

# SERMONS UPON 1 JOHN III.

---

## SERMON I.

*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*—1 JOHN iii. 1.

THE apostle had said in the close of the former chapter, 'that every one that doeth righteousness is born of God;' now this being so great a privilege to be adopted into God's family, and acknowledged and reckoned among his children, the apostle pauseth on it a while, and doth excite them to wonder and reverence in the contemplation of it, that the argument may have the more force to persuade them to righteousness and holiness, wherein they would resemble God, as children do their father: 'Behold what manner of love,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. A great privilege represented.

2. An anticipation of an objection or an exception made to that privilege. This dignity hath no outward appearance to discover itself to the world. Therefore the privilege must not be esteemed by the world's judgment, who are blind in God's matters: 'Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.'

The first I am to deal with at this time, and there observe—

1. The privilege itself, 'That we should be called the sons of God.'

2. The fountain and rise of this; the love of God is the bottom cause.

3. The wonderful degree of this love as to this instance, effect, or expression of it, 'What manner of love.'

4. The note of attention by which he excites our dull minds to the consideration of it, 'Behold.'

Let me explain these words a little.

1. The privilege itself is to be 'called the sons of God.' Mark, not subjects or servants, but sons; and to be called the sons of God is to be the sons of God, for that is the idiotism of the Hebrew phrase: Isa. lviii. 13, 'Thou shalt call the sabbath a delight;' that is, make it to be so. So in this matter it is often used: Gen. xxi. 12, 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called;' that is, owned and acknowledged to be thy children: Mat. v. 9, 'They shall be called the children of God.' Yea it is said of our Lord Christ himself, Luke i. 35, 'That holy thing which is born of thee shall be called the Son of God.'

2. The fountain and first rise is the 'love of the Father,' who is everywhere represented as the first cause of our blessedness. Of our redemption: John iii. 16, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life;' 1 John iv. 10, 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.' The cause of our regeneration: Eph. ii. 4, 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.' And here it is made the cause of our adoption: 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!' God's love is nothing else but his good-will and resolution to impart such great privileges to us; together with his acquiescence and well-pleas'dness with what he doth for us: he did it because he would do it; he was resolved to do it, and took pleasure in it.

3. The wonderful degree in the expression of his love, 'What manner of love.' The expression noteth not only the quality, but quantity; as in other places: Mat. viii. 27, 'What manner of man is this?' or how great a man is this, 'that even the winds and seas obey him?' 2 Peter iii. 11, 'What manner of persons ought we to be?' which noteth not only the manner or kind, but the degree of holiness. Therefore I would read it here, not only 'what manner of love,' but 'how great love.'

4. The note of attention, or the term used exciting our attention, 'Behold.' There is a threefold 'behold' in scripture, and they are applicable to this place; as—

[1.] *Ecce demonstrantis*, the behold of demonstration, or pointing with the hand, which is referred to a thing or person present, and noteth the certainty of sense; as John i. 29, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.' There he was then before their eyes, and he pointed at him as present. If prefixed to a doctrine, it noteth the certainty of faith: Job v. 27, 'Lo this, we have searched it; hear it, and know it for thy good;' believe it as a certain truth.

[2.] There is *ecce admirantis aut excitantis*, the behold of admiration, or awakening our drowsy minds, when anything weighty or any extraordinary thing is spoken of; this is to excite our attention as to an important truth, worthy of our most serious thoughts and raised affections. As in a case of evil: Lam. i. 12, 'Behold, see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.' So here in the case of good, 'What manner of love?' is there any love like unto this love? And all is that we may entertain it with wonder and reverence.

[3.] There is *ecce exultantis aut gratulantis*, the behold of gratulation, as rejoicing and blessing ourselves in the privilege: Ps. cxxi. 4, 'Behold, he that keepeth Israel never slumbereth nor sleepeth.'

Now all these take place here. Behold it with faith and confidence as a certain truth; behold it with wonder and reverence as a high dignity; behold it with love and delight as a blessed privilege to have God for our father, Christ for our elder brother, and heaven for our portion; what can we desire more? It is a certain truth, we should believe it more firmly; it is an important truth, we should consider it

more seriously ; it is a comfortable truth, we should improve it to our greater joy and consolation.

From the whole observe this doctrine—

That the love of God in adopting us into his family, and acknowledging us for his children, is such an act of grace as cannot be sufficiently considered and admired by his people.

I shall prove three things—

1. That there is such a relation as that of father and children between God and his people.

2. That this is a blessed and glorious privilege.

3. That believers ought to be excited to the earnest consideration of it.

I. That there is such a relation as that of father and children between God and his people. There is a relation between God and all his creatures ; for as God gave being to all, so he hath an interest and propriety in them. But the inanimate and brute creatures are his instruments by which he serveth his providence : Ps. cxix. 91, 'They continue this day according to thine ordinance, for they are all thy servants.' All creatures are subjected to the law and overruling government of his providence. Man is under his proper government. Adam in the covenant of works was rather God's subject and hired servant than his son. The children of Israel were his children, but as children in their nonage, as an heir while he is a child : Gal. iv. 1, 'An heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all.' A servile spirit was uppermost in that dispensation. But with respect to the gospel covenant of grace, so we are most strictly said to be the children of God : Hosea i. 10, 'In the place where it is said to them, Ye are not my people, there shall it be said that ye are the sons of the living God ;' 2 Cor. vi. 18, 'I will be a father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters.' He will own us as a father, and we must be to him in the relation of children. God hath a seed among men whom he hath begotten by his Spirit, and hath adopted and taken into his family ; he hath a paternal affection towards them, and they filial dispositions towards him ; he hath a paternal care and providence over them, and they filial confidence and dependence upon him ; he expects the honour of a father, and we may expect the privileges of children, for he hath begotten us to a lively hope. This special relation is distinct from his common relation to other men.

1. It proceedeth from a distinct cause, his special and peculiar love, not from that common goodness and bounty which he expresseth to all his creatures : Ps. cxlv. 9, 'The Lord is good to all, his tender mercy is over all his works.' But this is the special act of his grace, or of his great love : Eph. ii. 4, 5, 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.'

2. The foundation of this relation is not our being which we have from him as a creator, but our new being which we have from him as a father in Christ : 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.' As we are men, God is a governor to us, and we are his subjects ; but as we are new men, born again, God is a father to us and

we are his children: the former relation ceaseth not, but ariseth in it.

3. The whole commerce and communion that is between us and him is on God's part fatherly, on our part childlike. On God's part fatherly, in a way of grace and love, pardoning our sins and frailties, and giving us the helps of his grace: Mal. iii. 17, 'I will spare them, as a man spareth his only son that serveth him;' Ps. ciii. 13, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth those that fear him.' A faulty child is a child, and therefore not so easily turned out of the family as a servant. We often forget the duty of children, but God doth not forget the mercy of a father. So on our part childlike; that is, for the main we are loving and obedient to God, make it our work to love and please him, and count it our happiness to be beloved of him. Love is at the bottom of God's dispensations to us, and at the bottom of our duties to him; he giveth us his choicest benefits, as becomes his special love to us, and we perform him the best service we can: 'For the love of Christ constraineth us.' He hath given us a heart to know him and love him as a father, and he loveth us as his dear children. In short, fatherly benefits are fullest, sweetest, and surest; for he giveth us himself, his Spirit, grace, glory, every good thing. So filial duty is the choicest: 1 Peter i. 14, 'As dear children, not fashioning yourselves to the former lusts of your ignorance;' Eph. v. 1, 'Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children.' No motive so engaging as that, nor none goes so much to the heart of a christian.

II. That this is a blessed and glorious privilege will appear if we consider—

First, The person adopting, the great and glorious God, who is so far above us, so happy within himself, and needeth not us nor our choicest love and service; who had a son of his own, Jesus Christ, the eternally-begotten of the Father, 'the Son of his love,' in whom his soul found such full complacency and delight. If men adopt, it is *in orbitatis gratiam*, as a remedy found out for the comfort of them who have no children. Never was it heard of that a father who had a son should adopt a son. Therefore it heightens the privilege that God who had a son that 'thought it no robbery to be equal with him' in power; a son that 'was the express image of his person,' the object of his full delight, 'being daily his delight, and rejoicing before him;' I say, that God should vouchsafe to such unworthy creatures as we are so dear and honourable a relation to himself is wonderful.

Secondly, The persons who are adopted, miserable sinners, who were strangers and enemies to God: 'Children of wrath, even as others;' those who were born heirs of God's curse, 'dead in trespasses and sins;' who had cast away the mercies of our creation. Now, that strangers should not only be taken into the family, but put in the place of children, and dealt with as children; that enemies should not only be reconciled, but have the blessed God to become their father in Christ; that children of wrath should be called to inherit a blessing; that those who were dead in trespasses and sins, and had so often offended God, should be begotten to a lively hope; that slaves to sin and Satan should be made free indeed, even called into the glorious liberty of the children of God; this is that we may wonder at, and say, 'What

manner of love is this that we should be called the children of God !' The prodigal son, when he returned to his father, said, ' I am not worthy to be called thy son ; make me as one of thy hired servants.' We have all played the prodigal, cast away the mercies of our creation for a very trifle. We blame Adam for selling himself and his posterity for an apple, and Esau for parting with his birthright for one morsel of meat ; but ' we have sold ourselves for nought.' Therefore every son of Adam may say, I am not worthy to be called a son. We have forfeited all comfortable relations to God, and the privileges depending thereupon ; therefore what astonishing mercy was this !

Thirdly, The bottom cause and fountain of this mercy and grace, or that which moved God, was his love ; this was that which set his power and mercy at work to bring us into this estate.

1. This was an eternal love ; the first foundation of it was laid in the election of God ; there is the bottom stone in this building : ' From before the foundation of the world we were predestinated to the adoption of children, according to the good pleasure of his will.' Then was the way of man's recovery stated, the privileges, the terms, the persons who should enjoy them. Upon these terms it was agreed. Now what are we that the thoughts of God should be taken up about us so long ago, that he should show such favour to lost mankind, and to us in particular ?

2. It was a free love : ' I will love them freely.' God was not inclined hereunto by our worth, but out of his own free love was graciously pleased to call us with an holy calling, and to give us a new being and an holy nature, that being regenerated, we might be adopted, that so he might love us tenderly as his children, and seek our felicity. In other adoptions men are at liberty to choose the best and most accomplished. Nature is limited, but adoption is free. Whatever our children be, distorted or deformed in body or depraved in mind, yet they are our children ; we cannot cast them off. But where we choose one at our free will and pleasure, we take such as have drawn our affection by some good qualities and carriage of theirs. Now what good endowments had we to commend us to God, who are sinners by nature and practice, children of the devil, enslaved to sin ? If God had respected our deservings, he might have cast us into hell rather than taken us into his family, we were so infinitely below him, so rebellious against him ; therefore ' behold what manner of love God hath bestowed upon us.'

3. It is special peculiar love, not common to the world ; yet this love was bestowed upon us : ' In this the children of God are manifested, and the children of the devil.' Some live and die the children of the devil, always retain the satanical nature, and are not renewed according to the image of God ; yea, the greatest part of the world do so : ' We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.' Now the difference is not from ourselves, but from God, and cometh from God, that made thee to differ ; all our good is from God, and from his mere love and goodness.

4. It is a costly love, considering the way how it is brought about ; for before God's eternal purposes could be executed, and conveniently be made known to the world, redemption by Christ was necessary ;

therefore it is said that 'he was made of a woman, made under the law, that we that were under the law might receive the adoption of sons.' Sin needed to be expiated by the Son of God in our nature before God would bestow this honour upon us. Christ was to be our brother before God would be our father, and to take a mother upon earth that we might have a father in heaven; yea, to endure the law's curse before we could be instated in the blessing. In the business of our redemption he was treated as a slave or servant, that we might be treated as sons. Judas sold him for thirty pieces of silver, Mat. xxvi. 15, and that was the price of a slave, Exod. xxi. 32. And the apostle telleth us that he came in the form of a servant, even he that was lord of all: 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.' Now when so much is necessary to bring about this privilege, surely it should be the more admired by us. It was pure infinite love, and his love remarkably and particularly expressed towards us, that he will bestow such a privilege upon us: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.' It is a great and wonderful love; it cannot be said how or how much.

Fourthly, The dignity itself nakedly considered; it is a greater honour than the world can afford to us, a matter to be rather wondered at than told. Admire it we may, express it to the full we cannot. David saith, 'Seemeth it a light thing to be a king's son-in-law?' We may with better reason say, Is it nothing to be taken into God's family, and to become sons and daughters to the most high God? This was the honour and title of Christ himself, solemnly proclaimed from heaven: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;' and we have it in our proportion and measure: 'I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Blessed is that soul that is admitted into such a relation to God. All relations may blush and hide their faces in comparison of this; for all the splendid titles which are so greatly affected by men are but empty shows and shadows in comparison of this glorious and blessed privilege; they come short behind it, either in true honour or profit; therefore it is a higher instance of the love of God than if he had made us monarchs of the world, or if a man could produce his pedigree from an uninterrupted line of kings and princes. Alas! how much better is it to be born of the Spirit than of the froth of the blood? These things continue with us but to the grave; but to be children of God will be our honour and interest to all eternity.

Fifthly, It is not a naked and empty title, but giveth us a right to the greatest privileges imaginable; as our giving empty titles to God without duty on our part is looked upon as a mockage: Mal. i. 6, 'If I be a father, where is mine honour? if I be a master where is my fear?' As the soldiers called Christ the king of the Jews, and spat upon him and buffeted him. So on God's part, if he called himself a father, he will perform all the parts of a father to us; for he hath more abundant love to us than any title or notion can make out or express.

But what benefits depend upon it? Very many; they may be referred to two heads—what God will do as a father for the present and for the future.

1. With respect to the present state ; and there—

[1.] He will give us the Holy Spirit to be our sanctifier, guide, and comforter. This is a gift which he giveth to none but his children, and he giveth it to all his children. This suiteth with the greatness and love of our Father, and it is a father's gift indeed, and absolutely necessary for such children as we are to God. In ourselves (we said before) there is no intrinsic worth in us, but God puts a more excellent spirit into us. God as a creator gave us our natural endowments; but as a father he giveth us the supernatural grace of the Spirit. The Spirit was given to Christ without measure, that all God's children and the members of his mystical body may receive it from him as the head and fountain of their life: Gal. iv. 6, 'Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' If we have this high privilege of adoption, we have also the Spirit of adoption to reside and dwell in our hearts, to be our sanctifier, guide, and comforter. Our sanctifier to change our hearts, and to transform us into the image of God and Christ: 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image;' and Titus iii. 5, 'According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he hath shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.' To guide us in all our ways, and restrain us from sin: Rom. viii. 13, 'If ye live after the flesh ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' Quickening us to holiness: Ps. cxliii. 10, 'Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God; thy Spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness.' Especially to help us in the great duties of the spiritual life; as prayer: Jude 20, 'Praying in the Holy Ghost;' Rom. viii. 26, 'Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groans which cannot be uttered.' That they may address themselves to God as a father, in a familiar manner, with confidence, and yet with a holy reverence becoming both his majesty and his love; with a humble submission, and yet with a holy vehemency and earnestness, opposite to that careless formality and deadness which is in other men's prayers. Now how great a privilege is this, to have such a help at hand, a comforter as a witness! Rom. viii. 16, 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God.' As an earnest: 2 Cor. i. 22, 'Who hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit.' Indeed the Spirit is not so necessarily a comforter as a sanctifier; yet a comforter he is, and if not so explicitly and manifestly, we may blame ourselves. This is God's allowance, and we deprive ourselves of the benefit of it by our folly and indiscretion.

[2.] He giveth us an allowance of such temporal things, of outward mercies, as are convenient for us: Mat. vi. 25, 30, 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on: is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cut down; shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?' A christian hath two things to relieve him against all his distrustful fears and cares—adoption and particular providence.

He hath his Father, and his Father is not ignorant of his condition and mindless of it; and therefore though he hath little or nothing in his hand, it is enough that his Father keepeth the purse for him, whose care extendeth to all things and persons, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, and performeth all things according to his own will. He knoweth their persons, necessities, and temptations; and if we trust him for our heavenly inheritance, we may well trust him for our daily maintenance, which he vouchsafeth to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field, and also to his enemies; nay, sometimes while they are sinning against him, and dishonouring his name, oppressing his servants, opposing his interest in the world. He that feedeth a kite, will he not feed a child? He that supplieth his enemies, will he not take care of his family? You would think that person monstrously cruel that should feed his dogs and starve his children. This cannot without blasphemy be imagined of our gracious and heavenly Father. If God be your Father, you can want nothing that is good; but the determination of what is good must be left to his wisdom, for we are not so fit to judge of it, and to discern our own good, and therefore must commit all to his fatherly care and wise providence. Indeed he chooseth rather to profit us than to please us in his dispensations, and it is your duty to refer all to his wisdom and faithfulness.

2. With respect to the life to come. Eternal blessedness is the fruit of adoption: Rom. viii. 17, 'If sons, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: if we suffer with him, we shall be glorified together.' We have a blessed inheritance to look for as soon as we are adopted and taken into God's family, we have a right to it though not admitted into the fruition of it; and the right and hope that we have now is enough to counterbalance all temptations both on the right hand and on the left. The blessedness we hope for doth infinitely outweigh the carnal pleasures and delights of sin, which tempt us to disobey our Father's will. What are the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, to those blessed delights and glorious things which our Father hath provided for us in heaven? It was Esau's profaneness to part with his birthright, Heb. xii. 16, and Naboth's generosity to refuse it, 1 Kings xxi. 3. On the left hand there is enough to allay the fears and sorrows of the present life: Luke xii. 32, 'Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' If we have the kingdom at last, it is no great matter what we suffer by the way: Rom. viii. 18, 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.' So that during the time of our hope we have great encouragement. But more of this in the following part of the text. But hereafter we fully receive the fruits of our adoption: Rom. viii. 23, 'Waiting for the adoption, to wit the redemption of our body.' The manifestation is at the resurrection, the fruition in heaven: Rom. viii. 19, 'The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.' Then God's children are seen in all their glory. But in heaven, there we have the fullest and largest demonstration of God's love and favour. It is love and grace now that he is pleased to pass by our offences and take us into his family, to give us a taste of his love, and a right to his heavenly kingdom, and to employ us in his service, but then it is another man-



ner of love ; grace, indeed, when not only taken into his family, but into his presence and palace : John xii. 26, 'Where I am, there also shall my servant be.' Not only have the right, but the possession : Mat. xxv. 34, 'Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' And not only have some remote service and ministration, but be everlastingly employed in loving, delighting, and praising God among those blessed creatures who are our blessed companions with us in this work.

III. That believers ought to be excited to the earnest consideration of it.

1. To quicken our thankfulness, which is the chief motive and principle of gospel-obedience. There is a slackness and slowness of heart in holy things ; there are sundry methods, and ways, and means to work upon us, but they may all be reduced to two—love and fear ; and hope may be joined herein with love. We are thankful not only for the benefits we have received, but the benefits we expect from the love and goodness of God. Now all the motives that belong to fear do not make so kindly, so strong, and so durable an impression as those that arise from love. In fear we force ourselves, but love begets an inclination: it is love, and not fear, that is the bias and inclination of the soul. And look, what difference there is between a forcible impression and a natural and voluntary inclination, that there is between fear and love. A man is forced to do a thing by fear which he had rather leave undone ; but as for love *non cogitur, sed cogit*—'The love of Christ constraineth us.' The constraints of fear are ingrate, and unacceptable to the soul ; but of love, pleasing. This appears by the Israelites making brick for Pharaoh, when forced by their taskmasters ; and the Jews repairing the city and the temple : Neh. iv. 6, 'The people had a mind to the work.' Nothing now worketh upon love but love : 1 John iv. 19, 'We love him because he loved us first ; we love him who first loved us.' And where have we the fairest prospect of God's love, but in this relation of love, and adopting us to be his children, and to be heirs of glory by Jesus Christ ? The sum of what is spoken is this : That when we love God most, we are most pleasing to God and ourselves ; our duties run on the most freely and sweetly, and we are most like abundantly to love God when our thoughts are most steeped in the love of God.

2. That we may keep up the joy of our faith and comfort in afflictions from the world. Though we be God's children, yet the greatest part of the world treateth us as slaves. The apostle intimateth so much in the text : 'The world knoweth us not.' Princes in disguise in a foreign land may meet with manifold abuses, which otherwise would not be offered to them if their quality and condition were known ; so God's children and heirs make no fair show in the flesh. But 'Fear not, little flock ; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' It doth support us often and frequently to consider the world cannot hate us so much as God loveth us. If the world be an enemy, God is a father ; they cannot put so much disgrace and contempt upon us as God will put glory. If you be to them 'the scurf and off-scouring of all things,' you are to God as jewels ; if they thrust

you out of the world, God will receive you to heaven; if they prepare a dungeon, God hath prepared a kingdom.

3. That we may be satisfied and contented with our portion; if you have God to your Father, what though you be straitened in the world? A man has no interest in spiritual privileges unless he doth prize and value them; for God will not cast pearls before swine, that trample them under their feet. Now the practical estimation exceedeth the speculative when we are contented in the want of other things; as David saith, Ps. xvii. 14, 15, 'From men which are thy right hand, O Lord, from men of the world, whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I will be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' We need not envy others their portion; there should be a well-pleas'dness in our condition: Ps. xvi. 5-7, 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel; my reins also instruct me in the night-season.'

4. To stir us up to be exemplary in holiness; for if God be matchless in his love, we should be singular in our holiness; our return must carry proportion with our receipts: 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!' Then the inference may well be, 'What manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?' and we should study to please him more. As fatherly love, and the benefits depending thereupon, are fullest and surest; so should filial duty be highest and freest.

5. We should consider it, that we may clear up our interest the more in it, and not foolishly content ourselves with an inferior happiness. Surely if it be so certain a truth, and so great a privilege, we should see that it be ours, and be able to say, 'What manner of love hath God bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of the most high God!'

*Use 1.* And indeed the use that I shall make of it is to persuade you to put in for a share in this blessed privilege. To direct you in this, let me tell you—

1. That this new relation dependeth on the new birth, and that none are adopted but those that are regenerated and renewed to the image and likeness of God; all others, though called christians, are bastards and not sons, that is, not legitimate but degenerate children. The relative change goeth along with the real, or followeth it; for the real is first, John i. 12, 13, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: for we were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'

2. Regeneration is God's act; but repentance and faith, which are the immediate issues of it, are ours, and you must enter by the strait gate if you would enter into God's family, and obtain the privileges of it. We must humbly consent to take Christ upon the ends for which God offereth him, or to be and do what God hath appointed him to be and do for poor sinners: Gal. iii. 26, 'Ye are all made children of God, by faith in Jesus Christ.' That is our first admis-

sion, by a consent to the new covenant, depending upon the merit of Christ's sacrifice for the privileges thereof, and binding ourselves by a solemn vow to perform the duties thereof; for he presently speaks of being baptized into Christ, that we may put on Christ.

3. If you would have the privileges of children, you must perform the duties of children; we catch at privileges, but neglect duty. Now the great duty of children is to love, please, and honour their father: 'If I be a father where is mine honour? If I be a master where is my fear?' 1 Peter i. 17, 'If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth every man, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' There must be a tenderness and a fear to offend our heavenly Father. Our privileges are the strongest engagement to duty that can be: Jer. iii. 5, 'Thou hast said, Thou art my father; yet thou doest evil yet more and more.' The sons of Rechab are commended for keeping so close to the institutes of their family: Jer. xxxv. 6, 'But they said, We will drink no wine; for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever.' Such a disposition is pleasing to God. So tenderly he loveth the children that are childlike and obedient. How humble and obedient was the Lord Christ, though his only-begotten Son!

4. If we would enjoy the privileges of the family, we must submit to the discipline of the family. God will take his own course in bringing up his children; our fancies and appetites must not prescribe the way, but all must be humbly submitted to his wisdom: Heb. xii. 6-10, 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? 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.' Many times his love of good-will maketh use of the rod. Before conversion it is a means to awaken us, but after conversion we are made amiable in his sight, and objects of his love of complacency; yet the rod of correction will not wholly be laid aside. In heaven, where there is no danger of sin, there is no use of the rod. Those that are permitted to go on in their sins have not the benefit of paternal correction; therefore in the 9th and 10th verses before cited, it is said, 'We had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; and shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits? 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.' Children, when they take it ill to be beaten by others, yet they take it patiently to be beaten for their faults by their parents: they may err for want of wisdom, their chastisements are arbitrary and irregular; but there is more of compassion than passion in God's rod; his chastisements come from purest love, are regulated by perfect wisdom, and tend to and end in our holiness and happiness.

5. You must submit to bear the world's hatred, if God see fit: Rev. iv. 29, 'They loved not their lives to the death;' Heb. ii. 10, 'For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings.' And therefore, as Christ said, so must we say, John xviii. 11, 'The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?'

6. Think often and seriously of this wonderful and matchless love; the subject requireth it.

[1.] These are things excellent and great, and such things usually force their way into our minds; all other things are trifles to this love, in making us his children. Alas! what are the things you dote upon, and wherein you applaud yourselves, to this? honours, lands, revenues, to these glorious mysteries? These are the most sweet and ravishing thoughts, a feast to the minds of all spiritual wise men: Eph. iii. 18, 'That we may, with all saints, comprehend the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of Christ, and to know the love of God, which passeth knowledge;' to know as much as we can, that we may be affected with it.

[2.] These are things that nearly concern us. Needless speculations we may well spare, or other men's matters; all will seek their own things: in temporals it holdeth true. Now what doth more nearly concern us than to have God for our father, Christ for our elder brother, heaven for our inheritance, angels and saints for our fellow-members in the family? It may be so, if we do not forfeit or lose this privilege by our neglect or contempt. These things are ours by offer; they may be ours by choice. Consideration doth much promote it.

[3.] They are the most necessary things. What is more necessary to our happiness than to love God as a father, which is our work, and to know we are beloved of him as children?

[4.] Things most profitable should be considered by us. There is more profit to be gotten by the tillage of a fruitful land than a barren heath; and it is idle to stand telling stories when we have higher business of concernment in hand; so it is foolishness in us to muse upon vanity when we have the love of God to think of, to let the mill grind chaff when there is such plenty of corn at hand.

## SERMON II.

*Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.—1 JOHN iii. 1, 2.*

In the first part of these words we have observed two things—

1. A great privilege represented.

2. An anticipation of an objection, or an exception which might be made to that privilege.