is conformed to the law and will of God. Now the compliance of our will with the will of God carrieth a quieting pleasure in it, for then it agreeth with its proper rule and measure. Pleasure is *applicatio convenientis*. There is a pleasure in the conformity of our apprehensions to the truth revealed or represented; but more in the subjection of our wills, either to the disposing will, or to the commanding will of God, for then all is right as it should be. The will lieth nearer the affections than the understanding, and goodness is nearer to delight than truth.

3. From the part affected; not the senses, but the heart and the conscience: 'Thou shalt put more gladness in my heart,' Ps. iv. 7. Carnal delights are like a night dew, that only covers the surface, but spiritual delights are like a soaking shower, that goeth to the root; they tickle the senses, but this affects the heart. So Christ saith, John xvii. 13, 'These things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves;' that is, that their hearts might be filled with it, and feed on it as hidden manna. Now the more intimate any joy is, the more excellent. The joy of the world is empty; in the midst of it the heart is sorrowful. A joy in outward things is

foreign, and taken in by the senses, or the musty vessel of the body, but this is shed abroad in the heart. Which is more capacious, a deep well or a little cup or glass? You will say, There is no comparison. No more is there between the delight and pleasure which carnal men take, and the delight and pleasure that is found in the ways of wisdom; for carnal men take in all their delights by their corporal senses, which are soon filled and overcharged; the sense is easily glutted and clogged; but the heart and conscience have a greater capacity, and are not easily satisfied with things proper to them.

4. From the author and exciter of these joys, which is the Holy Spirit; and therefore it is called 'joy in the Holy Ghost,' Rom. xiv. 17. It is a joy of God's making: Ps. iv. 7, 'Thou hast put gladness into my heart.' It is not only allowed by God, but wrought by him.

[1.] It is allowed by God. It is much to our satisfaction that it is allowed by God. Many of the pleasures of ungodly men are forbidden; as James v. 5, 'Ye have lived in pleasure upon earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter.' To throng their hearts with vain delight heartens the enemy, and is unsuitable to God's providential dispensations: Isa. v. 12, 'The harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.' This is to defy providence, when there is nothing but jollity and mirth in the day of our Father's anger, or brethren's miseries; or else it is unsuitable to their condition, when such a black storm hangeth over their heads: Isa. lvii. 21, 'There is no peace to the wicked, saith my God.' This is not the joy that God doth allow; not such as is baneful to our souls, or unsuitable to God's providences, or to our state and condition. To sit down contented with the creature on this side God, to sing lullabies to our souls when he is angry for sin, this is not allowed; this is to go to our execution dancing. But we have God's warrant for this joy and peace; it is never unsuitable, never unseasonable: Phil. iv. 4, 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.' When we seek his favour in Christ, live in his love and obedience to his will, we may still keep an holy feast or maintain a continual joy.

[2.] But God doth not only allow it, but work it; it is his gift, wrought in us by his Spirit, the fruit of his love, promoted in us by his promises: Rom. xv. 13, 'The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.' It is God that speaketh peace to our souls, that reviveth the heart, healeth our wounds, and filleth us with a sense of his love. It is a pleasantness and peace, that not only resulteth from the rectitude of our actions, or is stirred in us by our own discourse, but excited by the Spirit. Now, the Spirit's works are singular, and do much exceed the natural operations of man's own heart. His groans are unutterable: Rom. viii. 26, 'The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered.' And his joys unspeakable: 1 Peter i. 8, 'In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' The heathens counted that fire more fit for their altars that was kindled by a sunbeam than by a coal taken from a common hearth. So this joy

which is raised in us by the Holy Ghost is more rich and glorious than that which is but the fruit of our own reason or our reflection upon our ways. When he sheddeth abroad the love of God in our hearts, it is more powerful and penetrating. Other joy is not wrought by God, but at second or third hand. It is said, Acts xiv. 17, 'He gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness;' that is, he giveth them the matter of their joy, as he blesseth the course of nature, and giveth fruitful seasons. Therefore this is the true and solid joy.

Object. 1. But how are all wisdom's paths pleasantness and peace, since there are many crosses and afflictions incident to a spiritual life?

Ans. 1. Spiritual joys and temporal adversities are no ways incompatible: Rom. v. 3, 'We glory in tribulation.' The joy that resulteth from the ways of wisdom is not always visible to the world. Believers feast on the hidden manna: Rev. ii. 17, 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.'

2. How afflicted soever we be for the present, there is an assurance of future joys in another world: Heb. x. 34, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that in heaven ye have a better and an enduring substance.' So that this is a peace which the world can neither give nor take away; it dependeth on things out of their reach.

Object. 2. Wisdom forbiddeth us many bodily pleasures.

Ans. 1. God forbiddeth no bodily pleasure but as it hindereth our greater pleasure, as it tendeth to our hurt, such whereby the mind may be perverted, or diverted from things spiritual, and so enchanted as to lose the relish of the true felicity, and intermit our care of the way that leadeth to it; as the flesh-pots of Egypt made them ready to revolt and neglect Canaan. So indeed God saith, 1 Peter ii. 11, 'Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;' as they bring a servitude and a brawn and a deadness upon the heart: Titus iii. 3, 'We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures,' &c.; as we are apt to love them more than God: 2 Tim. iii. 4, 'Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;' as they bring a brawn and a deadness upon the heart, and so make it incapable of that sweet consolation which the Spirit worketh in us.

2. When the heart is mortified and subdued to God, there is no such pleasure as the contempt of bodily pleasures. *Quam suave mihi subito factum est, carere suavitatibus nugarum!*—How sweet is it to me to want the sweetness of these trifles! In some diseases it is a pleasure to eat dust; when the disease is cured, it is abhorred as a filthy thing. It is our distemper that leaveth the carnal relish so strong upon us; get rid of your distemper, and you will be ashamed of your brutish satisfactions; it is a diseased mind that looks after them.

Use 1. To remove prejudice. Men usually judge wisdom's ways to be sour and bitter, whereas they yield great joy and pleasure to those that walk in them. Here is peace for their consciences, and pleasantness to satisfy their affections. Who live the pleasant life, they that walk upon the brink of hell every moment, or they who, being justified by faith, are made heirs of eternal life, who look every day when

God will translate them into his immediate presence? they that satisfy their lusts by breaking God's law, or they that provide for the peace of their consciences by observing and keeping it? Who are like to be most satisfied in their object, they that love a vain uncertain world, or they that live in the love of God? If men would but come and try what it is indeed to believe in Christ, to live in the love of God and the hope of eternal life, their prejudices would be soon confuted.

Object. But you will say, Your spiritual delight is but a fancy; it seemeth to be hard to forsake what I see, what I feel, what I taste, what I love, for a God and a glory which I do not see, and it may be never shall see.

I answer—It is no wonder. How can you see when you have no eyes? Faith is the eye of the soul: Heb. xi. 1, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen;' and ver. 27, 'By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible;' 1 Peter i. 8, 'Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' And how can you hope to see while you are carnal, and your hearts do not suit with these things, or ever experienced this joy? But beg the spirit of wisdom and revelation: Eph. i. 17, 18, 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints;' and return you to him. Illumination and inclination conduce both to your cure; for this holy delight cannot be forced, nor drawn forth by bare commands and threatenings. When the attractive goodness of the object is represented by the Spirit, the heart must be suited to it, and then you will find this joy.

Use 2. To reprove two sorts of people—

1. Those that can find no pleasure in an holy life, that is, no ground of pleasure. Is not God a delectable object? Is not salvation by Christ a delightful speculation, or such a glorious mystery as cannot be found elsewhere? Are not the promises of heaven comfortable things? If a man should adopt you into the succession of a crown, would it not please you? And is not God's promise more sure? Is not communion with God a pleasing exercise? Heathens pretended to secrecy with their gods as the greatest felicity. Needeth a christian pretend it? Hath he not liberty to open his heart in secret? Do you ever come from your sports with such a cheerful soul as you come from your duties? Many have repented of their carnal mirth; never any of their godly sorrow. Which is better, to fill the body with diseases, which is the part gratified by sin, and is more wasted than gratified, or to enrich the soul with graces? to deny the clamours of the flesh, or the importunities of conscience? or, which is all one, to offer violence to our lusts or to our consciences?

2. It reproveth them that live as if there were no pleasure in a course of holiness. When others go merrily to hell, will you go drooping to heaven? I pray, whose work are you about? Whither doth your journey tend? Are you sad because you have left Satan's service?

Was he a good master to you? Or because it is now a part of your business to tame and subdue the flesh? Will that yield anything more satisfying than the love of God? It could yield you nothing but vain pleasure, that, when gone, is but as a wind; nay, it proves a whirlwind in the conscience. Or is it because you have renounced the world? Is not heaven better? Is God wanting in such worldly supplies as are necessary for you? Or is it because you thrive no more in holy endeavours? Is not God's grace sufficient for you? Was he ever backward to do you good whilst you were labouring and striving to approve yourselves to him? Hold up your hearts: 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright,' Prov. x. 29.

Use 3. To press you to make trial. Resolve upon an holy and heavenly course, and then you are in the ways of wisdom: Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' Trust him upon his promises, before all be confirmed to you upon experience. To this end consider—

[1.] We invite to pleasure, not to labour; or to labour seasoned with pleasure; and pleasure is the lure that draweth all the world. By sensitive pleasure men are perverted: James i. 14, 'Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.' By holy pleasure he is perfected.

[2.] We invite you not to pleasure only in another world, but pleasure during service: Ps. xvi. 11, 'Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.' But now, that we may not be tired with expectation, there is pleasure, not only in the end, but in the way and path.

[3.] We invite you to continual pleasure: Phil. iv. 4, 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.' In worldly joys there are vicissitudes and subalternations; now we rejoice, and anon we weep; there is joy when a child is born, and grief when he dieth; joy when our estate is increased, grief when it is lost; but the Lord is always the same.