

SERMON UPON 2 SAMUEL XXIV. 24.

Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which costs me nothing.—2 SAM. xxiv. 24.

IN the context you will find a laudable contention between a good king and a good subject. Since it was to David, and since it was for the Lord, Araunah would not sell, but give. On the other side, David, since it was for the Lord, he would not take, but buy.

A double reason may be given of David's refusal.

1. According to the law no man might offer to God anything but what was his own.

2. Because he would not serve God cost free.

You have both in the parallel place, 1 Chron. xxi. 24, 'I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt-offerings without cost.' In the text it is notable that he calleth God, 'the Lord,' to note his majesty; and 'my God,' to note his own love, choice, and interest. Such a God he could not find in his heart to serve in a cheap and unworthy fashion. 'Neither will I offer,' &c.

Doct. A gracious heart will not serve God with that which costs him nothing; or counts that religion worth nothing which costs nothing.

Reasons. 1. This is the fruit of their faith. Carnal nature begrudgeth everything; and in the eye of sense all is lost that is laid out upon God. They say, with Judas, 'What needs this waste?' The same judgment that Seneca gave upon the Jewish sabbath, the same thoughts have carnal men of all the service of God: he said the Jews were a foolish people, *quia septimam ætatis partem perdunt vacando*, because they lost a full seventh part of their lives in idleness and rest. Now those that are thus minded, that think all is lost that is laid out in his service, will never do anything for God that is great and worthy; the refuse of what they have is thought good enough for him. That this opinion, that all that is done in religion for God's sake is as good as lost, hath an influence upon men's careless and perfunctory dealing in religion, appeareth by the first chapter of Malachi. The main intent of that chapter is to expostulate with them about their contempt of God, and the sorry service which they brought to him. Among other arguments, this is pleaded, that the meanest employment about him was not without its reward: Mal. i. 10, 'Who is there among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye

kindle a fire on my altar for nought,' &c. That is, the porters of the temple did not open and shut the doors for nought; nor the priest attend upon the burnt-offering for nought; they were all well rewarded with tithes and oblations; they were all well provided for, by God's own appointment and allowance. This is God's argument, which plainly sheweth they were under the influence and dominion of this blasphemous thought: that they should be losers by God, and therefore did not care how they served him. But now a man that hath faith, that is persuaded of God's being and bounty, Heb. xi. 6, he thinketh he can never do enough for God; for he knoweth it will turn to a good account. Here, during the time of his patience, the superficial service he gets from us hath its reward: God giveth many temporal blessings to those that worship him in the slightest fashion. He suspended his judgments, you know, upon Ahab's counterfeit humiliation, 1 Kings xxi. 29. His providence plainly declareth that none shall be a loser by him, nor do anything for nought; and therefore, shall we not do it well? If anything be done sincerely, though never so mean and inconsiderable, it hath its reward: Mat. x. 42, 'He that giveth a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward.' The smallness and meanness of the benefit, help, or refreshing, done to any in Christ's name, shall not lose his estimation and recompense, if it be done under that notion. This, though hardly credited by the unbelieving world, is very true: 'Verily I say unto you,' and 'shall in no wise,' they are emphatical particles. But now the more eminent services, which are carried on with hazard and difficulty, and some considerable self-denial, surely they shall not fail of their recompense: whatever we lose for Christ, we shall receive again with infinite advantage: Mark x. 29, 30, 'Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, and brethren, or sister, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life.' He shall not only have heaven at last; but here in this life, in the midst of persecution an hundredfold. Even in this time, the time of trials and troubles; yea, by his troubles: in kind or value. Not an hundred wives, or mothers, or children, as Julian scoffed. Now who would not serve such a master, and serve him with his best, improve every received ability, stand upon no cost and charges, so we may be faithful to him? It would be no difficult thing to persuade men to it, if they were firmly persuaded of these things; as it would be no hard thing to persuade others to put out their money where they may have, not only ten in the hundred, but an hundred for ten; or to sow their seed there where the soil will certainly produce an hundredfold. But we want faith, and therefore draw back and struggle with our shoulders when we are to do anything for God that will occasion trouble or cost. That faith hath a great influence upon the costly and self-denying services of the saints, is evident by the instance of Abel: Heb. xi. 4, 'By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain,' *πλείωνα θυσίαν*, the first, the fat, the best, the tenth. Cain, that doubted of the world to come, bringeth it hand over head. So also the instance of Abraham:

Heb. xi. 17, 'By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ; and he that received the promises offered up his only-begotten son.' Here is a son, an only son, a son on whom the promises were fixed, and this son to fall under the weight of his own father's hands : an act that occasioned not only a conflict between his obedience and his natural affection, but a kind of riddle between his obedience and his faith. How should he offer Isaac, and yet believe that in Isaac's seed all the nations should be blessed ? But faith is a strange grace ; it trusts God wonderfully, and can reconcile all contradictions ; it can see Isaac offered, and yet kept still, and a father of many children ; gain in loss, and life in death ; something in nothing. Well, then, a sound believer will not grudge at trials ; when he is put upon the most difficult cases, he saith, ' Shall I serve God with what costeth me nought ? ' No, God shall have the best : if he will have Isaac, let Isaac go.

2. Their love to God inclineth them to this disposition of heart. Love is liberal and open-hearted ; it standeth upon no labour, cost, or difficulty. Fear serveth God with a kind of reserve ; it is a force put upon us, and therefore doth no more than needs must. But love is sensible that our obligation is far beyond our ability to recompense, and hath such a delight in God's service, it can never do enough for him ; it counts nothing too good or too much, but all is short and too little. Love would still do more. There is a compulsion in fear, and there is a compulsion in love ; for love constraineth, 2 Cor. v. 14. But how do these differ ? The compulsion that is in fear is slavish, and mighty unwelcome to the soul, easily works off. That is bad ground that bringeth forth nothing except it be forced ; and usually such ground, at the best, brings forth but sparingly. But love is a willing compulsion. *Amor non cogitur, sed cogit*—love is not forced, but forceth. Natural conscience worketh by fear, faith by love, Gal. v. 6. Love consecrateth and devoteth all that a man hath to the will and pleasure of him whom he loveth. *Quis legem det amanti ? Amor major lex sibi ipsi est.* There needs no urging of laws. Love is a greater law to itself. No presenting of terrors where there is a strong self-inclination and propendency. It hath in its bosom as deep an engagement and obligation to please God as you can lay upon it. So that let a man's love be gained to Christ, and then he will stick at nothing. What love will do we may see in other cases ; as in Jacob's love to Rachel : Gen. xxix. 20, ' And Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had to her.' So in Shechem's love to Dinah : Gen. xxxiv. 19, ' The young man deferred not to do the thing, for the delight which he had in Jacob's daughter.' Circumcision was an hated thing to them, as well as painful in itself. Well, now, so it is in religion. Where love is wanting, all that is done seemeth too much ; but where love prevaiileth, let it be never so difficult, it seems light and easy : Acts xx. 24, ' None of these things move me.' Where there is love there will be self-denial ; it submitteth to duties against the bent and hair. Where there is love there will be labour ; it is not a slothful and idle affection : 2 Thes. i. 3, ' Your work of faith, and labour of love.' Well, then, if you had a greater love to God, he would have the best of your hearts, the best of your labours, the best of your estates, and the best

of your time and strength, and you would count nothing too dear to give to him or for him; for the voice of love is, 'Shall I serve God with what costs me nought?' It is very notable that a little is accepted if it hath the stamp of love upon it. The lover's mite cast into the treasury is more worth than ten times so much outward obedience from another man. But then this is the genius of love, to do its best. He that loveth much cannot satisfy himself with a little, but still seeketh how it may more glorify and please God, and that at an higher rate: Ps. lxxi. 14, 'I will glorify him yet more and more.'

3. They have a deep sense of God's majesty and excellency, and therefore dare not put him off with anything that is vile, cheap, and unworthy. No; he shall have the best, the choice, the flower of their time, strength, love, affection. If we had an higher sense of God's majesty and greatness, we would be more careful of his worship; for he is not a God to be slighted or dallied with, or put off with a little religiousness by the by. As his spiritual nature calleth for spiritual service, so his glorious majesty calleth for eminent service, and bindeth this thought upon us, that he should not be served without cost. It is a sign we have lessening thoughts of him, if we think that any slight sorry performance, that costs us little time, little care, little preparation, done with little life and affection, will serve the turn. God pleadeth his majesty against this abuse: Mal. i. 14, 'Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts.' A king of so great majesty calleth for other manner of service than usually we bestow upon him. Common stuff will serve for an ordinary house. In a palace for a king, most costly furniture is requisite and becoming. Superficial dealing in his work is an affront of his greatness, and sheweth that we have mean thoughts of him, and a want of reverence; when we put him off with the refuse, or bring common dispositions into his presence, and serve him carelessly and sorrily, thinking if the work be done it is no matter how, so we may once get it over. But he that knows God, what an high glorious God he is, dareth not be so sinfully bold and familiar with him: 'I will not serve God with what costs me nought.'

4. A cheap course of religion, such as costs little or nothing, will never be accepted with God; for it is contrary to his prescription. Our first lesson in Christ's school is self-denial, to prepare us for our after-service and obedience to him: Mat. xvi. 24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' We promise ourselves too much when we promise ourselves nothing but pleasure and contentment, as if we could go to heaven without blows and conflicts. This self-denial is not to be exercised only in little things, or in few things. No; we must sell all for the pearl of great price, Mat. xiii. 46. And selling all for the pearl of great price is required in times of peace as well as in times of persecution. None must enter upon the profession of christianity, but they must sit down and count the charges, Luke xiv. 28. And shall we think, after all this, that we shall go to heaven without cost? Surely this is new christianity, which Christ never taught, and the scriptures

own not ; a christianity of our own making, and therefore will not be accepted of God.

5. A cheap course of religion will yield us no comfort, nor sensible evidence of our sincerity. There are two reasons couched in one, but yet such as have a near affinity the one with the other.

[1.] There will be a sensible evidence of our sincerity. You will easily grant that it is necessary to a sound and sincere heart that we prefer Christ in our choice and esteem before the world and the flesh, and that we believe a world to come, and take heavenly things for our portion, treasure, and happiness. Now, how shall we know that we believe a world to come, if we venture nothing upon it, do nothing but what other men do, or but what we would do if there were no such hope offered to us? How shall we know that we prefer Christ before the world, if we can deny no worldly thing for Christ's sake ; so that a man is still doubtful, and cannot tell what to say and judge of his spiritual estate and condition before God? Heretofore, when God used extraordinary dispensations, he put his people upon special trials, that their sincerity might be more sensibly evidenced to them : Heb. xi. 17, ' By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac,' &c., *πειραζόμενος*. God saw fit to put such an eminent believer as Abraham was upon such an extraordinary and eminent trial. So the young man, when he came full of self-confidence to Christ, he puts him upon a special trial : Mark x. 21, ' Go thy way, and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor.' Doth the Lord wholly discontinue, think you, this kind of dispensations? No : Heb. x. 33, ' Partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions ; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.' Are not believers now put upon divers trials? James i. 2. Should they not ' count it all joy while they fall into divers temptations,' as having an happy occasion to discover their sincerity towards God? You are ignorant of the scriptures, and what belongeth to the usual discipline of your heavenly Father, if you conceit otherwise. Now, why doth God try us, or put his people upon sundry trials? Doth not he know our thoughts afar off. And is he not acquainted with us, and the sincerity of our affections towards him, before we are put upon such a sensible proof? Yes, verily ; he trieth, *non ut ipse hominem inveniatur, sed ut homo se inveniatur*—Augustine. Not that he may know more of man than he knew before, but that man may know more of himself than he knew before. He knoweth us already ; but he trieth us, that we may know ourselves. Indeed it is said, Gen. xxii. 12, ' Now I know that thou fearest God, since thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.' All interpreters grant that it is *humanitus dictum*, and they expound it thus : Now there is a document ; now there is an apparent and sensible proof ; now I know, what not till now, Lord. Was Abraham's mind unknown to thee before? Could not God tell long ago whether Abraham feared him, yea or no? Yes ; he that knew all things knew that he feared him : yet know it he would not, that is, not approve it, till he had thus experienced it. And that was for Abraham's comfort and satisfaction. All this is for our learning, brethren. We know not that we love God more than other things till we are tried ; and tried we are not to the purpose till we are tried

in our Isaac ; in things nearest and dearest to us, and can be at some cost for God. It is a nice case ; before a thing is liable to great uncertainty of debate ; therefore that is an happy occasion to a gracious heart, to be put upon some exercise of self-denial : ‘ I will not serve God with what costs me nought.’

[2.] God doth not so openly own men, nor pour out such a large measure of the comforts of his Spirit upon his people, when they serve him without cost, as he doth when they are called to deny themselves, and all that is dear and precious to them in the world, for his sake. In the Revelation there are many promises diversified under the notion of ‘ eating of the tree of life,’ Rev. ii. 7. ‘ Having the white stone, with the name,’ Rev. ii. 17 ; ‘ Of being fed with hidden manna ;’ but still ‘ to him that overcometh,’ chapters ii. iii. They are more feasted with comforts, and have a more liberal allowance of spiritual joys and delights than others have ; those that have passed the pikes, and have counted nothing dear to them, so they might keep their innocency, and approve their faithfulness to God. Sufferers have more of the comfortable and supporting operations of the Spirit than others have ; and in sharp trials, when put to live by faith, and having nothing to encourage them but their bare love to God, they enjoy usually more of the sensible comforts of his Spirit than others do. Whereas those who are not exposed to such difficulties, though they be sincere for the main, yet are kept more in the doubtful, humbling way, have less of the joys of the Spirit, and are more put to it to interpret their qualification, and make out any hope by Christ.

Cautions for the understanding of this truth.

1. When we speak of costs in religion, be sure you do not allow so much as a private whisper in your souls of merit ; for the costliest services deserve nothing at God’s hands. If we do never so much, suffer never so much for him, ‘ we are but unprofitable servants,’ Luke xvii. 10. Yet all our comfort and happiness is a free gift, or mere grace to us. When David had offered many cart-loads of gold and silver, he admireth grace, and acknowledgeth that he had but paid God out of his own exchequer : 1 Chron. xxix. 14, ‘ Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort ? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.’ He putteth away the glory of what was done from himself and people, that both will and ability might entirely be ascribed to God. So Rev. iii. 10, ‘ Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation.’ If we do never so much, and suffer never so much, the crown of life is a gift.

2. See that you do not draw needless trials and inconveniences upon yourselves ; for that is not zeal, but rashness and folly. Suffering for well-doing is a duty that doth not bind, as negative precepts do, at all times and in all cases ; nor are the children of God tied to it, as they are to some other positive duties. We are to ‘ watch unto prayer,’ 1 Peter iv. 7 ; redeem all opportunities for it. But this is only binding when the will of the Lord is so, 1 Peter ii. 17 ; and that is when by his providence he puts us under the power of persecutors, and they put us to a necessity either of suffering or sinning. Then, when the flesh is ready to say, Favour thyself, you must say, ‘ I will not serve the Lord

with what costs me nothing.' With courage and cheerfulness we must choose suffering rather than sinning. The apostle saith, James i. 2, 'Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.' He saith, when we fall into them; not, when we draw them upon ourselves. It was Tertullian's error to say, Afflictions are to be sought and desired. No; they are only to be submitted unto when sent by God. We are not to desire troubles, but bear them and improve them when he layeth them upon us. Christ hath taught us to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation;' and it is but a fond presumption to cast ourselves upon it. Philastrius and Theodoret speak of some that would compel men to kill them, out of an affectation of martyrdom. This was a mad ambition, not a true zeal. And no less fond are they that seek out crosses and troubles, rather than wait for them, and by their own violence bring a just hatred upon themselves, and run headlong into dangers without necessity. If a man set fire on his own house, he is liable to the law; if it be fired by accident, he is pitied and relieved. We are not to seek the cross, or make it, but bear it, and take it up; not to fill the cup ourselves, but drink it off when our Father puts it into our hands.

3. Take heed that you only displease the flesh in a lawful way. Do not step out of the road of your duty for this, and think that the Lord is pleased with barbarous austerities; as Baal's priests gashed themselves, 1 Kings xviii. 29. And the pharisees and papists have their self-disciplinings. And Origen, who was too allegorical in plain texts, was too literal when he castrated himself, because Christ speaketh of making ourselves 'eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven,' Mat. xix. 12, intending only thereby the gift of continency, or a power over our natural affections. Exterior mortifications and dolorous impressions on the body are a piece of apocryphal bastard religion, highly prized by the world, who are given to please the flesh. If they must displease it, they affect to do it in an outward way. But as much as these things are esteemed by men, they are abhorred by God. Christ is a lover of human nature, and he hath put no such severe penance upon us. It is more acceptable to him to mortify a lust than to mangle a member of the body.

4. See that you place not too much of religion in outward things, in external pomp and gaudiness, and then put this zealous gloss upon it, 'I will not serve God with what costs me nothing.' It is easy to exceed in externals, and such things as make a fair show in the world; but the majesty and spirit of religion is lost in the pomp of self-pleasing appearances. Aquinas disputeth the question whether a *nimum*, anything superfluous in religion. He grants it in externals. A man cannot love God too much, or trust in him too much; but he may exceed in outward observances, *connaturale est nobis per sensibilia duci*. And though not too much in absolute quantity, yet too much in proportion, *non proportionatur ad debitum finem istius luctus*. 'The king's daughter is all glorious within,' Ps. xlv. 15, in faith, love, patience, sobriety. By gifts and graces is the true church known, rather than by a splendid appearance; and holiness becometh his house rather than gold and costly furniture, Ps. xliii. 5.

5. When some outward advantages do accompany religion, they

must not be foolishly thrown away upon the pretence of self-denial, but acknowledged as favours from God, as reputation, countenance, maintenance, favour of men, &c. Yet the heart must be watched narrowly when duty and interest meet together. They must not be foolishly thrown away upon the pretence of a more self-denying serving of God: this was the pretence of the false teachers, to gain credit and entrance, 2 Cor. xi. from the 7th to the 12th. And if it be real, it is foolish; for it is God's allowance both in his word and providence. Not but that a man may *cedere jure suo*, for the glory of God, the credit of the gospel, and give no offence: 1 Cor. ix. 18, 'What is my reward then? Verily, that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.' Paul did what he could that the Corinthians might have *ἀδάπανον ἐναγγέλιον*; they would be prejudiced else; and Paul was fain to deny his own right to gratify them. But the heart must be watched when duty and interest meet together, that we do not make a market of religion, and a design of our profession, or a trade to live by; as we do when we look more to the secular encouragement than our duty. Their religion beareth their charges; they do not bear the charges of it. And these do rather say, I will not serve God for nothing, than, 'I will not serve God with what costs me nothing.'

6. Be not unreasonable in taxing yourselves with such a course of duty as is beyond ability and opportunity; for this is to make a snare for your own souls, and to entangle yourselves in some by-laws of your own making. And God accepts man according to what he hath, not according to what he hath not. A gracious heart may err on this hand, and think it never doeth enough. Conscience may be urging more; but even that little which we do is accepted. God is well pleased with it, because love is ill pleased with it, because it is no more nor better. Little is accepted for much when love offereth it. He taketh as much delight in the children's willingness as the more aged's strength. The main thing God looketh after is the willing mind: 2 Cor. viii. 12, 'If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not;' and 1 Chron. xxix. 9, 'The people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord.' Therefore, though we are to keep the heart liberal and open to God, and, when we have done our best, still to be willing to do more: Ps. lxxi. 14, 'I will praise him yet more and more;' yet this duty must be acted and exercised as strength and health will permit. In short, in performance of duties, the two measures are the strength and weakness of body and soul; as much as the health of the soul is more than the strength of body, our chief care must be for the soul, that the health of the soul be not lost, but still kept in good plight. That measure will show when we do too little; the other measure when the outward exercise is too much, when the health of the body is impaired or overwrought by it.

Use 1. It informeth us of the reasonableness and necessity of self-denial.

1. The reasonableness of it; for a man's heart, that is touched with any sense of religion, cannot be satisfied with a cheap course of duty. Natural light will tell us that no slight thing will become the God

whom we serve, and the glory and blessedness which we expect. Our religion were not a religion if it did not bind us to our duty, and not retrench the comforts and interests of the animal life, to preserve the spiritual in life and vigour; neither were christianity such a noble, glorious, and high institution if it did not draw us off from things earthly to things heavenly, and make them willing to quit the one for the other.

2. The necessity of it. They mistake religion that carry it on in such a way that it puts them to no cost. Wherever it is in vigour and power, it will put us to some expense. If it be otherwise, either men neglect many necessary duties, as self-examination, meditation, secret and earnest prayer, constant waiting upon God, mortifying their lusts and passions, which are all contrary to the ease of the flesh, or honouring God with their substance, Prov. iii. 4, seasonable reproof, owning his truth and stricter ways, notwithstanding troubles, persecutions, and disgraces, which are contrary to the interests and profits of the flesh; or else, secondly, they do what they do in a slight and overly fashion; and painted fire needeth no fuel. There is no trouble in a careless profession; there needs not much ado to keep it up. Where men leave the soul to the stream, and do, as Solomon saith of himself, Eccles. ii. 10, 'Whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them; I withheld not myself from any joy;' they leave their senses without guard, their affections without a bridle, and are carried on as they are impelled by their own lusts; and then varnish over all with a little profession, and talk of God, and Christ, or hearing. They may give religion a slight glance, and suffer it to have a turn among other things. Indeed such a religion puts them to no self-denial. But this is a false christianity of our own making. Here is no striving to enter in at the strait gate, no walking in the narrow way, no working out our salvation with fear and trembling. All this may be, and no denying ourselves and hazarding the displeasure of the world.

2. It informeth us that we have no reason to be displeased or overtroubled with oppositions, reproaches, and troubles for godliness' sake. God often in his providence sendeth troubles to heighten the price of profession, that it may not be taken up in a carnal design, and that every hypocrite may not take it up to hide or feed his lusts. Now when it is our lot to live in such times, they that are sincere should not be troubled at it; for then they have an happy advantage and opportunity to make their love to God more sensible and evident, when they do not serve him without cost. It is a finer and nicer debate at other times, to discern which is greatest in our hearts, our love to Christ or to the world, our esteem of things earthly or heavenly. A tried faith is sooner discerned, and God's suffering servants have a larger allowance of comfort. It is an happy occasion of discovering our sincerity; for you are now upon your trial, and more ample communion with God, and tasting the joys of the life to come. Surely these are truths which our Lord hath commended to our consideration: Mat. v. 11, 12, 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and say all manner of evil for my name's sake; rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.' When we suffer for a

good conscience, we are to carry this cross, not only patiently, but joyfully.

Use 2. It reproveth those that put off God with anything. A sickly lamb for a sacrifice; yea, and grudge at their sorry services: Mal. i. 13, 'What a weariness is it!' Surely they are far from religion that can deny themselves nothing, that will perform a duty when they have nothing else to do, and deal reservedly, superficially, and unfaithfully in all their work, and still complain of tediousness and weariness in God's service; that think the time long, the pains too much, the cost too burthensome; can be content with a little labour perhaps, but it must not be tired too much: 'When will the sabbath be over?' Amos iii. When will the duty be done? Or it may be they will sacrifice some of their weaker lusts, or their smaller and petty sins, which yield them no pleasure or profit, but retain their great sins, wherein their souls delight; as Saul destroyed the rascal multitude and carrion cattle of Amalek, but spared Agag and the fattest of the oxen and sheep, 1 Sam. xv. 7-9; or as John destroyed the idolatry of Baal, which his interest led him to, but not the calves at Dan and Bethel, which reason of state was against, 1 Kings x. 29, 30; or as Herod did many things, but if John will touch his Herodias, he shall smart for it, Mark vi. 17, 20. Thus do they desire and hope to gain heaven at a more easy rate than an entire resignation of all to God. They may sustain some reproach, make some small losses, but to be undone by their religion, to venture reputation, estate, and life, and all, for Christ and his gospel, this they cannot endure to hear of. They can be contented to be distasted and despised by their open enemies, but so as to make themselves whole again by their own party, yield to many corruptions, and humour them, please them, as the young prophet, 1 Kings xiii. 14, 19. Oh, this is but carnal self-denial, yea, rather carnal self-seeking.

Use 3. Of caution. Let us not rest satisfied with the cheaper part of religion. No; you must be at some cost for God. They are self-seeking hypocrites that cull out the safe, the cheap, the easy part of their duty, and leave all the rest undone. A faithful discharge of your duty may bring trouble to the flesh, but it will bring comfort to the soul.

What is the cheaper part of religion I shall instance in a few things.

1. Outward profession; especially when our interests or education lead us thereunto. Alas! this is to serve God with what costs us nothing. Though it be the profession of God's stricter ways, when we have not that constitution of heart, and do not carry on that course of life which doth become such profession; for then you are but factionists; not of Christ's religion, but of his faction. God is no *προσωπόλεμος*, 1 Peter i. 17, 'No respecter of persons.' Herding with a strict party, while yet our hearts are not subdued to God, is nothing worth. Religion is not to be carried on in the world so: Gal. v. 6, 'In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love;' Gal. vi. 15, 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature;' 1 Cor. vii. 19, 'Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing,

but the keeping of the commandments of God.' It is no great matter to be of this side or that, while carnal, if there be not an heavenly, holy, mortified heart, and a sober, grave conversation.

2. A dull speculative approbation of what is good will serve no man : Rom. ii. 18, ' And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law,' &c. The truths of God have great evidence, and reasonable men have some aptitude to discern it. Opinions are cheap things, and may be taken up and held without any great cost. Do they sway your love and practice ? There is the chief trial.

3. Minding lesser while we neglect weighty things : Mat. xxiii. 23, ' Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.' Ceremony rather than substance. No ; there must be a uniform conscience ; not make a business about small matters and neglect weighty duties.

4. Doing that which is good when no temptation to the contrary ; Exod. xxxiv. 21, ' Six days shalt thou labour, and the seventh day shalt thou rest. In harvest and earing-time shalt thou rest.' They should rest then when it was a self-denial to rest, when their profit invited them to labour. To be humble when under ; but lifted up, they soon discover themselves. Some will follow a good way while it is peaceable, writhe themselves into all shapes and postures, and distinguish themselves out of a sense of their duty, that they may avoid the cross, or be at any charge for God : Gal. vi. 12, ' They constrain you to be circumcised, lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.' They cannot live without honour, ease, and plenty ; and therefore turn and wind any way to shift off the cross.

5. It is an easy religion to be more in public duties than in private. We have the greatest advantage to discover more earnestness of affection in private, secret duties, where usually we are slight, and slubber over things in an unhandsome fashion. Our Lord Jesus went apart into a solitary place, early in the morning, to pray the more earnestly, Mark i. 53. There we may enjoy most sensible communion with God, can most feelingly lay forth our own case. The spouse of the church is bashful, saith Bernard, and will not communicate his loves to us in company.

6. The external part of religious duties is more easy than internal. They that have knowledge and utterance may flow in expressions. The ring of parts gratifieth natural pride, and procureth our esteem with others ; therefore the exercise of gifts will not discover a christian so much as the exercise of grace, faith, hope, love, humility, sobriety, mercy, mortification. Therefore should a christian measure himself rather by these things than the pomp of gifts : ' If I speak with the tongue of angels, yet without charity, I am nothing,' 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

7. It is more easy to reprove others than to reform ourselves, and to be more earnest in opposing their sins than to subdue our own. Many please themselves in invectives against the times or censuring others. It is a false zeal that is much abroad : James i. 27, ' Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the

world.' The crafty lapwing will go up and down fluttering and crying, to draw the fowler from her own nest. We have a nest of sin of our own; we are loath it should be rifled and exposed to public view, therefore we crack against others: James iii. 1, 'My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that ye shall receive the greater condemnation.'

8. Power and dominion of the truth over hearts is a far greater evidence of our sincerity than curious speculations or highflown notions: 1 Cor. iv. 20, 'The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power;' James ii. 17, 'Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.' Be warmed, be clothed; or, I have faith, relieving, comforting; this is best. A doing and giving is more than a bare attendance upon God in his worship: Isa. lviii. 5, 7, 'Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head, as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes upon him? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?' Acts of charity are much better than formalities of worship.

Use 4. To press us to this self-denying way of serving God. I shall do it by these considerations—

1. How much wicked men can deny themselves for their lusts. There is not a verier drudge in the world than a carnal man. What cost is he at to satisfy his lusts? nothing is too good for back and belly; he can ransack the storehouses of nature for their supply, and all seemeth little enough to gratify those pleasures and delights which he fancieth. The world and the flesh engross his whole time and strength, he beginneth betimes; the flower and freshness of his youth and strength is employed this way; so that if God should break in upon him, and bring him to any sense of his everlasting interest, there is nothing but the dregs of age left for God; the flesh and the world have his health and strength. If he promise anything to his Creator, whom he should remember in the days of his youth, Eccles. xii. 1, it is only his weakness and sickness. Carnal vanities have his first-fruits, and scarce his gleanings can be reserved for God and religion. In his age, how little is he reduced! what commands doth the devil lay upon men! and how laborious and grievous and difficult soever they be, this is no impediment. But in religion a little thing is grievous; all proveth too much. It is a costly thing to feed any lust; what large offers do they make! Micah vi. 6, 7, 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' They had rather be at any pains than quit their bosom corruptions; are more willing to promise what is impossible or sinfully cruel than kill one lust. How can a christian but blush at this, that he began with God so late, and that the best of his days were past before he thought of God; and when he seeth the devil's martyrs, how they venture reputation, estate, life, soul, and all, for a base pleasure, and he can do so little for God?

2. What a change it would make in the christian world if christians

of all sorts would put this question seriously to their souls, Shall I serve God with that which cost me nothing?

[1.] In ministers. Oh, how justly may God put us out of service, who have so often served him with what cost us nought! Surely, did we oftener think of this, we would be other manner of ministers than ever we have been. When we are entering into this sacred function and office, we would think what skill and industry is required to be able to guide souls unto their eternal rest; we would be more careful to get ministerial graces; that is to say, such zeal for God, such sound belief of the things whereof we speak, that we might not seem to speak of them in jest, and for fashion's sake. Such compassion over souls, for which Christ died, that we would warn every man, instruct every man, teach every man, that we may present every man perfect in Jesus Christ, Col. i. 27, 28. We would be more careful to get ministerial abilities and sufficiencies, such a stock of knowledge, speculative and experimental, that our lips might preserve knowledge, Mal. ii. 7; that we might be able to resolve cases, to answer doubts and scruples, obviate errors, convince gainsayers; not only fodder the sheep, but hunt out the wolves. We would not come to this work raw and unfledged, as many ministers, who are for the main sincere, do; we would not think that a few natural parts, or a little slight eloquence, would serve the turn. No; saith the conscientious man, 'I will not serve God with what cost me nought.' Every time we are meditating upon a word of exhortation, or thinking of attending God's throne, we would seek to find out acceptable words, and think we hear poor souls crying to us, Good sir, study for us. Certainly we would not serve God with what costs us nought. As the psalmist saith, Ps. xlv. 1, 'My heart inditeth a good matter,' baketh a good matter. It is an allusion to the mindah, or meat-offering. We would not come with a little dough-baked stuff, some raw, crude, and indigested eructations. Yea, we would deal reproofs more freely, as John Baptist told Herod plainly, Mark vi. 18, 'It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.' The flesh will be apt to say, 'This will be ill taken, this will procure displeasure or danger; but conscience will reply, Let him take it how he will, 'shall I serve God with what cost me nought?' The minister's conversation would be better, such as may be an example to others, such as may keep up the full value of his testimony in the consciences of men. He would aim at that singular holiness which becometh his station; for, saith he, 'Shall I serve God with what costs me nought?'

[2.] Let magistrates mind this, and they will be possessed with another spirit than most magistrates are. He will not be a careless Gallio, nor a partial Jehu, nor a lukewarm Laodicean. He will do justice, and be useful in his place; not only when his ease permitteth him, or his credit inviteth him, or may do it without any prejudice to his interests, but when his interests are in danger. He will not leave a duty undone, because trouble followeth it; when he is to contend with nobles, as Nehemiah; when hazards and displeasing attend the discharge of his office; for, saith he, 'Shall I serve God with what cost me nought?' He doth not consult with inconveniencies, but duty.

[3.] Let common christians think of this in their constant duties towards God or men. Towards God. In general, he is resolved not to

stand upon the ease of the flesh or the interests of the flesh. The pleasures and delights of the flesh will make us sluggish; and the interests of the flesh cowardly and faint-hearted. And then his repentance would be more full. When he cometh to enter in by the strait gate, there is required much sorrow and grief before he can settle his peace, or his soul sit easy. Now the flesh recalcitrates, and kicketh against this kind of discipline, as the bullock at yoking is most unruly; but he holdeth his heart to it by this, 'Shall I serve God with what costs me nought?' His walking in the narrow way, his mortification more full. If he findeth any bosom lusts or tender parts, they must be renounced; the right hand must be cut off, the right eye pulled out, Mat. v. 29, 30. Many do many things, but keep their Herodias. His profession is more constant, though he suffer loss of credit, estate, esteem. He is more diligent in the discharge of his duties. He dealeth righteously with men, though it be to his loss and hurt. He is more faithful in his relations, as husband, wife, master, parent, child, servant; when it is grievous. Soberly, when the flesh would crave an indulgence. What! shall I obey every vain fancy and appetite? The main care and diligence of his life is laid out, not upon the flesh, but the spirit, that God be first and chiefly served, and not self. They leave God nothing that will not give him their best.