

SERMON XV.

And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.—ACTS XXI. 14.

THE history that concerns this passage begins at the 8th verse. In the whole you may take notice:—

I. Of the occasion.

II. Of the carriage of the saints upon it.

I. In the occasion I observe:—

1. That Paul was now at Cesarea, in Philip's house, ver. 8. Philip was one of those that were scattered and driven out of his dwelling by Paul's persecution, Acts viii. 4, 5; and now he received him into his own house. Philip, that was injured by Paul a persecutor, is easily reconciled with Paul a convert. It is an ill office to rake in the filth which God hath covered, and it argueth some envy at the divine grace to upbraid men with sins committed before conversion. Former miscarriages and injuries should be forgotten. If Christ hath taken them into his bosom, we should not be strange to them.

2. There Agabus comes to him and prophesieth of Paul's bonds at Jerusalem. Agabus was a prophet, but by what appears of him in scripture, ever a prophet of evil tidings: he foretold a famine, Acts xi. 28, and now Paul's bonds. God will be glorified by all manner of tempers and dispositions. Some, like Agabus, come always with a sad message in their mouths; and yet these have their use. Even those that give warning of judgments to come should be accepted, as well as those that bring us hopes of mercy and deliverance. It was an unjust exception of the king of Israel against Micaiah, 1 Kings xxii. 8, 'I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.' They that do evil do not love to hear of evil; and yet that may be true which is not pleasing.

3. Agabus useth a sign, ver. 11; he goes and binds himself, and showeth thus it should be done with Paul at Jerusalem. This was usual with the prophets; as Isaiah went naked and barefoot to show what should be their usage under the king of Assyria, Isa. xx. 2, 3. Ezekiel was to pack up his stuff and remove, to signify what should be the lot of the people, Ezek. xii. 3-5; that God might teach his people by visible signs, as well as by word of mouth, and what was received by both senses (sight and hearing) might make a deeper impression upon their souls; therefore he hath instituted sacraments. As kings delight to have their royal deeds not only recorded in chronicles, but to have some monuments set up as a sign which may be perpetuated in future ages, so the Lord Jesus, having vanquished death, hell, the grave, the devil, and sin, not only has it recorded in his word, but would give us signs and monuments, that we might continually remember both the victory and the comfort we have by Christ.

But what needs Paul so often to be warned of his bonds? He had been told before, Acts xx. 22, 23, 'I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the

Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.' And then again, in this chapter, Acts xxi. 4, 'There were some disciples which said to Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem.' How shall we reconcile these expressions? They 'said through the Spirit that Paul should not go up to Jerusalem;' and yet Paul was 'bound in the spirit to go to Jerusalem.' In this latter place we must distinguish between the prediction of troubles and the counsel of safety. The prediction of troubles; so they said through the Spirit that it would be dangerous for Paul to go to Jerusalem, but they dissuaded him from going to Jerusalem out of their own private love and affection to him; so that Paul was warned again and again.

Quest. But why was he warned so often?

Ans. That he might be thoroughly prepared. God doth not love to take his children unprovided. Paul was not surprised, but had warning upon warning of his present danger. If a sudden and unexpected flood of miseries break in upon us, it is not because we want warning, but because we will not take warning. When we are well at ease, we will not think of death and the cross; and therefore, if we be unprovided, we may thank our own security.

II. The carriage of the saints upon this occasion. And there we may take notice of four things:—

1. The entire affection of the disciples to Paul, who had done them good: *they besought him, &c.*

2. Paul's entire affection to God: *yet he would not be persuaded.*

3. Their discretion: *when he would not be persuaded, they ceased.*

4. The ground of their discretion, their piety: *they said, The will of the Lord be done.*

1. Their entire affection to Paul: 'Both we and they of that place besought him that he would not go up to Jerusalem,' ver. 12. This entreaty did not proceed from self-love, for they were resolved to go with him, ver. 15, but zeal for God's glory. The lives and liberties of those that are eminent instruments of God's glory are very dear and precious to God's faithful people. Paul declares of Aquila and Priscilla, Rom. xvi. 4, 'For my life laid they down their own necks;' and Acts xix. 31, His friends desired him 'that he would not adventure into the theatre.' They have them in singular love for their worth's sake, and therefore, when they are in danger they weep sore, Acts xx. 37; and when they are dead they make great lamentation: 'Devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him,' Acts viii. 2. As the Israelites said to David, 2 Sam. xxi. 17, 'Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel;' that is, lest the glory and splendour of the nation perish with thee. The loss of a good magistrate is a great loss, and such instruments are not easily had again when once lost.

But was this well done to persuade him?

Yes; for though the prophet had foretold what Paul should suffer, yet we know of no command they had to the contrary. All desires against God's secret will are not unlawful, when we afterwards submit to his revealed will: 1 Kings viii. 18, 'And the Lord said to David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thy heart.' And yet that was against

God's secret will ; it was in his heart to build God's house, and it was no sin, for there was no command to the contrary. So here they were to desire the preservation of so precious an instrument as Paul was ; yet Satan might have a hand in it, from their persuasion to weaken his resolution. Satan often laboureth to take us off from our duty by the persuasion of our loving friends, who mean us well in what they say to us. When Christ had told of his sufferings at Jerusalem, Peter said, ' Be it far from thee, Lord ; this shall not be unto thee.' Our Saviour replied, ' Get thee behind me, Satan,' Mat. xvi. 22, 23. Who would have thought that Christ's disciple should have been Satan's instrument, and then when speaking in love to his master ? Therefore we must not measure their counsel by their good meaning, but by God's word, and be deaf to all relations, that we may discharge our duty to God. See Deut. xiii. 6, 7. In our affections to eminent instruments to God's glory, there may be much of carnal infirmity.

2. Here was Paul's firm resolution : ' He would not be persuaded.'

Did Paul do well in this ? How doth this agree with that character of heavenly wisdom that it is ' easy to be entreated ?' James iii. 17.

I answer—*In* our duty it is praiseworthy to be easy to be entreated, but not *from* our duty. Paul went bound in the spirit to Jerusalem. He knew the will of God, and therefore though they did even break his heart, they could not break his purpose. No persuasions of friends, no apprehensions of danger, should turn us out of the way wherein God commands us to walk. No persuasion. So Christ, when he was desired to avoid suffering, which was the end of his coming into the world, rejected the motion. It is notable, the Lord Jesus with the same indignation rebuketh Peter dissuading him from suffering, as he did the devil tempting him to idolatry. See Mat. xvi. 23, compared with Mat. iv. 10. No dangers. Here were dangers threatened. Agabus foretold bonds, the Spirit foretold bonds, others told him of bonds, yet Paul was not persuaded. So when the king of Babylon threatened the three children, they resolutely answered, Dan. iii. 18, ' Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us ; but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship thy golden image.' And therefore Paul rebukes them, for they were weeping when they saw his resolution : ' What ! mean ye to break my heart ? For I am not only ready to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem for the name of Christ.' A little to clear the expression by the way.

Is it not a good thing to have a broken heart ? And are not they that further it to be commended rather than reproved ?

I answer—There is a twofold heart—a heart that is hard against God, and soft for God ; and a heart that is hard for God, and soft against God. The first, when it is bold in sinning, but fearful and soft in troubles. As Deut. xx. 8, ' The fearful and the soft-hearted.' But now the heart which is hard for God, and soft against God, is the heart which is a coward in sin ; but like a lion, undaunted in all manner of sufferings. They will trust in God though he kill them, and can confront the greatest dangers, and yet tremble at the least offence against God, and dare not do it. Now saith Paul, You

break my heart ; that is, even weaken my courage, and take me off from my purpose.

3. Observe their discretion, that ‘when he would not be persuaded, they ceased.’ Either Paul told them what intimation he had from God, or else they thought so wise a man as Paul would not thrust himself upon danger without a warrant. It is the disposition of humble spirits not to be peremptory of their own conceits, but to submit to those that are wiser than themselves. Mat. iii. 15, John would not at first admit Christ to his baptism, out of reverence to him, and humility. But saith Christ, ‘Suffer it to be so now.’ When he was informed of Christ’s mind, then he suffered him. So those that were so zealous for inclosing of the common salvation, ‘When they heard that God had granted repentance unto life to the Gentiles, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life,’ Acts xi. 18. It showeth we should not be too stiff in our private conceits and humours, when a plain evidence appeareth to the contrary,—a lesson that men have great need to learn.

4. Their piety, the ground of their discretion: ‘The will of the Lord be done.’ The scripture speaks:—

[1.] Of God’s determining and decreeing will: Eph. i. 11, ‘He doth all things according to the counsel of his will.’

[2.] Of his approving or liking will: Rom. xii. 2, ‘That ye may prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.’

The text speaks not of his commanded, but of his intended will ; not of his will to be done *by* us, but of his will to be done *upon* us. God’s intended will is either—(1.) Secret, before the decree bring forth the issue and event ; (2.) or else declared by the event. While it is secret, we pray for the accomplishment of it: Jer. xxix. 11, ‘I know the thoughts that I think towards you.’ &c. And we conceive all our desires with submission to it. But now we speak of his will revealed and declared in his providence. There is a submission required to both.

1. To God’s intended will, while it is yet kept secret.

That in every business we should ask his leave and blessing. It is a piece of religious manners to begin with God.

[1.] His leave, as Judges i. 1: ‘Shall I go up and fight against the Canaanites, or shall I not?’ And thus Jehoshaphat would inquire of the prophet, ‘Shall I go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and prevail?’ The honest heathens had this principle, *A Jove principium*, that every action was to be begun with God.

Balaam had a conscience this way, he would inquire of God before he would proceed either to curse or bless. By this means we acknowledge God, our dependence upon him, and his dominion over us. It is robbery to use any goods without the owner’s leave. We and all ours are the goods of God. God hath such a dominion over us as a man hath over his goods ; not only a dominion of jurisdiction, as governor in law, but a dominion of propriety. Therefore in journeys, in removing of our dwelling, in disposal of our children, God must not be left out, but be treated with in the first place.

[2.] His blessing. When the event is uncertain, beg the Lord’s concurrence, and the blessing of his providence: Jer. x. 23, ‘O Lord,

I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' Man cannot manage his own actions with any comfort or success; therefore we must beg it of God, whose will doth all in the case. So Gen. xxiv. 12, 'And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day.' We are to desire all may speed while we are in God's way. It is a vain thing to promise ourselves great matters without the leave and blessing of providence; for our lives and actions, and all which concern us, are in God's hands.

2. We must refer the event to his determination. This is a great part of trust in God, and of quietness of mind, when we are so persuaded of the Lord's goodness, wisdom, and power that we leave the event to him, and refer it that he shall cast it as he pleaseth, being so sensible of the power of his providence, and so confident of the goodness of his conduct. Submitting all things to God's will after the event is patience, and submitting all things to God's will before the event is a notable piece of faith. When I trust God absolutely, let him do with me what he pleaseth; but I know he is a good God, and he will do nothing but what is good, and what is for the best. We are obliged in all things we design to be subordinate to God's will, and to accept of it: Rom. i. 10, 'Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you; James iv. 15, 'We ought to say, If the Lord will;' 1 Cor. iv. 19, 'But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will.' So in many other places. This was a truth evident to the heathens. Plato brings in Alcibiades asking Socrates how he should speak of future events, and in what manner he should express himself; and Socrates answers, Even as God will. To use such an express reservation in all our undertakings is profitable to beget reverence in ourselves, and to instruct others. Thus far the light of nature teacheth men. I confess it is not absolutely necessary in all cases to express ourselves so, but this disposition should be in our minds: 1 Cor. xi. 34, 'And the rest will I set in order when I come.' He doth not say there, 'If God will,' but yet he reserves that. I speak this as the lowest thing, that we be not too confident of events, but refer them to the Lord's will. But a child of God goeth higher: he knows he hath a good God, a heavenly Father, which guides all things in wisdom, power, and goodness. And the event may be against his desires, appetites, conceits, fancies, but he knows God will govern and do better for him than his own choices. He trusts all to God.

3. Our purposes and desires must be so moderated that we may be forearmed for all events: 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26, 'If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation: but if he say thus, I have no delight in thee; let him do with me as seemeth good unto him.' Such a holy indifferency should there be upon our spirits, that we should be like a die in the hand of Providence, to be cast high or low according as it falls. When we are over-earnest for temporal blessings, we do but make a scourge, a snare, and a rod many times to ourselves. For when God's will is declared to the contrary, this fills us with bitter sorrow; and obstinate desires pettishly solicited put us upon great vexation and

disappointment, and that layeth us open to atheism, and distrust of God, the conduct of his providence, and the promises of the invisible world. Therefore, until God hath declared his pleasure, there must be such moderation as to be prepared for all events.

4. When the event depends upon a duty, we must do the duty, and refer the event to God: 1 Cor. ix. 16, 'Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me, if I preach not the gospel!' It is a base principle to say we must be sure of success before we will engage for God. No; when there is an apparent duty we must do our duty, and trust God with the event.

5. In a dubious case observe the ducture and leading of Providence. The Israelites were not to remove but as they saw the pillar of cloud before them. And so in all things the happiness of which depends upon God's secret will. See what God's providence will lead you to: Acts xvi. 10, 'We endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them.' Sometimes we are left to gather and collect for our own reason what such or such a thing means. Now, after earnest prayer, when the fair course and tendency of outward circumstances lead us, we may look upon it as the way of God's providence for our good. It is said, Ezra viii. 21, 'I proclaimed a fast, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.' How did they know the Lord was entreated for them? Why, after prayer they found such an overruling instinct, such a fair invitation of Providence, that from thence they apparently gathered, This is the right way the Lord would have us walk in. This is the direction to be given to Christians when the event is uncertain.

But when the event is declared in God's providence, then we have nothing to do but plainly to submit, and that very quietly and contentedly, with hope and encouragement in the Lord. And that is the main point.

Doct. That it is the duty of all God's children to be willing to submit themselves to the dispensation of God's providence, in what ever befalls them or theirs.

In this point there is:—

I. Something implied, that all things come within the guidance of God's providence.

There is nothing so high but God doeth it: Dan. iv. 35, 'He doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, and say unto him, What doest thou?' The sun doth not shine by chance, nor the rain fall by chance.

There is nothing so mean but it is under God's providence: Mat. x. 29, 30, 'Not a sparrow lights to the ground without your heavenly Father.' A mighty support unto Christians in their affliction.

There is nothing so bad but the Lord can turn it to good: Gen. 1. 20, 'Ye thought it for evil, but God meant it for good.'

There is nothing which happeneth from wicked men to his children but the Lord hath a hand in it: Job i. 21, 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken,' &c. It is Chrysostom's gloss upon that place:

He doth not say the thief, the Sabean, the Chaldean, hath taken; no, but the Lord hath taken, the same God that gave it. If it come from Satan, God hath a hand in it, for many of Job's troubles and afflictions, especially upon his body, came immediately from Satan; and yet he saith (chap. vi. 4), 'The arrows of the Almighty stuck fast in me.' They were the arrows of the Almighty, though shot out of Satan's bow. This certainly is implied, that God hath a will, hand, and providence in all those things which are most contrary to us. The will of the Lord is to be seen.

II. That which is expressed is, that we ought to submit to the providence of God.

I shall prove it:—

1. By the example of the Lord Jesus Christ: Mat. xxvi. 39, 'Father, not as I will, but as thou wilt.' He had more to lose than any of us have, or possibly can have; the comfort and influence of the presence of God in a personal union; and more to suffer. Yet he submits, and professeth a full subjection to his Father's will. His cup was a bitter cup, which made him sweat drops of curdled blood, yet he was willing to drink it, even the dregs, since it was his Father's will. But let me fully vindicate the will of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Object. You will say, Christ desires it to pass: Mat. xxvi. 39, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.' How could Christ make an offer of prayers repugnant to God's will and purpose? He knew it was the will of his Father that he should suffer many things, and be slain, and had rebuked Peter resisting the soldiers. 'The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?' John xviii. 11.

Many answers may be given for the clearing of this matter.

[1.] We must know, contrary to the monothelites, that there was a double will in Christ, as there was a double nature—divine and human. These are not contrary, but yet distinct. The divine nature would, because it was necessary to our redemption. The human nature was to show a reasonable aversion of what was destructive to it; and yet the human nature did not contradict the will of God, because he did it not absolutely, but only conditionally: 'Father, if it be possible.'

[2.] There is a deliberate elective will and a natural velleity. Now mark, the human nature did except against his suffering, not with a deliberate, elective will, but only by a natural velleity. There is a resolute will which overcometh all impediments, and there is an innocent desire, showing itself in a simple complacency in that which is good, or a displacency to that which is evil, but goes no farther. Apply this to the business in hand. When Christ would have the cup pass, it is not meant of his resolute and effective will, but only of his will expressing a simple displacency of the human nature to what is destructive to it.

Aquinas gives us another distinction. There is a will natural and indeliberate, and a will deliberate and elective. The one showeth the sudden inclination of nature to what is good for us as we are living creatures; the other is an act of reason as we are reasonable creatures. The natural inclination of all creatures is to preserve themselves; but

the deliberate will chooseth what the understanding judgeth to be good, all circumstances considered. The inclination of nature flees death and torments, but reason submitteth to it. As for instance, a bitter potion is against the inclination of nature, for, as we are living creatures we would be put to no pain; but the reasonable creature, by an elective will, takes that bitter potion for health. Cutting off a gangrened member is against the first inclination of man, as a living creature; we submit to it as a reasonable creature, lest it corrupt the whole body. So in the martyrs, the flesh could not but be against sufferings, being contrary to their well-being as living creatures; but the spirit, that is their reason, guided by grace, submitted to the greatest torments for the glory of God. Thus the Lord Christ saith, 'Let this cup pass.' There was the inclination of an innocent nature declining so dreadful an evil; but yet it was his meat and drink to do his Father's will; therefore, 'Not my will, but thine be done.'

Others to the same purpose. There were two things willed by Christ; one was *bonum naturæ*, the good of nature; the other was the glory of God with our salvation; and the first was desired but subordinately to the second. So that the Lord Christ is a notable pattern that our appetites and desires are not to be according to the interests of the flesh, but for the glory and honour of God, and the good of others.

The next pattern we have is David, a man after God's own heart, in 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26, 'Behold, here am I; let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.' What a meek submission was here to God's pleasure, resigning up his person, crown, and estate to the wise and gracious disposal of God, to receive a benefit or punishment as the Lord should determine. David sets his name to a blank, and bids God write what he pleaseth. It is hard for us to consent to known articles, but David wholly referreth himself unto God: 'Let him do what seemeth good unto him.'

So Abraham, the father of the faithful, how contentedly doth he speak; and he thought no other but that Isaac, the son of the promise, should be sacrificed, Gen. xxii. 8, when his son asked him, 'Where is the burnt-offering for sacrifice?' and he answered, 'My son, the Lord will provide an offering; and so they went on their way together.' When God declareth his will not only contrary to our natural affection, but our gracious hopes, when he taketh away instruments upon whose life his glory seems to depend, we have the same answer, 'God will provide.'

The next shall be of Eli: 1 Sam. iii. 18, 'It is the Lord; let him do whatsoever he pleaseth.' When the sentence was passed, he humbly submitteth. He doth not murmuringly say, Must I bear the punishment of my sons' iniquity? their will is not in my power; if they be wicked, let them answer for it. No, 'It is the Lord;' and his will must stand; 'It is the Lord,' who is too just to do us wrong, too good to do us hurt.

The next shall be the great doctor of the Gentiles, St Paul: 2 Cor. xii. 7-9, 'And for this I besought the Lord thrice;' he knocked thrice at the throne of grace, as Christ prayed thrice, and Elijah prayed thrice for rain. Well, but the Lord made him no answer, 'But my grace is

sufficient for thee.' The thorn in the flesh, some painful disease or affliction, must continue. And what saith Paul? 'Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions for Christ's sake.' He doth entertain it with some kind of cheerfulness and thanksgiving, if he may have experience that the grace and power of Christ may rest upon him; it is enough that God's will is fulfilled, though it be with our pain and loss.

Now let us consider:—

I. Wherein this submission consists.

II. Upon what grounds we ought to submit.

I. Wherein this submission consists.

Negatively, it is not to be insensible. Godliness doth not teach men stoicism, to harden themselves under the rod of God. The Lord complains of that, Jer. v. 3, 'I have stricken them, but they have not grieved,' &c. We must lay his hand to heart as well as his word. We are not to be like the corner-stone which bears the whole weight of the building and feels nothing. There are two extremes—slighting the hand of God, or fainting under it, Heb. xii. 5; and slighting is worse than the other. There is no patience where there is no sense and feeling. Certainly there can be no improvement where there is not a feeling the rod of God, the strokes of his correcting hand upon us.

But affirmatively, there is in it:—

1. A work of the judgment, which subscribes to the justice and goodness of the dispensation, that it is just: Dan. ix. 7, 'O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face.' It is a smart and dreadful correction, but the Lord is righteous. And to the goodness of it, Isa. xxxix. 8, 'Good is the word of the Lord.' Though it was a terrible word, yet the submission of a sanctified judgment calls it good.

2. The act of the will is accepting of it: Lev. xxvi. 41, 'If they shall accept of the punishment of their sin.' There is a consent and choice of the will; such a perfect correspondence between the temper of a gracious heart and the will of God, they take it well and kindly from God that it is no worse, as a patient takes bitter pills for his good. There are some kind of reluctances of nature, but their overpowering judgment and will doth approve and accept. Afflictions are to be taken as a potion, not as a drench, not forced upon us whether we will or no; we must accept of them, take them down ourselves; it is a bitter cup, but it is of our heavenly physician's tempering. Seneca, a heathen, could say, *Deo non pareo, sed assentio ex animo*—I do not merely submit to divine providence, but consent to it. A strange thing that a heathen should say so. It is good, and so we accept it; not barely out of necessity and by a patience perforce, but there is a willing submission to what the Lord ordereth concerning us.

3. There is a command reached out over the affections of anger and sorrow. (1.) Anger, that we may not fret against the Lord: Ps. xxxvii. 1, 'Fret not thyself against evil-doers.' Many times when words are kept in there is a secret rising and swelling of heart against God's providence;

as an oven stopped up is the hotter within. So though it may be words do not break out, yet the heart boils, riseth, and dislikes God's dealing: Ps. lxii. 1, 'My soul, keep silence to God;' not only my tongue, but my soul. Thoughts are as audible with God as words; therefore there is a command upon our anger and indignation, that it may not swell and rise up against God's providence. (2.) Upon our sorrow, that it may not run into excess, causing disorder. We are allowed to grieve, but with temper and moderation. To be horny, flinty, dead, and senseless, whatever breaches are made upon us, doth not suit with the temper of a Christian. Christ hath legitimated our fears and sorrows, for in the days of his flesh he had his tears, sorrows, and groans; therefore, 1 Cor. vii. 31, mourn we should, but as we mourned not. If the affection be stubborn and boisterous, it must be cited before the tribunal of reason. We must give an account of it: 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? hope thou in God,' Ps. xlii. 5. The upper part of the soul checks the excesses of the lower part when its commands are slighted.

4. The tongue is bridled, lest discontent plash over; as 'Aaron held his peace,' Lev. x. 3. It was a sad stroke, but it was the Lord. He kept his tongue from murmuring against God. If there be a fire kindled in our bosoms, we should not let the sparks fly abroad. Murmuring is a taxing of God, as if he dealt hardly and unjustly with us; and if it vents itself, it is more to his dishonour: Job xl. 4, 5, 'Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yea twice, but I will proceed no further.' Job was resolute enough before to fill his mouth with arguments; if once he could meet with God, he would reason the case with him, but presently is damped at God's appearance; and when his passions were a little calmed, he renounceth his former bold resolutions, and would no longer give vent to his distemper, and is resolved to be silent before God, and to give over his plea, and bury all his discontented thoughts in his own bosom. As if he had said, Once in my foolish passion I was complaining of thee, and desirous to dispute with thee; it is time to give over that debate, and humbly to submit.

II. What are the grounds of this submission? For patience is wise and considerate, and proceeds upon solid reasons, as impatience is rash and unreasonable.

1. They see God in his providence: Ps. xxxix. 9, 'I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.' That is the first principle of submission; surely God hath a hand in it: Isa. xxxviii. 15, 'What shall I say? he hath spoken to me, himself hath done it.' That passage, though it be in a song of thanksgiving, doth not relate to the deliverance, but the affliction, the disease and sentence of death which he had received. There is atheism and anti-providence in our murmurings. If we did see God at the end of causes, we could no more murmur against his providence than we can against his creation. You would laugh at that man that should murmur and complain because God made him a man and not an angel. It is as ridiculous to oppose yourselves against the will of God in other dispensations; and the more immediately the affliction comes from God, the greater

our submission should be; as, in sickness, and death of friends and relations, 'It is the Lord.' But if subordinate instruments be used in bringing on the affliction, every wheel works according to the motion of the first mover; all the links are fastened to God's hands; therefore if we look no higher than the creature, we murmur, and break our teeth in biting at the next link. David was so far from opposing God that he bears the contumely of the instrument: 2 Sam. xvi. 11, 'Let him alone, for the Lord hath bid him curse.' That was a time of humiliation, not revenge. If God will admonish us of our duty by the injuries of men, and cure our impostume with the razor of their sharp tongue, we must be content. To resist lower officers of the state is to contemn the authority with which they are armed. They could not wag their tongues without God.

2. That God hath an absolute sovereignty to do what he will: Rom. ix. 20, 21, 'Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay? We are in his hands, as the clay in the hand of the potter.' His supreme right and dominion over the creatures, to dispose of them according to his pleasure, should be often thought of by us: Job ix. 12, 'Behold he taketh away, who can hinder? who shall say unto him, What doest thou?' He hath an absolute dominion, and is not accountable to any. A man may do with his own as he pleaseth. Why should we not allow him the common privilege of all proprietors? A man may cut out his own cloth as he pleases. If God deprive us of any enjoyment, there is no resisting him by force, seeing God is omnipotent; nor ought there to be any question to be made of the justice of the fact, seeing he hath absolute dominion, and is not accountable to any. All creatures are in his hand to dispose of them as he pleaseth; and sometimes he sees fit to take them away in a violent manner, so as may most affect the parties interested, and show us his sovereignty. He will do it in his own way, by arming the thoughts and humours of our own bodies against us. Here our subjection to God must begin, till he be pleased to give some farther account of his dealing with us: Job xxxiii. 13, 'Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters.' Before what tribunal will you call the Lord? Where will you cite him to answer for the wrong done to you? This sovereignty of God doth exceedingly calm the heart; God hath right alone to govern the world. He did govern it before we were born, and will do it when we are gone. He deposeth kings and disposeth kingdoms and all affairs as he will. Men must not prescribe rules to God, nor limit his uncontrollable authority. Our work is not to dispute and quarrel, but to obey and submit in all things.

3. This sovereignty of God is modified and mitigated in the dispensation of it with several attributes. As—

[1.] With infinite justice: Deut. xxvii. 26; when every curse was pronounced they were to say *Amen*, let it come to pass, for it is just. All that we suffer is deserved, nay, 'less than our iniquities deserve,' Ezra ix. 13. As the restored Israelites acknowledge, when they were in Babylon, they might have been in hell. Job xxxiv. 10, 'Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, or the Almighty that he

should commit iniquity.' All such thoughts are to be rejected with abhorrence and indignation. We have strange conceptions and thoughts of God when under a temptation; ver. 23, 'He will not lay upon man more than right,' that he should enter into judgment with God. No; he goeth on just and sure grounds, though we do not always discern them.

[2.] God doth it too with great faithfulness; they look on all afflictions as federal dispensations, as appendages of the covenant of grace: P's. exix. 75, 'In very faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' Mark, he doth not say, *notwithstanding* thy faithfulness, but *in* faithfulness he performs his covenant. When he thresheth us, it is to make our husks fly off, that he may quicken us to a serious remembrance of himself, and of the duties we owe to him.

[3.] It is ordered with great wisdom: 'For God is a God of judgment,' Isa. xxx. 18. He knows what is best for his people. We think this and that best, but God is wiser than we. When many providences fall out, we think it would be better for the church if it were otherwise. But this is to tax God's wisdom, and charge him with want of love and tenderness towards his people; they are dearer to him than they are to you. Chrysostom shows how we take upon us to order affairs. He brings in an instance of a man that is very kind to the poor; if he dies they are undone: have you more care of them than God their maker? Job did not eat his morsels alone, but the poor did eat his bread, and were clothed with his fleece, therefore the sides of the poor are said to bless him. Cannot God provide for the poor without Job? So in like cases for the church's sake. This providence seems to tend altogether to evince; but God knows how by these and these means to provide for his people; and you must not prescribe to him. It was blasphemy in Alphonsus to say, *Si Deo a consiliis adfuisset, se consultius multa ordinaturum*—'That if he had been by when God made the world, he would have ordered some things with greater advice and better care. He would not have placed the horns of the beasts above their eyes, but under their eyes.' Such blasphemy do we secretly lisp out in our murmurings and discourses about providence, when we are questioning how this, that, and the other thing can be for his glory. The Lord knows how to guide all things to his glory, and we must absolutely yield to it.

[4.] With much love; for he that hath the wisdom of a father hath also the bowels of a mother. A mother may sooner forget a poor shiftless child than God will forget his people, Isa. xlix. 15, &c. There is a great deal of love showed in our afflictions. Sometimes in mitigating them: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able to bear.' And as Jacob drove on as the little ones were able to bear, so the Lord suits his conduct and lays on the affliction as his people are able to bear. Castles are victualled before they are besieged. After great comforts then comes affliction: Heb. x. 32, 'After you were enlightened ye endured a great fight of affliction.' Then again, in refreshing their troubles with many gracious experiences. The Lord doth things which seem very bitter to the carnal sense and gust, but when he hath defecated and refined our taste, then he sheds abroad his love into our

hearts by the Holy Ghost, Rom. v. 3, 5. Their adoption is cleared up, and the loss of outward comfort is accompanied with a greater increase of spiritual comfort. Again, he shows his love in ordering all things for their good, Rom. viii. 28. Out of what corner soever the wind blows, it blows good to the saints. 'Arise, O north wind, and blow thou south,' &c. North and south, contrary points; Cant. iv. 16, yet 'the spices of his garden flow out;' that which is against our will is not against our profit; God is still pursuing what is for his own glory and good of the elect. So all that falleth out is either good or will tend to good.

Use. This teacheth us upon what grounds there should be such a submission to all personal and domestical calamities which may befall any of us, and to all that befall the church. It is the will of God; and that is the great ground of composing the heart whatever falleth out. Whenever you hear of the increase of violence, or any resolution against the people of God, this should calm us, 'The will of the Lord be done;' God knows what is best for his people. This is an everlasting ground of comfort, that we are still in God's hands, and whatever befalls us, it comes by his special providence, even by his that numbers the hairs of our heads, and who carves out every condition to us: Deut. xxxiii. 3, 'Surely he loved his people; all the saints are in his hands.' When the disciples were sore troubled and affrighted, John vi. 20, 'Jesus comes to them and said, Be not afraid, it is I' that order this. There are many remarkable passages in that story. The disciples were, in the dark of the night, overtaken with a mighty storm, and for a long time did not know what would become of them. The text saith they had rowed about twenty-five or thirty furlongs before Christ appears. Christ seeth it not fit to appear at first, but lets the trial go on until it be a trial indeed. Now about the fourth watch of the night, Jesus passed by, Mark vi. 48; that is the morning watch, and then Jesus appears to them. We are very tender of ourselves, and soon think we are low and tried enough, therefore would fain be delivered; but our wise Lord seeth we need more. When Christ came, then their fears are increased. Christ came walking upon the water, and they thought it was a spectre. Spirits broken with troubles are very apt to take in afflicting impressions from everything they see and hear. The very way of our mercies may be matter of terror to us. At length he discovereth himself: 'It is I, be not afraid.' I walk upon that water which seems to be ready to swallow you up. I, that raised the waves, know how to still them. Here is that which may allay all our disquiets and fears. Remember, it is not the instrument but Christ and God must be eyed, and the will of the Lord be done.

In our darkest condition God seeth us, when we do not see him: Ps. lxxiii. 22, 23, and Job xxiii. 9, 10, 'I looked on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him. But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.'
