

thee, without putting thee to the trouble of physic. Take up a resolution to look after the cure of thy soul, and observe the whole progress of the work, and what a wound is given to sin in every ordinance: what in the word, what in the Lord's Supper; how thy resolution is strengthened against it; how the carnal nature wears off every day. The work is not perfect in an instant, but he is still turning; therefore when thou beginnest to be dead to sin, die more. Ye are dead, therefore mortify. Christ hath perfectly bought off all sin in every kind and degree; should not we strive to have all that he hath purchased? At least do not strengthen thy bonds, the sin thou canst not avoid hate it, and keep up the lively resistance still. Hear diligently, pray earnestly, watch narrowly, and keep thyself from thy sin: do not only pare the nails of it, but cut off thy very right hand, and mortify and subdue it yet more and more, that Christ may have his conquest in thy soul.

SERMON IV.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.—2 PET. I. 4.

In these words the apostle extolleth the grace of God towards us in the gospel. In them take notice of:—

First, The means.

Secondly, The end and use of them.

Thirdly, The method and order in which this effect is wrought in us.

First, The means whereby God conveys his grace to us, viz., the promises of the gospel, which are set forth:—

1. By their excellency: *exceeding great and precious promises.*

2. Their freeness: *are given to us.*

1. Their excellency is set forth by two adjuncts. They are 'exceeding great and precious': τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα. The one noteth their intrinsic worth and value; they are 'exceeding great.' The other, our esteem of them; they deserve to be 'precious' to us.

[1.] Τα μέγιστα, so called from the matter of them, which are great and precious gifts, such as pardon, and life begun in sanctification and perfected in glory.

[2.] Τα τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, precious, deserving and challenging our esteem, being so suitable to our necessities and desires. Our necessity ariseth from the fears of misery so justly deserved. Our desires are after a proper happiness, which is only offered to us in the promises of God, not only as probable, but as certain to be ours, if duly qualified. Now these promises, being so great and precious, should attract us to all purity and holiness; for what is greater, and

deserveth to be more esteemed by us, than remission of sins, and an inheritance among the sanctified?

2. Their freeness: *given*, made freely, made good freely.

Secondly, The end and use of them: *that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.*

By the *divine nature* is not meant here the essence of God, but his communicable excellencies, or such divine properties as can be imparted to the creature, and these not considered in their absolute perfection, but as they are agreeable to our present state and capacity. These are sometimes called 'the image of God:' Col. iii. 10, 'The new man, which is renewed in holiness after the image of him that created him;' because they imply a likeness to him. And sometimes 'the life of God:' Eph. iv. 18, 'Being alienated from the life of God,' because it is a vital principle. And here 'the divine nature,' and that for two reasons:—

1. Because these are communicated to us by God; they are created in us by his divine power, and therefore the word *created* is so often used on this occasion: Eph. ii. 10, 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus;' 2 Cor. v. 17, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.' Creation is proper to God. We have them by virtue of our communion with him. They flow from God, as the light doth from the sun.

2. Because by these perfections we somewhat resemble God. Therefore it is said, 1 Peter ii. 9, 'We show forth his praises:' τὰς ἀρετὰς, his virtues or divine attributes, his 'wisdom, goodness, bounty, holiness;' for in these we most resemble him. If you take in his power, there is some resemblance of that too, as to the moral exercise in taming our own flesh, mastering our inordinate lusts and passions, and vanquishing all temptations. This is a spiritual power, and so spoken of 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.' And πάντα ἰσχύω, 'I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me,' Phil. iv. 13. To live above the hopes and fears of the world is a great ability and power. And vanquishing the world is made the fruit of the new birth: 1 John v. 4, 'That which is born of God overcometh the world.' And in that place where the spirit of a Christian is described, it is said to be 'a spirit of love, power, and of a sound mind,' 2 Tim. i. 7. We conceive God to be a spiritual being, of infinite wisdom, goodness, and power. To his wisdom answereth the spirit of a sound mind; to his goodness, a spirit of love; and what is the original and pattern of the spirit of power, the very name discovereth, namely, God's own power. So all his attributes leave their impress upon us.

Thirdly, The way, method, and order how we receive this benefit of the divine nature. 'Having first escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.' As we die to sin, the divine nature increaseth in us. There is a putting off before there can be a putting on: Eph. iv. 22-24, 'We put off the old man, which is corrupt by its deceitful lusts.' We begin the work of sanctification with mortification in the first place, and then proceed to the positive duties of a new life; for the plants of righteousness will not thrive in an impenitent

and unmortified heart. As the corruption of sin is driven out and expelled, so the divine nature succeedeth. *Intus existens prohibet alienum*, these things are not consistent, cannot be joined together. The corruption that is in the world and the divine nature can no more agree than darkness and light, Rom. xiii. 12. But let us see how this mortification is expressed.

1. What is to be avoided.

2. The manner of shunning it.

1. What is to be avoided: 'The corruption that is in the world through lust.' Observe, sin is called *corruption*, as often in scripture, because it is a blasting of our primitive excellency and purity; Gen. vi. 12, 'All flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth;' Ps. xiv. 1, 'They are all corrupt and abominable;' that is, degenerated, fallen from their pristine or former purity. Observe, the seat of this corruption is said to be in the world, where lust and all uncleanness reigneth; therefore called *μιάσματα κόσμου*, 'the pollutions of the world,' 2 Peter ii. 20. The generality of men are defiled with them, corrupted in their faith, worship, and manners; therefore conversion is called for under these terms: Acts ii. 40, 'Save yourselves from this untoward generation.' Conversion to God implies a renouncing or an escaping the evil fashions and corruptions of the world, or 'having no fellowship with them,' with their sins, but 'reproving them rather.' So that the question is, whether we will conform ourselves to God or the world? whether we will have fellowship with the corruptions of the world, or be partakers of the divine nature? We must avoid the one to obtain the other. Lastly, observe, that this corruption is said to reign in the world 'through lust.' Besides the bait there is the appetite; it is our naughty affections that make our abode in the world unsafe and dangerous. If it were not for lust, neither the baits nor the examples of the world would pervert or hurt. Mortify the lust, and you have pulled up the temptations by the roots.

2. The manner of shunning, in the word *escaping*. There is a flying away required, and that quickly, as in the plague, *cito longe*; or from a fire which hath almost burned us, or a flood that breaketh in upon us. We cannot soon enough escape from sin: Mat. iii. 7, 'Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come;' Heb. vi. 18, 'Who have fled for refuge,' &c. No motion but flight becomes us in this case.

Doct. That the great end and effect of the promises of the gospel is, to make us partakers of the divine nature.

I. Let us consider the effect or end.

II. The means appointed to attain it.

III. The influence of the one on the other.

I. For the effect or end. There observe:—

1. That it is a natural, not a transient effect. There may be such a sense of the goodness, wisdom, and power of God as may produce a sudden passion; as suppose of fear or love. It may only affect us for the present, but inferreth no change of heart and life. There is an impression we cannot deny, and an impression suitable to those apprehensions that we have of God; but it is not a constant principle of holy spiritual operation. But the promises of the gospel are to breed

in us such a temper of heart as may be a second nature to us, a habit or constitution of soul that may incline us to live to God. A habit serveth for this use, *ut quis facile, jucunde et constanter agat*, that a man may act easily, pleasantly, and constantly. (1.) To act easily. There is an inclination and propensity to holiness. God created all things with an inclination to their proper operations, as air to ascend, and water to descend. So the new creature hath a tendency to those actions that are proper to it. Their hearts are bent to please God and serve him, and do whatever they do with a kind of naturalness, because of this bent and inclination. They act not only or barely as enjoined, but as inclined. The law of God is in their hearts, Heb. viii. 10. So act not by constraint, but with a ready mind. (2.) To act pleasantly. They have not only a new bent, bias, and tendency, but it is a delight to do what is holy, Ps. xl. 8, as being in their element when they are thus employed. What is against nature is ingrate and harsh, but what is with nature is sweet and pleasant. It is hard, a kind of force, to bring them to do the contrary, 1 John iii. 9. There needeth some kind of violence to bring a good man to sin, as also a naughty man to do good. (3.) It is a constant principle of holy operations, so that a man doth not only obey God easily, but evenly, and without such frequent interruptions of the holy life. Many do that which is good, or forbear evil, uneasily, because of the restraints of providence or dictates of conscience, and unevenly by fits and starts: Ps. cvi. 3, 'Blessed is he that keepeth judgment, and doth righteousness at all times.' They are continually exercising of all duties of godliness, righteousness and mercy; for the operations of nature are constant, however impeded, obstructed, or diverted at certain times. This we are to look after, that the sanctifying grace we have received become a new nature; that the soul have a tendency and delight as to spiritual objects, and be constantly and easily carried to them, and this should be the whole frame and drift of our lives.

2. It is a divine nature; that is, not only such as floweth from God, but may carry some resemblance with him or to him. It floweth from God, for we are 'partakers;' it is but a ray from his excellency, and it carrieth a likeness to him, or cometh nearer to the nature of God himself, than anything that a man is capable of. Now this is said for two reasons:—

[1.] To show the dignity of it. Nothing known to man is so like God as a sanctified soul. The saints have their Maker's express image; therefore if God be excellent and holy, they are so. The image and picture of God and Christ is in them, not made by a painter or carver, but by the Holy Ghost, 2 Cor. iii. 18. This is not a forbidden image, which may pollute and stain our minds, or form in us ill thoughts and conceptions of God, but raise our hearts to him. Natural conscience doth homage to the image of God shining in the saints: Mark vi. 20, 'Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy.' So of Moses it is said, Exod. xi. 3, 'Moses was a great man in the land of Egypt, and in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of all people.' His person and presence was awful to them, as having something rare in it. There is a secret

sentiment of the excellency of holiness that draweth eyes after it, and maketh wicked and carnal men wonder at it, stand in awe of those in whom it is eminent, and extorteth a reverence from them. But especially when they come to die they have a sense of this excellency; all then approve a sober, righteous, and godly life, and disallow that which is dissolute and carnal. Then all things appear in their own colours, and the fumes of lust being dissipated, they begin more clearly to discern the happiness of those who are made like God. Then those that would live with the carnal would fain die with the righteous: Num. xxiii. 10, 'Let my last end be like his.' When entering on the confines of eternity they grow wiser.

[2.] To show the quality and condition of it. You must have a new nature, and such a nature as may be a divine nature. If you have nothing above natural men or corrupt nature, you are strangers to the promises of the gospel. It is a thought that possesseth many when they are pressed to Christian duties, they will say, we are not saints or angels, and therefore cannot abstain from such sins, or attain unto a heavenly life. But do you mark what is said here: Christians must be partakers of a divine nature; and not only they are cut off from any privilege by Christ 'who corrupt themselves as brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed,' Jude 10—that is, against the light of nature ingulf themselves in all manner of dissoluteness and sensuality; but also they that walk as men, only according to the rule of men, who mind nothing beyond the present world: 1 Cor. iii. 3, 'Are not ye carnal, and walk as men?'—that is, they are not raised above the pitch of mere men, and have nothing of the Spirit of God in them.

[3.] This divine nature may be considered three ways. Either—

(1.) As begun; when we are first 'renewed in the spirit of our minds,' and regenerated 'according to the image of God,' Eph. iv. 23, 24. There is a wonderful change wrought in sinners by reason of the divine qualities impressed on them; so that the creature beginneth to look like God himself: their nature is altered, their course of life is altered, and their designs and actions have something divine in them.

(2.) As increased; when more like God in a conspicuous degree. At first the impression is but weak, and this glory is darkened by remaining imperfections; and we show forth much of Adam upon all occasions, as well as somewhat of Christ. But where any are sincere and diligent, the old nature is more suppressed and curbed, and the divine nature doth more eminently appear: 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'We are changed from glory to glory.' It is a work capable of spiritual progress. We should grow more like God, and come nearer to the nature of God every day; and it is a shame we are not, having been so long acquainted with the word.

(3.) As it is perfected in heaven; for there we have the nearest communion with God, and so the highest conformity to him that we are capable of: 1 John iii. 2, 'We shall see God as he is, and be like him.' Perfectly like him; for the being of sin is then utterly abolished: there is not the least stain or blemish upon a glorified soul. Besides, then we are like him, not only in point of holiness,

but in point of happiness and felicity; for God is a holy and happy being. Here we resemble God more in holiness and purity; for many times the most eminent and exemplary holiness may be accompanied with remarkable afflictions; at least, sanctifying grace doth not exempt us from them. But there, as our holiness is exact, our felicity is complete also. First we are made holy, and then immortal, and in both like God. Well, then, this is the effect, 'partakers of a divine nature;' so that when you come among the people of God, and you be asked what kind of men do you find them to be, as Gideon, in another case, asked Zeba and Zalmunnah concerning his brethren, who answered, 'Each one resembled the children of a king,' Judges viii. 18,—they were godly¹ and majestic persons,—so it will be said concerning the saints, who are really and eminently partakers of the grace of the gospel: they are all children of the most high God; as like God as mortal men can be,—bear his image, and express resemblance of the grace of the gospel.

II. Let us now see the means by which God doth accomplish this effect: 'To us are given great and precious promises.'

1. It is an instance of God's love, that he will deal with us in the way of promises. The world is depraved by sin, and sunk into fears and despair of any good from God, whom we have so highly provoked. Therefore God invites and allures us to himself by promises; for promises and² declarations of God's will in the gospel, whereby he signifies what good he will freely bestow us, if we will look after it. These advantages we have by them:—(1.) A promise is more than a purpose; for the purpose and intention of a man is secret and hidden in his own bosom, but a promise is open and manifest. Thereby we get the knowledge of the good intended to us. If God had only purposed to bestow all his grace upon us, we could not have known his intention and purpose till it were manifested in the effect; it would have been as a hidden treasure or sealed fountain, of no comfort and encouragement to us till we had found it. But now the word is gone out of his lips, we may know how we shall speed, if we will hearken to his counsel. God's promises are, on his part, the eruption or overflow of his love. His heart is so big with thoughts of good to us, that his love cannot stay till the accomplishment of things, but he must tell us aforehand: Isa. xlii. 9, 'Before they spring forth, I tell you of them.' He might have done us good, and given us no notice; but that would not satisfy him. It is an obligation God takes upon himself, *promittendo, se debitorem fecit*. God's purposes are unchangeable, but promises are a security put into our hands, not only give us notice, but assurance that thus it shall be. We have the greater holdfast upon him, and may put his bond in suit: Ps. cxix. 49, 'Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.' (2.) It is more than a doctrinal declaration. It is one thing to reveal a doctrine, another to promise a benefit; that maketh a thing known, this maketh a thing sure, and upon certain terms; that gives us notice, but this gives us interest. If 'life and immortality' had been only 'brought to light in the gospel,' 2 Tim. i. 10, which was only obscurely known to the heathens, it were a great mercy that we were

¹ Qu. 'goodly'?—Ed.

² Qu. 'are'?—Ed.

not left to blind guesses and dark conjectures. That eternal life is set before us, a thing real and excellent, is a great matter. But God hath put it into a covenant form and promise, 1 John ii. 25, that we may make our title and our claim. Surely that is matter of great comfort to us: Ps. cxix. 111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.' (3.) It is more than a prophecy or simple prediction. Scripture prophecies will be fulfilled because of God's veracity; but scripture promises will be fulfilled, not only because of God's veracity, but also his fidelity and justice; for by God's promise man cometh to have a right to the thing promised. It was his mercy and goodness to make the promise, but his justice and fidelity bindeth him to make it good: 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness;' 2 Tim. iv. 8. Divines say, of all lies, a promissory lie is the worst; for this is not only against truth, but right, even though that right entirely accrue from your own free promise.

2. The promises of the new covenant are of a most glorious and valuable nature. They are not about small things, or things of little moment, but about worthy and dear-bought blessings. They contain spiritual and eternal riches; such as the healing of our nature, the pardon of our sins, a safe conduct unto eternal happiness; the glorifying of our souls, the resurrection of our bodies, and then life everlasting, or an unchangeable state of happiness. These are the greatest things indeed, in comparison of which all the things of the world are but as a May-game, vain and empty, or the smallest matters, as the apostle calleth them, 1 Cor. vi. 2. Reconciliation with God is our privilege here; and is it a light thing to be at peace with the living God? to enjoy his amity and love? to study and fit ourselves to do his will? to live in constant communion with him now? to have access to him at all times? to obtain from him whatever in reason and righteousness we can ask? A Christian is never upbraided with the perpetuity of addresses, never denied audience, never has cause to doubt of success, has more familiarity with God, and a surer interest in his love, than the greatest favourites have in any prince or potentate upon earth. But then the eternal enjoyment of God hereafter: Phil. iii. 14, 'I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling in God in Christ Jesus.' It is a high prize that is set before us; then we shall have a larger capacity to know God, and enjoy him, and receive his benefits: Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Oh! cry out: 1 Cor. ii. 9, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.'

3. They are precious promises, worthy of our esteem; for they are not about things that we have nothing to do with, but such wherein we are deeply and intimately concerned. In God's promises there is due provision made for the desires, necessities, and wants of mankind. Let me instance in pardon and life, the first inviting benefits, Acts xxvi. 18. Pardon answereth the fears, and life those desires of happiness which are so natural to us.

[1.] The consciousness of sin, and the fear of God's wrath and dis-

pleasure, should make offers of pardon acceptable to us. The great scruple of the guilty creature is how sin shall be expiated and God appeased, Micah vi. 6, 7. We fear punishment from a holy and just God, and cannot get rid of bondage till sin be forgiven. The justice of the supreme governor of the world will be ever dreadful to us. The gospel serveth for this use, to give us the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, Luke i. 77.

[2.] The other great privilege is eternal life. Corrupt nature is not against the offers of felicity. There was never a creature heard of that would not be happy, for there was never a creature but loved himself. Therefore what more powerful inducement to bring us into the way of holiness than this blessed hope set before us, that we may see God, and live for ever? Titus ii. 12, 13. It is true, we are greatly enchanted with false happiness, but shall not such an offer be precious to us? John vi. 34, 'Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.'

4. All this is given to us wretched men without any desert of ours; nay, we had deserved the contrary. Without our asking or thinking, the covenant was framed and modelled to our hands, and in the frame and contexture of it we may see a constant strain of covenant grace, in the richness of the benefits, the graciousness of the donor, the seasonableness of the offer, the readiness of the help, when once we set ourselves to seek after God, and please and serve him; and, lastly, in the sureness of the reward, notwithstanding frailties and imperfections.

III. The influence of the one upon the other; or, how do these promises promote the divine nature?

1. From their drift, which is, to draw us from the creature to God, and the world to heaven; to mortify the esteem of the false happiness which tainteth and corrupteth our natures; and to raise us to those noble objects and ends which dignify and adorn the soul, and make it in a sort divine. It breedeth an excellent spirit in us, which is carried above the world, and the hopes and fears of it, 1 Cor. ii. 12. Alas! what a mean spirit have they that drive no higher trade than providing for the flesh, or accommodating a life which must shortly expire! Like foolish birds who, with great art and contrivance, feather a nest, which within a little while they leave. But how divine and god-like are they who look to higher things, to please God, enjoy communion with him, and live with him for ever!

2. The matter of the promises. Many of which concern the change of our hearts, the cleansing or healing of our natures: Heb. viii. 10, 'I will put my laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people;' Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26, 'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh;' Jer. xxxiii. 8, 'And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity.' All which are encouragements of prayer to God for this benefit. If God doth not exclude us, we should not exclude ourselves.

3. The conditions or terms on which our right is suspended. Not pardon without repentance: Acts iii. 19, 'Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins might be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; Acts ii. 38, 39, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost,' &c. Not heaven or eternal life without holiness: Heb. xii. 14, 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord;' 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' Mat. v. 8.

4. The power with which the promises are accompanied: 2 Peter i. 3, 'According as his divine power hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.' He gives us life temporal and spiritual, and that immutable life of felicity hereafter. The divine nature is communicated to us by virtue of the promises; for the Spirit is our sanctifier, and he works by congruous means.

Use 1. Believe the promises, for they are most sure and certain. God's testimony of the good things he will bestow upon us cannot deceive us, or beget a vain and uncertain hope. His promise is a testimony of his will, and against his power nothing can stand. 'There shall be a performance of those things spoken of by the Lord,' Luke i. 45.

2. Esteem them: Heb. xi. 13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.' We can never embrace them till we are persuaded of their truth. But then consider their worth. Great is the stupidity of those who are nothing taken with these things. If a great man engages himself any way, we make great reckoning of his word; and shall we not make great matter of the word of God, and esteem his promises? Esteem them so as to get them at any price, Mat. xiii. 46. Sell all for the pearl of price. Esteem them so as to be contented with a mean condition in the world. Though God keeps us low, it is enough to be 'made partakers of his holiness:' Heb. xii. 10, 'For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' Esteem them so as to perform the duties required, Ps. cxix. 14; esteem them so as to keep up your rejoicing in Christ: Phil. iii. 8-10, 'I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord;' and ver. 3, 'We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.'

3. Labour to improve the belief of every promise for the increase of holiness, that we may be like God, pure and holy as he is: 2 Cor. vii. 1, 'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.'