

SERMON UPON LUKE XXIII. 34.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.—LUKE xxiii. 34.

THE words of the dying are wont to be much observed. When men depart out of the body, they are usually more serious and divine, and speak with greater weight. As a man that is to take a journey trusseth up his bundle or fardle, so when men are to take a journey to God, and are upon the brink of the everlasting state, they are wont to gather up whatever is of a divine and immortal nature. Especially the speeches of the godly dying are to be regarded, who, having laid aside worldly affairs and earthly thoughts, are wholly exercised in the contemplation of heavenly things. Therefore in scripture we read of David's last words, 2 Sam. xxiii. 1, and of Joshua, chap. xxiii. 14, 'And behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth;' but before he goes he would leave this testimony for God: 'Ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you, all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.' So Jacob, Moses, Simeon: Luke ii. 29, 30, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.' Paul: 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.' Now certainly, if any man's dying speeches are to be observed, Christ's are much more. Job said, chap. xix. 23, 24, 'Oh, that my words were now written! oh, that they were printed in a book! that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!' It were well if Christ's words were written, not in cedar, but in our own hearts. They reckon seven short speeches of Christ upon the cross, and this is the first; when he begins to break off his silence, it is to pray for his persecutors: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' In which words there is—

1. Christ's request, 'Father, forgive them.'

2. The argument by which it is enforced, 'For they know not what they do.'

I. Christ's request, 'Father, forgive them.' 'Father' is a word of confidence towards God and of love to his enemies; he mentioneth the sweetest relation. 'Father' is a word of blandishment, as children, when they would obtain anything at their parent's hands, cry, Father!

Some observe that when he speaketh of his own desertion he crieth, 'My God! my God!' but now, when he prayeth for the pardon of his enemies, he useth a more endearing relation, 'Father.' But the observation is fond and nice; for Christ in his own case useth the same endearing title: Mat. xxvi. 39, 'O my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;' and there is a special reason why in his desertion he should say, 'My God! my God!' as suiting the title to his case, Eli! Eli! my strong one! my strong one! He wanted the strong support and the sensible consolations of his godhead. It is most comfortable to observe how Christ upon the cross calleth God 'Father.' He felt him a judge, and believeth him a father. The special work of faith in afflictions is to maintain the comfort of adoption: Heb. xii. 5, 'Ye have forgotten the exhortation that speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord.' Those that are under chastening may be sons. God doth not always put on the person of a judge when he taketh the rod in his hand; the change of your condition doth not alter, nor make void your interest. God is the God of the valleys as well as the God of the hills. Christ was now, as a man, forsaken and rejected of God, left to the assaults of Satan and scorns of men; and yet in the height of his pains and passion he retaineth his confidence: 'Father, forgive them.' The whole world is not worth the comfort that is wrapped up in that one word, 'Father.' It is a great folly in the children of God to question his love merely because of the greatness of their afflictions. We presently cry out, as Job, chap. xxx. 21, 'Thou art become cruel to me; with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me;' that he hath put off all fatherly affection, because we judge of the cross according to the sense of our own flesh. And therefore, merely to question God's love because of afflictions is folly. Rather we may conclude the contrary of the two. Bastards are left to a looser discipline than sons; the bramble of the wilderness is suffered to grow and spread when the vine is cut, and pruned, and pared; the stones that are to be set in the building are most hewed and squared, others lie neglected in the quarry and are left to their own roughness. Multiplied afflictions are a sign God hath a care of you; he will not suffer you to run wild. And therefore, in defiance of the cross, learn to call God Father; look through the cloud of the present dispensation to the love of God towards you.

'Father, forgive them.' Christ speaks as foreseeing the danger and punishment which they would bring on themselves as the fruit of their madness and folly, and therefore he prays, 'Father, forgive them.' This act was provocation enough to move God to dissolve the bonds of nature, to cleave the earth, that it might swallow them up quick, or to rain hell out of heaven upon them. Lesser offences have been thus punished, and one word from Christ's mouth had been enough. But, 'Father, forgive them.' We hear nothing but words of mild pity. When he says, 'Forgive,' he means also convert them; for where there is no conversion there can be no remission.

I shall look upon this prayer under a twofold consideration—

1. As an high moral act of an holy man.
2. As a taste of his mediation and intercession, where we shall consider the public relation he sustained upon the cross.

First, Let us look upon it as a moral action. He doth not threaten fearful judgments, but prayed for his enemies; there was no stain of passion and revenge upon his sufferings: 1 Peter ii. 21, 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps.' And wherein? ver. 23, 'Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.' One great use of Christ's death was to give us lessons of meekness and patience and humble suffering. In this act there is an excellent lesson. Let us look upon the necessary circumstances that serve to set it off—(1.) For whom he prays; (2.) When he prays; (3.) Why he prays; (4.) In what manner.

1. For whom he prayeth; for his persecutors, men that had done him the greatest contempt and villany which their spite and malice could invent. They had mocked and buffeted him, mangled his flesh with scourges, led him like a public spectacle of shame through the streets of the city, and by importunate clamours had gotten him to the cross, and there placed him in the midst of thieves. They had cursed themselves, and yet Christ prayed for them. In their rage they had even appealed to and dared divine justice: 'His blood be upon us and on our children;' but Christ saith, 'Father, forgive them.' Yea, and which is more, they did all this to him when he came to serve the world in a design of the greatest love. Of all things, men cannot endure to have their love slighted. Holy David, when Nabal slighted his kindness, vowed the destruction of him and all his house; but when Christ cometh with higher acts of kindness, he is despised and rejected of men: 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not,' John i. 11. Nay, his own persecuted him, and despitefully used him, and yet he prayeth for them. They omitted no kind of cruelty. The law saith, 'Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth,' Lev. xxiv. 20; but when they cry, 'Crucify him,' he cries, 'Forgive them.' Oh, how may we wonder at this, who are so vindictive as we are!

2. When he prayeth; in the very extremity and height of his sufferings. Then, when we are apt to forget our friends, Christ remembereth his enemies; in the very height of his sorrows he mediates for a pardon for them. A man would have thought that the sharp sense of the afflictions wherewith he was exercised should have embittered his spirit; if he would make intercession for sinners in heaven, a man would have thought that he should not have interceded upon the cross. We pardon when the misery is over, and, by the course of affairs, that which was intended for a mischief proveth an advantage; as Joseph did his brethren: Gen. l. 20, 'As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive.' But Christ in the very act of his sufferings seeketh mercy for the instruments of his passion. *Pendebat, et tamen petebat*, saith Austin; their rage had brought him to the cross, and there Christ mediateth to bring them to heaven.

3. Who prayeth; Jesus Christ. With honour enough to himself he might have done otherwise; he could have destroyed them with the breath of his mouth or with a beam of his glory. We forgive when we cannot harm. Power efferateth the mind, and makes men fierce and cruel. Many would be cruel enough, but they are restrained

either by want of power or opportunity. But here neither was wanting: Mat. xxvi. 53, 'Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray unto my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?' In man's eye that would have seemed a rare vindication of the glory and dignity of his person; but Christ doth not pray, Father, send twelve legions of angels, but, 'Father, forgive them.' One angel had been enough: 2 Kings xix. 35, 'The angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand.' It would have been more easy for Christ to come down from the cross than to go up thither, that was the greater miracle. Four nails could not have held the Lord of glory, if he had not been nailed and fastened through by his own love and voluntary condescension. But Christ would not be glorious now in acts of power, but of mildness and charity, and therefore it is not, Father, destroy, but, Father, forgive them.

4. How he prayeth for them. He pleadeth their case, and putteth the fairest construction that can be made of an action so foul and enormous; they are poor ignorant people, led with a blind zeal. Christ pitcheth upon the only circumstance that serveth to lessen the offence; of all excuses this is the most plausible: 1 Tim. i. 13, 'I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief;' Acts iii. 17, 'And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.' We are wont to strain and force actions to the most rigorous interpretation they are capable of. *Iracundia solers est fingendi causas sui furoris*—Seneca. Anger is witty to find out causes to justify itself; and if there be aught to justify censure, we omit those alleviating circumstances and necessary mitigations, whereby our asperity may be taken off, and actions be more mildly considered. But Christ saith, Poor creatures! they act out of a blind zeal, they know not what they do; Father, forgive them.

Use 1. Information.

1. It informeth us that the love of Christ is greater than we can think or understand, much less express. If we be afflicted with any pain in the teeth, head, or eyes, we are so overcome with the sense of it, that we can think of nothing else; we neither admit the visit of friends, nor will we trouble ourselves with any business, our pain wholly engrosseth and taketh up our minds and thoughts. But Jesus Christ, in the midst of his agonies and painful sufferings, remembereth not only friends, but enemies, and is solicitous about their salvation. Now if he be thus affected towards persecutors, how is he to the persecuted? They cry, 'Crucify him! crucify him!' but he saith, 'Father, forgive them.' He might justly have called for vengeance, but he prayeth for mercy; nothing was so cruel but they were ready to think, and speak, and do against him in this blind and inconsiderate fury; but he doth not consider their injuries against himself, but their sin against God, and would have that pardoned; and this at the time when they sought not pardon for themselves, but were venting their malice against him. Which surely is an encouragement to the penitent that he will not be hard to be entreated by them that confess and forsake their sins, and fly unto him for mercy. He seeks for pardon for them that sought it not, and considereth not so much what they deserved, as what became himself,

and the riches of his grace. They curse, and he blesseth; they vomit out scorns and slanders, but he poureth out prayers to God for them.

2. That all sins, even the greatest, except that against the Holy Ghost, are pardonable. What greater sin could there be than crucifying the Lord of glory? yet upon repentance it is forgiven. That it was capable of pardon appeareth by this prayer of our Saviour, and that it was actually pardoned appeareth by Acts ii. When they were touched to the quick with the sense of this crime, and asked what they should do, Peter adviseth them to this remedy, Acts ii. 38, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins;' and they found it effectual upon the use of it: ver. 41, 'Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.' And that it is so in the general case, our Lord assureth us, Mat. xii. 31, 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.' There is no exception of any sin, though it go so high as blasphemy, but the malicious blaspheming the operations of the Holy Ghost, those by which he testified, manifestly and sufficiently, that he was the true Messiah, and their imputing these operations to the devil. But of other sins there is no exception; speaking against the Son of man was not believing him to be the Messiah; that may be forgiven; but blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is resisting his manifestations, affirming them to be done by the devil rather than God, and this shall never be forgiven. Well, then, let us conceive of God's mercy according to the infiniteness of his nature, and of Christ's merits according to the dignity of his person; an ocean of water will wash one sink or filthy hole clean.

3. That remission of sins is the free gift of God, and the fruit of his pity and grace. Christ asketh it of his Father, 'Father, forgive them: ' he must be sought to; we cannot merit it of ourselves. David addresseth himself to God, and useth no other plea but grace and mercy: Ps. li. 1, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.' Our work lieth with the Father of mercies and the God of all compassions, that he may be reconciled to us, and seal up his perfect pardon to our souls.

4. That pardon of sins is a special benefit. Christ asked no more than, Father, forgive them. It is a special benefit, because it freeth us from the greatest evil, wrath to come: 1 Thes. i. 10, 'And it maketh us capable of the greatest blessing, eternal life: Titus iii. 7, 'That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. It is purchased at the dearest rate, even the blood of Christ: Rom. iii. 25, 'Whom God hath 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.' It is brought about by the highest power, the finger of God, or his all-conquering Spirit, who by converting us, or giving us repentance, maketh us capable of pardon: Acts ii. 38, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins;'

Acts v. 31, 'Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.' It openeth the door to the choicest privileges, the favour of God and communion with him in the Spirit; therefore David pronounceth the pardoned blessed: Ps. xxxii. 1, 2, 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth no iniquity.'

5. That love of enemies, and those that have wronged us, is an high grace, and recommended to us by Christ's own example. Sure it is needful that we should learn this lesson, to be like God: Luke vi. 36, 'Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful;' that we may obey God, who hath required this at our hands. Therefore we must consider not what others have been to us, but what God will have us to be to them, meek, patient, and merciful. Again, we hereby show the purity and sincerity of our love; nature will teach us to love those that love us, but grace only teacheth us to love enemies. This is love with self-denial. They who love us endear themselves to us, the other alienate themselves from us; yet for God's sake we can love them, and seek to draw them out of the snares of the devil, that we may restore them to God.

Use 2. Reproof of those that are cruel and revengeful. How different are they from Christ who are all for unkindness and revenge, and solicit vengeance against God's suffering servants with eager aggravations! Oh, how can these men look upon Christ's practice without shame! How can they look upon these prodigies of love and grace, and not blush! Can there be a greater crime and wrong done to any than was done to Christ? And yet when he was whipped, crowned with thorns, pierced with nails, lifted up upon the cross, he doth not pray for revenge, but pardon; he doth not cry, Justice! justice! but Mercy! mercy! 'Father, forgive them;' he doth not by captious queries and expostulations aggravate the offence, but he alleviates it by a sweet interpretation, 'They know not what they do.' It is strange to think what bloody principles many christians have espoused of late; that we rage against our brethren upon every offence, especially in matters of doubtful apprehension, where men are more liable to mistakes. Oh! it is sad, when God is but a little displeased, to help onward the affliction. I wonder where men learn that cruel and fell spirit into which we are commenced of late; it was wont to be good doctrine, 'Be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful.' What is become of all those good lectures of charity, and meekness, and gentleness, which are commended to us in the rule of the gospel and the example of Christ? Certainly when the spirit is exulcerated it argues some loss of peace with God. David was never more cruel than when he had violated the peace of his own conscience: 2 Sam. xii. 31, 'And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them to pass through the brickkiln.' Certainly matters are not right between us and God when men's principles and practices grow bloody and cruel.

Use 3. To exhort us to imitate Christ in being meek, patient, merciful, void of malice, doing good for evil, bearing the worst usage without studying revenge. Surely the same mind should be in us that

was in Christ Jesus. Head and members are acted by the same soul ; so in the mystical body, Christ and we should be acted with the same spirit ; the same spirit of holy love, sweetness, and forgiveness that breathed in Christ should breathe forth in our lives and conversations : Eph. iv. 32, ' And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.' All his ordinances imply this. In the word we hear of Christ's meekness ; his pattern is set forth that we might be like-minded ; in prayer we are taught to say, ' Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' We break our sponson and promise solemnly given in this petition if we do not pardon others. In baptism, ' we put on Christ,' Rom. xiii. 14 ; we put on his nature and qualities, that is, planting us into his likeness. In the Lord's supper we come to renew our union and communion with him, and to liken ourselves to Christ yet more and more. Christ changeth the temper of those that spiritually feed upon him, as natural meats communicate their qualities to us. The Israelites were more generous because they were so long fed with manna ; Nero was more bloody because he sucked the milk of a cruel nurse, who was wont to besmear her dugs with blood ; Achilles was more valiant because he was nourished with the marrow of lions. Men's dispositions are much according to their food ; certainly those that eat the Lamb should not be wolves, but meek as Christ was, and ready to forgive, and every way transcribe their master's pattern. See how Stephen imitates his master when he comes to die. First he prayeth for himself : Acts vii. 59, ' Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ;' as Christ did, Luke xxiii. 46, ' Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit ;' and then he intercedeth for his enemies : Acts vii. 60, ' Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' Here is not only an example of faith ; he committed his soul to Christ, but of charity, he deprecateth revenge from his enemies. Moses and other holy ones of God have done so. Moses : Num. xii. 13, ' Heal her now, O Lord, I beseech thee ;' when his sister Miriam was smitten with a leprosy for doing him wrong. Aaron, when he was despitefully used, and his calling maligned : Num. xvi. 47, 48, ' He ran into the midst of the people, and behold the plague was begun among the people ; and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people ; and he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed.' David fasted for his enemies when they were sick : Ps. xxxv. 13, ' But as for me, when they were sick my clothing was sackcloth, I humbled my soul with fasting.' We fast against them often, but seldom fast for them. So Paul : 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13, ' Being reviled, we bless ; being persecuted, we suffer it ; being defamed, we entreat.' When we are looked upon and treated as evil-doers, we should bear it patiently, not rage against instruments, but pray the Lord to open their eyes, that they may see the greatness of their sin, in hating and opposing the godly. You should not think the example of Christ an act beyond imitation. You see the holy men of God have attained a great measure of self-denial ; do you go and do likewise.

1. In private cases. A man shall meet with offences in the world. All men have not faith ; some are absurd and injurious. What a comfort would a man have in his spirit when he can pity their blindness and pardon their malice. They took away the life of Christ, and

yet he saith, 'Father, forgive them;' he was slain by them, and yet he prayeth for them. Certainly it is not comely for us to retaliate, to hate, curse, revile, and pursue injury with injury. They that revenge take an example from their enemies, and do them this honour to make them their own pattern; and what comfort can any have to make a wicked man his precedent! Besides, to revenge is to rush into God's tribunal, and to take his work out of his hands: Prov. xxiv. 29, 'Say not, I will do to him as he hath to me; I will render to the man according to his work.' Solomon putteth it into such words as are proper to God, that we may be sensible of the pride and usurpation that is in revenge: and, Rom. xii. 19, 'Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.' We take upon us to be rewarders when at least we should leave the case to God. You may put it into the hands of the righteous judge: 1 Peter ii. 23, 'When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.' Besides, it will much interrupt your prayers. Our revengeful dispositions must needs weaken our confidence, for we muse of others as we use ourselves. How can you say, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us,' when we are like vessels broken as soon as touched, and are furious and raging upon every wrong, and the least offence done to us? Alas! their offences to us are nothing like ours to God, either for number or weight. Not for number; no man can wrong us so much as we daily trespass against God. How many neglects and affronts doth mercy put up at our hands every day! Luke xvii. 4, 'If he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.' Seventy times seven is a number too little for the transgressions and offences of one day, and yet we grow peevish and passionate upon every slight fault or wrong done to us. So for the weight; the naughty servant would not forgive a hundred pence when his master forgave him ten thousand talents, Mat. xviii. 24, compared with the 28th verse. There is a great difference between pence and talents; the Roman penny was sevenpence halfpenny, and their talent was one hundred and eighty-seven pounds ten shillings. Their offences cannot be so heinous as ours, because of our great obligations to God, and the dignity of his essence; theirs are against dust and ashes, their guilty fellow-creatures; ours are against the great God. It is proper to christians, that know such an infinite pardoning mercy, to do something above heathens and publicans: Mat. v. 46, 'If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans so?' Christianity should raise the affections to a greater self-denial, so that we are to love our very enemies. Besides all this, consider the benefit of a meek patience. Revenge is sweet, but you will find more pleasure in meekness. All vexations disturb the peace and quiet of the soul, and I cannot do my enemy a greater pleasure than to let him take away my contentment, and, when I am wronged by others, to wrong myself. Will you hurt yourself by passion and sin because others hurt you by slanders and persecutions? He that will not forgive hurts himself more than he that doeth the wrong; for the injury offered reacheth but to the name,

body, or goods, but the desire of revenge wounds the conscience, and provokes God to wrath, and shuts the gate of his mercy against us. The great motive that excites the devil to molest and disturb us by his instruments is not to hurt your bodies, but to tempt your souls to impatience and revenge, and to draw you to other sins; and therefore you do not conquer it as a temptation till you avoid the sin. Job was robbed and plundered, but in all this Job sinned not; to come off with a wounded conscience, this is to be foiled indeed. Besides, conscience will take hold of all revengeful acts. David's heart smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment. Besides, consider the gain of others. Saul wept when he saw David's tenderness: 1 Sam. xxiv. 16, 'And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lift up his voice and wept.' Tenderness is expressed by heaping up coals upon your enemy's head: Prov. xxv. 21, 22, 'If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.' You may make him pliable to your purpose, as lead or wax melted by fire. Such charity doth often procure servants to God and friends to ourselves. It is indeed said there, 'and the Lord shall reward thee.' There are indeed some sour and crabbed pieces that will never be smoother, but if distorted and depraved natures are not won, God will reward thee. Endeavours of reconciliation are not lost with God; though you get nothing but scorn and contempt, you may comfort yourselves with your sincerity, and God will not be wanting. Besides all this, consider the honour of being above an injury: Prov. xix. 11, 'The discretion of a man deferreth his anger, and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.' As it is the glory of God to pardon sin; we think it a disgrace; but the Holy Ghost tells us it is the glory of a man. It is the devil's design to suffer the world to miscall grace; meekness is sheepishness, and patience is a kind of weakness and servility; an argument *ignavi ingenii*, of a slow dull temper, that hath no sense of things; as astronomers call glorious stars dogs and bears and dragons' tails. Oh, consider this is an height proper to christianity! nature could not reach it; there is no greater servility than to be a slave to one's passions: Ezek. xvi. 30, 'How weak is thy heart, saith the Lord, since thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman?' There are no spirits so feeble as those that are swayed by the ruffle of their own passions.

2. In public cases. In these times of mutual provocation we are apt to return evil for evil and word for word, and to curse and pray against one another; but we should labour to return good for evil, for injury doth not justify revenge. Religious quarrels are usually carried on with great hatred and animosity, for then religion feedeth the excess of passion, and instead of being a judge, becometh a party, and that which should be a restraint proveth fuel. The quarrel between Christ and his persecutors was a quarrel of religion, and yet he prays, 'Father, forgive them;' and if Christ did thus, why should not christians? Oh! consider it—(1.) As to open enemies; (2.) As to the undue carriage of brethren.

[1.] As to open enemies. Christ saith, Mat. v. 44, 'Love your

enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.' Lest we should excuse ourselves by a colour and show of religion, and so give indulgence to the exorbitancy of our passions, Christ names 'persecutors,' that are not only our enemies, but God's enemies; you are to pray for them, and wish them conviction of sin and reformation. And you see how Christ practiseth his own doctrine, and so taught us not only living, but dying. These were carried on by a blind zeal; alas! that they have no more light nor better principles. I doubt in all our divisions we have not plied this way of love; if we did, they would be soon cured and healed. We pray one against another, and seek each other's ruin and destruction, but when have we commended our enemies to God's grace and pity? And after all, we are apt to baptize our sufferings, which have been the effects of our pride and passion, with the glorious name of persecution, and that exasperateth our spirits, and we think it is but a duty to call for fire from heaven. We know not what manner of spirits we are of. An angry zeal hath the less of God in it, because it is so hastily kindled and so hardly suppressed.

[2.] As to undue carriage of brethren: James v. 10, 'Grudge not one against another, brethren; *μη στενάζετε*, groan not. When they should commend each other to the grace of God, they groan one against another. We should willingly bury the remembrance of their injuries. There cannot be unity, sympathy, brotherly love amongst the Lord's people, unless there be a heart to pity the infirmities of one another, and a proneness of spirit to do good contrary to what they deserve at our hands.

Quest. But is it not lawful to pray for revenge? Zechariah, when he was stoned between the temple and the altar, said, 'The Lord look upon it and require it,' 2 Chron. xxiv. 22; and David in the psalms prays that God would not pardon his enemies.

Ans. We cannot always imitate what the prophet did, who could know by special revelation who had sinned unto death, and therefore cannot use these imprecations unless conditionally. Their curses were predictions, and uttered by the spirit of prophecy, not by any private spirit. Meek and humble addresses to God, and wrestling for their good, suit better with us and the example of Jesus Christ: 1 Peter iii. 9, 'Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing, knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.' It is more suitable to christianity to wish good to them that curse and injure you. If you will not imitate Christ, you are none of his disciples, nor will he be your Saviour, nor must you think to live and reign with him in heaven. You must overcome yourself, and corrupt nature, that thirsteth after revenge: Prov. xvi. 32, 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.' Overcome and shame the party that doeth the wrong: 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.' Look upon them as objects of pity and compassion rather than of passion and anger: Eph. i. 32, 'Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.' Consider what God hath done to you that you may do the same to them.

Secondly, The next consideration of this prayer of Christ is as a taste and pledge of his mediation and intercession. So it is prophesied, Isa. liii. 12, 'He was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.' Christ was placed in the midst of thieves, as the first clause is explained, Mark xv. 28; and he made intercession, that is, prayed for his persecutors. The whole chapter is a prophetic narration of the acts and sorrows of Christ upon the cross. In this public sense and consideration, let us see what may be gathered out of the clause, 'Father, forgive them.'

1. It is an instance of Christ's love and bowels to sinners; he loved mankind so well that he prayed for them that crucified him. Look on the Lord Jesus as praying and dying for enemies, and improve it as a ground of confidence. Upon the cross he would give us an instance of his efficacy in converting the thief, and of his affection in praying for his persecutors. We were as great enemies to Christ, and as deep in the guilt of his passion, as they: Rom. v. 10, 'When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.' The enemies of his kingdom are every way as bad as the enemies of his person. If Christ did not say, 'Father, forgive,' what would become of us? You will say, We are christians; but scandalous sinners renew his sufferings, and 'put him to an open shame,' Heb. vi. 6. Oh, let us adore God for these experiences! It is a mighty ground of hope that Christ hath put in for a pardon; he would not die till he had expressed his reconciliation with his enemies.

2. See what is the voice and merit of his sufferings, 'Father, forgive them.' This is the speech that Christ uttered when he was laid on the cross. The apostle compareth Christ's blood and the blood of Abel: Heb. xii. 24, 'And to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.' Abel's blood was clamorous in the ears of God: Gen. iv. 10, 'The voice of thy brother's blood crieth to me from the ground;' and so in the conscience of Cain it crieth, Avenge! avenge me! Christ's blood hath another voice, it speaketh to God to pacify his wrath, and to pardon us, if penitent and believing sinners; it speaketh to conscience to be quiet, God hath found out a ransom. The blood of Christ may speak against us as well as against the Jews, for by our sins we made Christ to die. Oh, be not quiet till it speak peace in your consciences. Christ's blood was spilt in malice, as Abel's was, and might have cried for vengeance on the actors, who were not only the Jews, but we, and it yet speaketh as Abel's did: Heb. xi. 4, 'By it he, being dead, yet speaketh.' It is a speaking blood, and is yet speaking. The speaking of the blood is interpreted according to the words in their mouth wherewith they died: Mat. xxiii. 35, 'That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zecharias the son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the porch and the altar.' Our Lord gathers it from Zecharias' saying, 'The Lord look upon it and require it,' 2 Chron. xxiv. 22. So the words of Christ interpret his death.

3. In the mediatory consideration it hinteth the coupling of his intercession with his satisfaction. On the cross, there he dieth and there he prayeth; he was both priest and sacrifice. The high priest under the law was not only to slay the sacrifice, but to intercede for the

people ; first the beast was slain without the camp, and then the blood was carried into the holy of holies, and there prayer was made with incense ; but before that, Aaron, when he was going into the holy place before the Lord, was to cause the sound of his golden bells to be heard under pain of death, Exod. xxviii. 35. To this I parallel this action of Christ upon the cross. This prayer was as the sound of the golden bells ; he would make his voice to be heard by prayer, and then he goes into the holy of holies ; the Lord Jesus Christ, when he shed his blood before the tribunal of God, he sendeth forth a prayer. God would have our salvation carried on in a way of mercy and justice, and Christ was to mingle entreaty with satisfaction ; as, Lev. xvi. 14, the high priest was to bring the blood within the veil, and to sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat. He must satisfy justice and make an address to mercy, that we that have sinned with both hands may take hold of God with both hands : Rom. iii. 24, ' Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ ; ' it is ' freely,' and yet ' through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ ; ' these two sweetly accord.

4. This is a pledge of his constant intercession in heaven. The ceremonies of the old law were not only types of Christ, but his visible actions were a kind of types and pledges of his spiritual actions, 1 John ii. 1, ' If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' He that could pray for enemies will pray for friends, and he that got our pardon by his intercession will promote our salvation. Certainly Christ's glorified soul loseth no affection ; he is as earnest with the Father for his friends as ever he was upon the cross for his persecutors : Heb. ix. 24, ' For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.' Christ doth appear as our advocate in court, not only in our name, but in our stead.

5. It shows the nature of his intercession. It not only implies the everlastingness of his merit, that his blood doth continue to deserve such things at the hands of God as we stand in need of, but it is a continual representation of his merit ; it is not a metaphor, but a solemn act of his priesthood. Again, it is not by verbal expressions, such as he used hereupon earth, ' Father, forgive them ; ' his became the state of his humiliation ; but now he intercedes *non voce, sed miseratione*, not by voice, but by pity. What is it then ? Partly his appearing in heaven as God in our nature : Heb. ix. 24, ' Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands,' &c., ' but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.' He is said to appear before God for us, as the high priest came and presented himself before God with the names of the twelve tribes engraven on his breastplate. Partly in his expressing an actual willingness, or the desires of his holy soul concerning our salvation : John xvii. 24, ' Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me may be with me where I am ; ' and so he appears in our names, as well as in our nature. Partly by some acts of adoration of the sovereign majesty of God ; some address to God there is : John xiv. 16, ' I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.' He doth not only ask the enlargement of his own kingdom : Ps. ii. 8,

'Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession;' but the pardon, comfort, peace, and supply of particular persons: 1 John ii. 1, 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' Partly in his presenting our prayers and supplications: Rev. viii. 3, 'And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne;' and therefore he is called 'a minister of the sanctuary,' Heb. viii. 2. This is the nature of Christ's intercession.

6. The success of Christ's intercession, 'Father, forgive them.' Was he heard in this? Yes; this prayer converts the centurion, and those, Acts ii. 41, above 'three thousand,' and presently after five thousand more, Acts iv. 4. In the compass of a few days above eight thousand of his enemies were converted. Christ is good at interceding; his prayers are always heard: John xi. 42, 'I knew that thou hearest me always.' And therefore let us seek no other mediator; God cannot deny his own Son. Jesus Christ the righteous intercedes for us; let us put all our requests into his hands.

II. I come now to the argument used, 'They know not what they do.' But you will say, Christ elsewhere complaineth of his enemies, that they know him, and refused him out of malice: John xv. 24, 'Now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father;' and therefore he saith, they had no cloak for their sin, but were utterly without excuse, for they could not plead ignorance.

Ans. 1. This is not spoken of all, but of some only. The greatest part were moved with the command, authority, and persuasion of the priests, or blinded with a false zeal to preserve their old religion, and so thought they did God service in crucifying Christ. Those that sinned out of malice, Christ had told them their doom before: Mat. xii. 32, 'Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.'

2. They knew him to be a just man, though they knew him not to be the Lord of glory, and that he did many signs which the prophets foretold should be done by the Messiah; and therefore at least that he was a great prophet, and as such they should have revered and received him, so that they had the less cloak for their sin.

3. Christ excused not *a toto*, but *a tanto*, not altogether, but only sheweth that they were capable of pardon because of their ignorance. Christ excuseth the sin of his enemies in that manner that he could excuse them; he could not altogether excuse the injustice of Pilate, nor the cruelty of the soldiers, nor the envy of the chief priests, nor the folly and unthankfulness of the people, nor the perjury of the false witnesses; all that he could plead was some ignorance of the dignity of his person: 1 Cor. ii. 8, 'Which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' The chief men of the Jews did not understand the mystery of redemption, and many were ignorant, not only of the divinity of Christ, but his innocency also: 'They know not what they do.'

Doct. There is a difference between sinners, and it is a more dangerous thing to sin against knowledge than out of ignorance.

1. Some sin wittingly and wilfully, as Cain, Saul, Judas, &c., who against the apparent light of their consciences venture upon the foulest actions.

2. Others sin out of ignorance; either they do not certainly know what they do to be sin, or do not expressly consider it. So Paul in persecuting the church of God: 1 Tim. i. 13, 'Who was before a persecutor, and a blasphemer, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief.'

3. Some sin knowingly indeed, but out of infirmity, either arising from some great fear of danger and present death, as Peter denied his master; it is done with a troubled mind: these may be recovered to God, but with difficulty. Or else they are hurried to evil by the baits of the flesh, and pleasing temptations: James i. 12, 'Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.' Now their case cannot easily be spoken to, for it needs much discussion. It may be by surprisal, and that for one act, and none of the grossest: Gal. vi. 1, 'Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.' The devil many times leaveth no time for deliberation, and bringeth his tempting baits not to the fore-door of reason, but to the back-door of sensual appetite, which being in a rage, blindeth the mind. But if they sin with a strong will, their case is more dangerous; especially if they live and lie in sin after many experiences of the evil of it, their condition is deplorable.

This foundation being laid, let us see how far ignorance excuseth from sin.

[1.] Whatever sin we commit, it is sin, and of itself deserveth damnation. Sin is not determined to be sin by its being voluntary or involuntary, but by its contrariety to the law of God: 1 John iii. 4, 'Sin is the transgression of the law.' Therefore the causal particle *for* in the text doth not show the reason of pardon, but the capableness of pardon. So Paul's ignorance was not the cause of God's mercy, for sin cannot be the cause of mercy, but only the occasion of it. The nature of sin is not determined by the voluntariness of it, but only the degree of it.

[2.] Ignorance is either antecedent, concomitant, or consequent.

(1.) Antecedent, going before the act, as in the generality of the Jews: Acts iii. 17, 'And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.' Out of ignorance and blind zeal they crucified him whom God did make both Lord and Christ.

(2.) Concomitant. A man hath knowledge, but useth it not for the present. It is one thing to sin with knowledge, and another thing to sin against knowledge; he that hath knowledge, but for the present may be blinded by his lusts and carnal affections, sinneth not against knowledge directly, but collaterally only, as he that stealeth or committeth adultery doth not this for sin's sake (for none can will evil as evil), but he only attendeth to the profit and pleasure that is in adultery and theft, but shutteth the eyes of his mind against the filthiness or injustice that is in it; and therefore he is like a man that leapeth from an high place into the water, who first shutteth his eyes, and then casts himself into the flood or stream.

(3.) Consequent ignorance is after the sin or act of the will, either

from the depraved disposition of the will: John iii. 20, 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd;' or from the just judgment of God: John ix. 39, 'For judgment I am come into the world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind.' God inflicts a judicial blindness on men that will not obey the truth.

[3.] Ignorance is either invincible or vincible.

(1.) Invincible ignorance is when there is not sufficient revelation, when it is a thing we should know, but God hath not brought light among us. Thus the heathens are punished for not glorifying God, whom they knew by the light of nature: Rom. i. 21, 'When they knew God, they glorified him not as God;' not because they believed not in Christ, for he was not revealed unto them; but christians shall be punished for not obeying the gospel: 2 Thes. i. 8, 'In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

(2.) Vincible ignorance is when there are plentiful means and great helps to overcome it; then is our ignorance more culpable. This is seen when either ignorance is voluntary and pertinacious, or when there is gross negligence. When it is voluntary: 2 Peter iii. 5, 'For this they are willingly ignorant of.' That they may sin more freely and securely, they will not know what may disturb or trouble their sleep in sin: Job xxi. 14, 'Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.' The psalmist says of them, Ps. xcv. 10, 'It is a people that do err in their hearts; they have not known my ways.' They err in their hearts as well as in their minds; when they do not desire to know what they should know, this ignorance is voluntary. Or else it is betrayed by gross negligence, when a man doeth a thing that, if he were not grossly negligent, he might know to be sin: Eph. iii. 15-17, 'See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' A christian is bound to use all holy means to know all things that belong to his duty, and must bestow much time and diligence upon it. If he is grossly ignorant, it is a sign he hath a mind to put a cheat upon his soul.

Use. Let us beware of sin against knowledge; these sins, of all others, are the most dangerous, whether they be sins of omission; to omit duties that we know to be duties, this is very dangerous: James iv. 17, 'Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin;' or sins of commission, to commit sins that we know to be sins: Rom. ii. 21, 22, 'Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?' To commit sins that we know to be sins is to involve ourselves in wrath and vengeance. Have a care then of these sins; if you are guilty of them, it cannot be pleaded for you, 'Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.'