

SERMON XXV.

PROVIDENTIAL CHANGES, AN ARGUMENT FOR UNIVERSAL HOLINESS.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?—2 PET. iii. 11.

THAT this second epistle was written unto the same persons to whom the former was directed, the apostle himself informs us, chap. iii. 1. Who they were to whom the first was directed, he declares fully, 1 Epist. i. 1, 2. ‘Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia,’ &c.

‘Strangers’ are taken two ways : First, In a large, general, and spiritual sense. So all believers are said to be strangers and pilgrims in this world, because they are not of the world, but they look for another country, another city, another house, whose framer and builder is God. Secondly, In a proper, natural sense ; for those who abide or dwell in a land that is not their own, wherein they have not right of inheritance with the natives and citizens of it. In this sense, the patriarchs were strangers in the land of Canaan, before it came to be the possession of their posterity : and the children of Israel were strangers four hundred years in the land of Egypt.

Now though the persons to whom the apostle wrote, were strangers in the first sense, pilgrims whose conversation and country was in heaven, yet they were no more so than all other believers in the world ; so that there was no just cause of saluting them peculiarly under that style and title, were there not some other special reason of that appellation. They were therefore also strangers in the latter sense, persons who had no inheritance in the place of their abode, that were not the free and privileged natives of the country where they dwelt and inhabited ; that is, they were Jews scattered abroad in those parts of the world.

The people of Israel in those days were under various distributions and appellations. First, They were the natives of Jerusalem, and the parts adjacent ; and these were in the gospel peculiarly called Jews. You have it often mentioned, that in our Saviour's discourse with them, the Jews answered so and so ; that is, the natives of Jerusalem, and places adjoining. Secondly, Those who inhabited the sea-coasts of the country, whom the others much despised, and called them, from the place of their habitation, as if they had been men of another nation, ' Galileans.' Thirdly, Those who lived in several dispersions up and down the world among other nations. Of these there were two chief sorts : (1.) Those who lived in some parts of Europe, in Asia the less, also at Alexandria, and other Greek colonies. These are in the Scripture sometimes called Greeks, Acts xvii. and elsewhere, commonly termed Hellenists, because they used the Greek language, and the Greek Bible then in use. (2.) Those who lived in the greater Asia, in and about Babylon ; as also in the countries here enumerated by the apostle : the Jews converted to the faith, that lived scatteredly up and down in those parts of Asia.

Peter being in a special manner designed by the Holy Ghost the apostle of the circumcision, and being now at Babylon in the discharge of his apostolical office and duty, 1 Epist. v. 13. and being now nigh unto death, which he also knew, 2 Epist. i. 14. and not perhaps having time to pass through, and personally visit these scattered believers ; he wrote unto them these two epistles, partly about the main and important truths of the gospel, and partly about their own particular and immediate concernment, as to the temptations and afflictions wherewith they were exercised.

It is evident, from sundry places in the New Testament, what extreme oppositions the believing Jews met withal all the world over from their own countrymen, with and among whom they lived. They in the meantime, no doubt, warned them of the wrath of Christ against them, for their cursed unbelief and persecutions ; particularly letting them know, that Christ would come in vengeance ere long, according as he had threatened, to the ruin of his enemies. And because the persecuting Jews all the world over upbraided the believers with the temple and the holy city Jerusalem, their

worship and service instituted of God, which they had defiled; they were given to know, that even all these things also should be destroyed, for their rejection of the Son of God. After some continuance of time, the threatening denounced being not yet accomplished, as is the manner of profane persons and hardened sinners, Eccles. viii. 11. they began to mock and scoff, as if they were all but the vain pretences, or loose, causeless fears of the Christians. That this was the state with them, or shortly would be, the apostle declares in this chapter, ver. 3, 4. Because things continued in the old state without alteration, and judgment was not speedily executed, they scoffed at all the threats about the coming of the Lord, that had been denounced against them.

Hereupon the apostle undertakes these three things :

First, He convinces the scoffers of folly by an instance of the like presumption in persons not unlike them, and the dealings of God in a case of the same nature.

Secondly, He instructs believers in the truth of what they had before been told concerning the coming of Christ, and the destruction of ungodly men.

Thirdly, He informs them in the due use and improvement that ought practically to be made of the certainty of this threatening of the coming of Christ.

For the first he minds them, as I said, of the old world, ver. 5, 6. Before the destruction of that world, God sent 'Noah, a preacher of righteousness,' who both in word and deed effectually admonished men of the judgment of God, that was ready to come upon them; but they scoffed at his preaching and practice, in building the ark, and persisted in their security. Now, saith he, 'this they are willingly ignorant of;' it is through the obstinacy and stubbornness of their will, they do not consider it; for otherwise they had the Scripture, and knew the story. There is no ignorance like that, where men's obstinacy and hardness in sin keeps them from a due improvement of what they ought to have improved to its proper purpose. They are to this day willingly ignorant of the flood who live securely in sin, under the denunciation of the judgments of God against sin.

I shall only observe by the way, not to look into the difficulties of these verses, that I be not too long detained from my principal intendment, that the apostle makes a distribu-

tion of the world into heaven and earth, and saith, they 'were destroyed with water and perished.' We know that neither the fabric or substance of the one or other was destroyed, but only men that lived on the earth; and the apostle tells us, ver. 7. of the 'heaven and earth that were then,' and 'were destroyed by water,' distinct from 'the heavens and the earth that were now,' and 'were to be consumed by fire:' and yet as to the visible fabric of heaven and earth, they were the same both before the flood and in the apostle's time, and continue so to this day; when yet it is certain, that the heavens and earth whereof he speaks, were to be destroyed and consumed by fire in that generation. We must then, for the clearing our foundation, a little consider what the apostle intends by the heavens and the earth in these two places.

1. It is certain, that what the apostle intends by the world, with its heavens and earth, ver. 5, 6. which was destroyed; the same or somewhat of that kind he intends by the heavens and the earth that were to be consumed and destroyed by fire, ver. 7. otherwise there would be no coherence in the apostle's discourse, nor any kind of argument, but a mere fallacy of words.

2. It is certain, that by the flood, the world, or the fabric of heaven and earth, was not destroyed, but only the inhabitants of the world; and therefore the destruction intimated to succeed by fire, is not of the substance of the heavens and the earth, which shall not be consumed until the last day, but of persons or men living in the world.

3. Then we must consider, in what sense men living in the world are said to be the world, and the heavens and earth of it. I shall only insist on one instance to this purpose, among many that may be produced, Isa. li. 15, 16. The time when the work here mentioned of planting the heavens, and laying the foundation of the earth, was performed by God, was when he 'divided the sea,' ver. 15. and gave the law, ver. 16. and said to Zion, 'Thou art my people;' that is, when he took the children of Israel out of Egypt, and formed them in the wilderness into a church and state; then he planted the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth; made the new world; that is, brought forth order, and government, and beauty, from the confusion wherein

before they were. This is the planting of the heavens, and laying the foundation of the earth in the world. And hence it is, that when mention is made of the destruction of a state and government, it is in that language that seems to set forth the end of the world. So Isa. xxxiv. 4. which is yet but the destruction of the state of Edom. The like also is affirmed of the Roman empire, Rev. vi. 14. which the Jews constantly affirm to be intended by Edom in the prophets. And in our Saviour Christ's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, Matt. xxiv. he sets it out by expressions of the same importance. It is evident, then, that in the prophetic idiom and manner of speech, by heavens and earth, the civil and religious state and combination of men in the world, and the men of them are often understood. So were the heavens and earth that world which then was destroyed by the flood.

4. On this foundation, I affirm, that the heavens and earth here intended in this prophecy of Peter, the coming of the Lord, the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men, mentioned in the destruction of that heaven and earth, do all of them relate, not to the last and final judgment of the world, but to that utter desolation and destruction that was to be made of the Judaical church and state; for which I shall offer these two reasons, of many that might be insisted on from the text.

(1.) Because whatever is here mentioned, was to have its peculiar influence on the men of that generation. He speaks of that wherein both the profane scoffers, and those scoffed at, were concerned, and that as Jews; some of them believing, others opposing the faith. Now there was no particular concernment of that generation, nor in that sin, nor in that scoffing, as to the day of judgment in general; but there was a peculiar relief for the one, and a peculiar dread for the other at hand in the destruction of the Jewish nation; and besides an ample testimony both to the one and the other of the power and dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was the thing in question between them.

(2.) Peter tells them, that after the destruction and judgment that he speaks of, ver. 13. 'We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth,' &c. they had this expectation. But what is that promise? Where may

we find it? Why we have it in the very words and letter, Isa. lxxv. 17. Now when shall this be that God will create these ‘new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness?’ Saith Peter, it shall be after the coming of the Lord, after that judgment and destruction of ungodly men, who obey not the gospel, that I foretell. But now it is evident from this place of Isaiah, with chap. lxxvi. 21, 22. that this is a prophecy of gospel times only; and that the planting of these new heavens, is nothing but the creation of gospel ordinances to endure for ever. The same thing is so expressed, Heb. xii. 26—28.

This being then the design of the place, I shall not insist longer on the context, but briefly open the words proposed, and fix upon the truth contained in them.

First, There is the foundation of the apostle’s inference and exhortation, *τούτων οὖν πάντων λυομένων*: seeing that I have evinced that all these things, however precious they seem, or what value soever any put upon them, shall be dissolved, that is, destroyed; and that in that dreadful and fearful manner before mentioned, in a way of judgment, wrath, and vengeance, by fire and sword; let others mock at the threats of Christ’s coming, he will come, he will not tarry: and then the heavens and earth that God himself planted, the sun, moon, and stars of the Judaical polity and church, the whole old world of worship and worshippers that stand out in their obstinacy against the Lord Christ, shall be sensibly dissolved and destroyed; this we know shall be the end of these things, and that shortly.

There is no outward constitution nor frame of things in governments or nations, but it is subject to a dissolution, and may receive it, and that in a way of judgment. If any might plead exemption, that on many accounts of which the apostle was discoursing, in prophetic terms (for it was not yet time to speak it openly to all), might interpose for its share. But that also, though of God’s creation, yet standing in the way of, and in opposition to, the interest of Christ, that also shall be dissolved: and certainly there is no greater folly in the world, than for a mere human creation, a mere product of the sayings and the wisdom of men, to pretend for eternity, or any duration beyond the coincidence

of its usefulness to the great ends that Christ hath to accomplish in the world. But this is not my business.

Secondly, There is the apostle's inference from, or exhortation on this supposition, expressed emphatically by way of interrogation: 'What manner?'

Now herein two things are included.

1. The evidence of the inference. It follows necessarily, unavoidably; every one must needs make this conclusion: so that he leaves it to themselves to determine whose concernment it is. So the apostle Paul in another case, Heb. x. 29. leaves it to themselves to determine, as a case clear, plain, unquestionable. So here: and this is a most effectual way of insinuating an inference and conclusion, when the parties themselves who are pressed with it, are made judges of its necessary consequence. Judge ye whether holiness becomes not all them who are like to be concerned in such providential alterations.

2. The extent and perfection of the duty in its universality and compass, is in this manner of expression strongly insinuated: 'What manner of persons?' That is, such as indeed it is not easy to express, what attainments in this kind we ought on this account to press after. This apostle useth the same kind of expression to set forth the greatness and height of what he would deliver to the thoughts of men, 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18. There is in this kind of expression somewhat more insinuated to the mind, than we know how to clothe with any words whatever.

Two things seem principally to be intended.

(1.) That even the saints themselves in such cases ought to be other manner of men than usually they are, under ordinary dispensations of providence. Mistake not; our old measures will not serve; another manner of progress than as yet we have made, is expected from us; it is not ordinary holiness and godliness that is expected from us, under extraordinary calls from God and Christ.

(2.) That our endeavours to be godly and holy, ought to be boundless and endless. No less is included in this apostrophe, 'What manner of persons ought we to be?' Not resting in what we have attained, nor what may seem sufficient to keep our heads above water, but an endless and

boundless pressing on. Alas ! it will hardly enter into our hearts to think what manner of men we ought to be.

Thirdly, For the matter of this exhortation and inference from the former principle couched in this interrogation, it is, 'All holy conversation and godliness.' The word 'all' is not in the original, but both the other words are in the plural number; 'In holy conversations and godlinesses.' Now these expressions being not proper in our language, the translators have supplied the emphasis and force of them by the addition of the word, 'all:' and there is no just cause of quarrel with them for so doing: only in the original the words are more weighty and emphatical than that supply doth readily reach unto. That which is principally intended, is, that all the concernments whatever of holiness and godliness, are couched in the words. So that two things are in them.

1. The two general parts of that universal duty that we owe to God; and they are these. (1.) Holiness of conversation; which is comprehensive of all holiness and righteousness, both in principle and practice; for no conversation is holy, but what comes from a holy heart, and is carried on to that great and holy end, the glory of God. (2.) Godliness, or the worship of God according to the appointment and institution of Christ. This is the proper importance of *εὐσέβεια*, as distinct from holiness of conversation; a due adherence to, and observance of, the instituted worship of God.

2. The extent and compass of them both and their degrees. It is not in this or that part of conversation; to be holy in one thing, and loose in another; to be holy in one capacity, and vain in another; to be godly as a private person, and ungodly or selfish as a magistrate; nor is it to observe one part of worship, and despise another: but in all concernments of conversation, in all parts of worship doth this duty lie. 'In all holy conversation and godliness.'

Fourthly, There is the relation that we ought to bear to the universality of holiness and godliness. We ought to be in them: *δεῖ ὑπάρχειν ὑμᾶς*, 'You ought to be, to exist' in them. In these things is your life; they are not to be followed now and then, as your leisure will serve; but in all

that you do, you ought to be still in these, as in the clothes that you wear, the garment that is on you; be what you will, or where you will, or employed as you are called, yet still you ought to be in holiness and godliness; and what persons you ought to be in them, or how, hath been declared.

Observation. Great providential alterations or destructions made upon the account of Christ and his church, call for eminency of universal holiness and godliness in all believers.

I esteem it my duty to speak somewhat to this proposition, as containing the direction of our great duty in this day. That we have had many providential alterations amongst us, is known to all. What light I have about their relation to Christ and his church, I shall make bold to communicate when I come to the application of the truth in hand, and thereby make way for the pressing of the duty of the text on ourselves in particular: for the present, I confess, I am ashamed and astonished at the deportment of many who are professors in these days; they see and talk of the alterations and dissolutions that God is pleased to make; but what is the improvement that is made hereof? Many take advantage to vent their lusts and passions, some one way, some another; one rejoicing at the ruin of another, as if that were his duty; others repining at the exaltation of another, as if that were their duty; some contriving one form of outward constitutions, others for another (I speak of private persons); but who almost looks to that which is the special call of God under such dispensations? Let us then, I pray you, take a little view of our duty, and the grounds of it; and who knows but that the Lord may by it enlarge and fix our hearts to the love and prosecution of it.

The two great providential alterations and dissolutions that have been, and shall be made on the account of Christ and his church, to which all lesser are either consequent, or do lie in a tendency, are that first of the Judaical church and state, whereof I have spoken; and secondly, that of the antichristian state and worship, whereunto all the shakings of these nations seem to tend in the wisdom of God, although we are not able to discern their influence thereunto.

1. Now for the first of these, we may consider it in its coming as foretold, and as accomplished.

(1.) As it was foretold and threatened by Christ. How were believers cautioned to be ready for it with eminent holiness and watchfulness therein? So Luke xxi. 34. 36. 'Take heed to yourselves; watch therefore.' Why so? 'Christ is coming;' ver. 27. When? Why, 'in this generation;' ver. 32. What to do? Why, 'to dissolve heaven and earth;' ver. 25. to dissolve the Jewish church and state. Watch therefore; give all diligence. So also Matt. xxiv. 42. 'Watch therefore.' Oh! on this account what manner of persons ought we to be?

(2.) As accomplished. See what use the apostle upon it directs believers unto, Heb. xii. 26—28. This is the use, this the call of providence in all these mighty alterations: 'Let us have grace,' strive for it; the nature of the works of God call aloud for an eminent frame of holiness, and close adherence unto God in his worship. I could shew how both the duties of my text are here expressed; but I need not.

2. So is it also in reference to that other great work of God in the world relating to Christ and his church, which is the ocean of providence whereinto all the rivulets of lesser alterations do run; I mean the destruction of antichrist and his Babylonish kingdom.

What a frame shall be in the saints on the close of that work, the Holy Ghost declares at large, Rev. xix. All rejoicing and spiritual communion with God; and whilst the work is on the wheel, those whom God will own in it, he sets his mark on as holy, called, and chosen.

The grounds hereof are,

1. Because in every such providential alteration or dissolution of things on the account of Christ and his church, there is a peculiar coming of Christ himself. He cometh into the world for the work he hath to do: he cometh among his own to fulfil his pleasure among them. Hence such works are called his coming; and the coming of his day. Thus James exhorts these very Jews, to whom Peter here writes, with reference to the same things, Jam. v. 7—9. 'Be patient to the coming of the Lord.' But how could that generation extend their patience to the day of judgment? Nay, saith he, that is not the work I design, but his coming

to take vengeance on his stubborn adversaries, which he saith, ver. 8. 'draweth nigh,' is even at hand: yea, Christ 'the judge standeth before the door,' ver. 9. ready to enter; which also he did within a few years. So upon, or in the destruction of Jerusalem, the same work, Luke xxi. 27. the Son of man is said to 'come in the clouds, and great glory;' and they that escape in that desolation, are said to 'stand before the Son of man;' ver. 36. So, in the ruin and destruction of the Roman empire on the account of their persecution, it is said, 'That the day of the wrath of the Lamb was come;' Rev. vi. 16, 17.

In all such dispensations then, there is a peculiar coming of Christ, a peculiar drawing nigh of him to deal with all sorts of persons in a special manner; though he be oftentimes encompassed with many clouds, and with much darkness, yet he is present exerting his authority, power, wisdom, righteousness, and grace in an eminent manner. It is with him as it is with God in other works, Job ix. 11. though all 'see him not, perceive him not,' yet 'he goeth by,' and 'passeth on.' The lusts, prejudices, corruptions, selfishness, injustice, oppressions of men; the darkness, unbelief, fears, carnal wisdom of the saints themselves; the depth, compass, height, unsearchableness of the path of the wisdom of Christ himself, keeps us in the dark as to his presence in this and that particular; but yet in such dispensations he is come, and passeth on towards the accomplishment of his work, though we perceive it not. Now, 'what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness,' to meet this great King of saints at his coming? What preparation ought there to be? What solemnity of universal holiness for his entertainment? He is in such dispensations continually nigh us, whether we take notice of it or not.

I say, then, if there be a special coming, and a special meeting of Christ in such dispensations, I suppose I may leave the inference unto all holy conversation and godliness with the apostle to the breasts and judgment of them that are concerned. Are we in this work to meet the Lord Jesus? What manner of persons ought we to be?

It may be observed, that Christ puts very great weight on the present frame and course, which he finds men in at his

coming. Matt. xxiv. 46. 'Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.' He annexes blessedness to the frame and course he finds men in at his coming; and waiteth for that hour; ver. 42. Be not asleep when the thief comes to break up the house; take heed that that day take you not unprovided, that you be not overtaken in the midst of the cares of this world. And he complains, that when he comes, he shall not 'find faith on the earth.'

But you will say, Is this enough then, that we look to be found in all godliness and holiness at his coming? May we indulge ourselves and our lusts at other seasons, so we be sure to be then provided? Is not the command of duty equal and universal as to all times and seasons? Or is it pointed only unto such dispensations?

Ans. 1. The inference for preparedness for the coming of Christ, is to universal holiness at all seasons, and that upon the account of the uncertainty of it. This our Saviour presseth again and again. You know not at all when it will be, nor how; no not in the least; you believe it not when it is come: 'I shall not find faith of it in the earth,' saith Christ. Men will not take notice of it, nor acknowledge it, nor own it, as my coming; wherefore you have no way to be prepared for it, but by universal, perpetual watchfulness.

Ans. 2. The exhortation lies not unto holiness and godliness in general; but as to the degrees of it, what manner of men we ought to be in them. It is not a godly conversation at an ordinary rate that may find acceptance at another time, which will suffice to meet Christ at his coming, and that on sundry accounts after to be mentioned.

I shall at present only treat on some grounds of it from his own person who cometh, and whom we are to meet; and speak of the work he hath to do in his coming afterward.

(1.) On the account of his personal excellencies and holiness. Consider how he is described when he comes to walk among his churches, Rev. i. 13—17. He is full of beauty and glory. When Isaiah saw him, chap. 6. he cries out, 'I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips;' because of the dread and terror of his holiness. And Peter also, 'De-

part from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.' They were not able to bear the thoughts of his glorious holiness so nigh to them. When the holy God of old was to come down among the people at the giving of the law, all the people were to sanctify themselves, and to wash their clothes; *Exod. xix. 10, 11*. And order was still taken, that no unclean thing might be in the camp, because of the presence of the holy God, though but in a type and resemblance. Whether we observe it or no, if there be any dissolving dispensations among us, that relate to Christ or his church, there is a holy one in the midst of us; or there will be, when any such dispensations shall pass over us. And to think to have to do in the works and ways wherein he hath to do, with hearts unlike and unsuitable unto him, to act our lusts and follies immediately under the eye of his holiness, to set our defiled hands to his pure and holy hands, his soul will abhor it. This is a boldness which he will revenge, that we should bring our neglect and lusts into his holy presence. Christ is in every corner, in every turn of our affairs; and it is incumbent on us to consider how it is fit for us to behave ourselves in his special presence.

(2.) Upon the account of his authority. He who thus comes is the King of saints, and he comes as the King of saints: he comes to exert his regal power and authority, to give a testimony to it in the world. So *Isa. lxiii. 1—4*. He shews his glory, his might, his kingdom, and authority in this work. So *Rev. xix. 12*. When he comes to destroy his antichristian enemies, he hath many crowns on his head; he exerciseth his regal power and authority. What is the duty of saints when their King is so nigh them, when he is come into the midst of them, whilst he puts forth the greatness of his power round about them? Will it become them to be neglective of him; to be each man in the pursuit of his own lusts, and ways, and works in the presence of their King? Holiness and godliness hath a due regard to the authority of Christ. Wherever there is a due subjection of soul unto Christ, all holy conversation and godliness will ensue. To be neglective in or of any part of holy conversation, to be careless of any part of worship under the special eye of the Lord of our lives and our worship, is not to be borne with.

(3.) On the account of the present care, kindness, and

love that he is exerting in all such dispensations towards his. It is a time of care and love; the way of his working out the designs of his heart, are indeed oftentimes dark and hid; and his own do not see so clearly how things lie in a tendency to the event and fruits of love. But so it is; Christ comes not but with a design of love and pity towards his, with his heart full of compassion for them. Now, what this calls for at their hands, seeing their holiness and worship is all that his soul is delighted in, is evident unto all.

Put now these things together: every such dispensation is a coming of Christ: the coming of Christ, as it is trying in itself, so it is the coming of the holy King of saints in his love and pity towards them; yea, be the dispensation what it will, never so sharp and severe unto them, yet it is in love and compassion to their souls: their work is to meet this their holy King in the works of his love and power: and ‘what manner of persons ought we to be?’

SERMON XXVI.

2. THE second ground is, because every such day, is a lesser day of judgment, a forerunner, pledge, and evidence of that great day of the Lord which is to come. God's great and signal judgments in the world, are to be looked on as pledges of the final judgment at the last day. So Jude tells us, that in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, 'God set forth an example of them that shall suffer the vengeance of eternal fire;' ver. 7. And Peter calls the time of the destruction of the Judaical church and state, expressly 'the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men;' 2 Epist. iii. 7. So to the full is the destruction of the Roman persecuting state expressed, Dan. vii. 9, 10. 14. The solemnity of the work and whole procedure bespeaks a great day, a day of judgment; it is so, and a representation of that which is to come. And the like also is set forth, chap. xii. 1—3. And the same description have we of the like day of Christ, Mal. iv. 1.

Every such day, I say then, is a lesser day of judgment, wherein much judging work is accomplished. This Daniel tells us, chap. xii. 10. it is a trying, a purifying, a teaching, a hardening, a bleeding time: there are great works that are done upon the souls and consciences of men, by Christ, in such a day, as well as outwardly, and all in a way of judgment. To let pass then the outward, visible effects of his wrath and power, of his wisdom and righteousness; I shall consider some few of the more secret judiciary acts that the Lord Christ usually exerts in such a day.

(1.) He pleads with all flesh that are concerned in the alterations and desolations he makes. God puts this as one act of his in judgment, that he pleads with men; Ezek. xxxviii. 22. In his judgments he pleads with and against men about their sins. And in that great representation of the day in judgment, Joel iii. 2. God is said to 'plead with all nations.' Now, I say, in general, Christ in such a day pleads with all men concerned. His providences have a voice, and that a contending, pleading voice: unless men

are utterly blinded and hardened, as indeed the most are, they cannot but hear him in his great and mighty works contending with them about their sin and unbelief; representing to them his righteous judgment to come. Though men now cast off things, on this account and that, and being filled with their lusts, passions, fury, revenge, or ease, sensuality, and worldliness, think these things concern them not; yet the day will come, wherein they shall know, that the Lord Christ in his mighty works was pleading even with them also, and that in a way of judgment about their sin and folly.

(2.) In such a day Christ judges and determines the profession of many a false hypocrite, who hath deceived the church and people of God. One great work of the last day shall be the discovery of hypocrites: it is thence principally called 'the day wherein the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed.' Many a fair pretender in the world, shall be found to have been an enemy of Christ and the gospel. So is the day of Christ's coming in the flesh represented, Mal. iii. 1, 2. All were high in their professions of desiring his coming, and of delighting in him: but when he came, what was the issue? How few endured the trial! The false, hypocritical, selfish hearts, who had treasured up the hopes of great things to themselves, being discovered by the trials and temptations wherewith his coming was attended, themselves were utterly cast off from their profession, into open enmity to God and his Son. So dealeth the Lord Christ in and under the dispensations whereof we speak, to this day. What by the fury of their own lusts, what by the temptations which lie in their way, what by the advantages they meet withal for the exercise of their vile affections, their hypocrisy is discovered, and themselves cast out of their profession. Notable effects of this acting of Christ as a judge have we seen in the dispensation that is passing over us: some he hath judged by the sentence and judgment of his churches. How many false wretches have been cast out of churches, that have withered under their judgment, and returned no more? Some who have not walked in the order of his churches by him appointed, he hath judged by the world itself, suffered their sin and folly so to break forth, that the world itself hath cast them out from the number of profes-

sors, and owned them as its own. Some have been judged as to their profession of him by strong temptations; that is, their lusts, ambition, selfishness, which have carried them into ways and compliances, wherein they have been compelled to desert, and almost renounce all their former profession. Some have been tried and judged by the errors and abominations of the times, and turned aside from the simplicity of the gospel. Now though there have been, and are, these and many other ways and means of casting men out of, and from the profession that they have made, some good, some bad, some in themselves of a mere passive nature and indifferent; yet they all proceed from Christ, in a judiciary way, they are acts of his, in his day of judgment; and oh, that England might not yet be farther filled with instances and examples of this kind!

(3.) He doth exercise his judgment in blinding and hardening of wicked men; yet they shall not see nor perceive what he is doing, but shall have advantages to do wickedly, and prejudices to blind them therein. So expressly, Dan. xii. 10. 'They shall do wickedly, and they shall not understand.' There are two parts of his judgment in such a day about and against them: first, his giving of them up to their own lusts to do wickedly; 'They shall do wickedly.' Wicked they are, and they shall act accordingly; they shall do it in such a day to the purpose; Rev. xvi. 10, 11. Christ will providentially suffer occasions, advantages, provocations, to lie before them, so that they shall do wickedly to the purpose, they shall have daily fresh occasions to curse, repine, blaspheme, oppose Christ and his interest, or to seek themselves, and the satisfaction of their lusts, which at other times they shall not be able to do. Be they in what condition they will, high or low, exalted or depressed, in power or out of it, they shall in such a season do wickedly, according as their advantages and provocations are. And for men to be given up to their own hearts' lusts, is the next door to the judgment of the great day, when men shall be given up to sin, self, and Satan, unto eternity. Secondly, he blinds them: 'None of the wicked shall understand.' Strange! Who seems so wise and so crafty as they? Who do understand the times, and their advantages in them, more than they? Who more prudent for the management of affairs

than they? But, the truth is, none of them, no, not one of them, shall, or do, or can understand; that is, they understand not the work of Christ, the business and design that he hath in hand; nor what is the true and proper interest of them who are concerned in these dispensations. There are many ways whereby Christ exerts this blinding and infatuating efficacy of his providence towards wicked men in such a day of judgment, that they shall not understand, or know, that he is at all concerned in the works that are in the world.

Sometimes the very things that he doth, are such, and so contrary to the prejudicate opinions of men, that they can never understand that they are things which he will own. How many have been kept from understanding any thing of Christ in the world, in the days wherein we live, from their inveterate prejudices on the account of old superstitions, and forms of government which have been removed; they will rather die, than believe that Christ hath any hand in these things. 'They shall not understand.'

Sometimes the persons by whom he doth them, keep them from understanding. Shall these men save us? These whom they look upon as the offscouring of the earth? Sure if Christ had any work to do in the world, he would make use of other manner of instruments for the accomplishing of them: they are no less offended with the persons that do them, than the things that are done. Christ worketh all this that they should not understand.

Sometimes the manner of doing what he hath to do, the darkness wherewith it is attended, the strange process that he makes, sometimes weak, sometimes foolish, sometimes disorderly to the reasoning of flesh and blood, though all beautiful in itself, and in relation to him.

And sometimes Christ sends a spirit of giddiness into the midst of them, that they shall err and wander in all their ways, and not see nor discern the things that are before them. 'None of the wicked shall understand.'

By these, and many such ways as these, doth Christ in these days of his coming exercise judgment on ungodly men: not to mention the outward destruction, desolation, and perdition, which usually in such seasons he brings upon them.

(4.) He exerciseth judgment at such a time, even among the saints themselves; Psal. lxxxii. 1. he is judging in the great congregation. So Psal. l. 4—8. All this solemnity of proceeding is for the judgment of his own people. And his judging of them is in a plea about their obedience and failing therein. The sum of this his dealing with them is expressed, Rev. iii. 9.

We may then consider, [1.] What it is that Christ pleadeth with his own people about his coming; [2.] What are the ways and means whereby he doth so.

[1.] There are sundry things on the account whereof Christ at his coming pleads with his saints, one or more of them.

1st. On the account of some secret lusts that have defiled them, and which they have either indulged themselves in, or not so vigorously opposed as their loyalty unto Christ required. Times of peace and outward prosperity are usually times wherein, through manifold temptations, even the saints themselves are apt to sully their consciences, and to have breaches made upon their integrity: sometimes in things they do know, and sometimes in things they do not know, nor take notice of. Instances may be given in abundance of such things. In this condition Christ deals with them as Isa. iv. 4. there is blood and filth upon them; the spirit of judgment and burning must be set at work, which, as it principally aims at the internal efficacy of the Spirit in the cleansing of sin, so it respects a time of providential alterations and trials, wherein that work is effectually exerted. Christ in these dispensations speaks secretly to the consciences of his saints, and minds them of this and that folly and miscarriage, and deals with them about it. He asks them if things be not so and so with them? If they have not thus and thus defiled themselves? Whether these hearts are fit to converse with him? And leaves not until their dross and tin be consumed.

2dly. On the account of some way or ways wherein they may have been unadvisedly, or through temptation, or want of seeking counsel aright from him, engaged. They may be got in their employments, in their callings, in the work that lies before them in this world, into ways and paths wherein Christ is not pleased they should make any progress: what

through leaning to their own understandings, what through an inclination of saying a confederacy to them to whom the people say a confederacy, what through the common mistakes in the days wherein they live, even the saints may be engaged in ways that are not according to the mind and will of Christ. Now in such a day of Christ's coming, though he spares the souls of his saints, and forgives them, yet he 'takes vengeance of their inventions;' Psal. xcix. 8. He will cast down all their idols, and destroy and consume every false way wherein they were: one is, it may be, in a way of superstition and false worship; another in a way of pride and ambition; another in a way of giving countenance to the men of the world, and things wherein God delights not. Christ will take vengeance of all these their inventions in the day of his coming; he sits as 'a refiner's fire, and as fuller's soap.'

3dly. On the account of inordinate cleaving unto the shaken, passing things of the world. This is a peculiar controversy that Christ hath with his, upon the account of adherence to the passing world; and it is a thing wherein, when he comes, too many will be found faulty. I might also insist on their unbelief, and other particulars; but,

[2.] The ways and means whereby Christ judgeth and pleadeth with his own, on these accounts, are also various.

1st. He doth it by the afflictions, trials, and troubles, that he exerciseth them with at his coming. The use of the furnace is to take away dross; and the issue of afflictions and trials to take away sin: this is their fruit. So Dan. xii. 1. The time of Christ's coming shall be a day of trouble, such as never was. And what shall be the issue? ver. 10. 'Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried.' Their trials and troubles, their great tribulations, shall be purifying and cleansing; though the design of Christ in the issue, at the appointed season, be the peace and deliverance of his saints, yet, in the carrying on of his work, great trials and tribulations may befall them all; and many may fall in the way, and perish as to the outward man. Hence, Dan. xii. 13. there is an appointed time of rest; and it will be a blessed thing for them that shall be preserved unto it; but whilst those days and seasons are coming to their period, there is often 'a time of great trouble;' ver. 1. And 'the power of the holy people may be scattered;' ver. 7. and many afflic-

tions and trials may befall them. Now by these doth Christ plead with his for the consumption of their lusts, and the destruction of their inventions, for the purging and purifying of them. All our trials, pressures, troubles, disappointments, in such a day, are the actings of Christ to this end and purpose. The influences that affliction hath unto these ends, are commonly spoken unto.

2dly. He doth it by pouring out of his Spirit in a singular manner, for this end and purpose, so to plead with, judge, and cleanse his saints. It is in the administration of his Spirit that at his coming 'he sits as a refiner and purifier of silver,' Mal. iii. 1—3. and we see what work he accomplishes thereby. The Holy Ghost, who is the great pleader for the saints, and in them, doth at such a time effectually plead with them, by convictions, persuasions, arguings, application of the word, motions, strivings, and the like. Hence those who are unrefined at such a season, are said in a peculiar manner 'to vex,' to grieve 'the Holy Spirit' of God; Isa. lxiii. 10. His design upon them, is a design of love; and to be rejected, resisted, opposed, in his actings and motions, this grieves and vexes him. Men know not what they do in neglecting the actings of the Holy Ghost, which are peculiarly suited to providential dispensations. When God is great in the world in the works of his providence, in alterations, dissolutions, shakings, changings, removals, and sends his Spirit to move and work in the hearts of men, answerable to his mind and will in these dispensations; so that there is a harmony in the voice of God without and within, both speaking aloud and clearly; then to neglect the workings of the Spirit, brings men into that condition complained of, Ezek. xxiv. 13. 'Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged any more.'

It may be observed, that at such seasons when Christ hath any great and signal work to bring forth in the world, he doth by his Spirit deal with the hearts and consciences of the most wicked and vile men; which, when the secrets of all hearts shall be discovered at the last day, will exceedingly exalt the glory of his wisdom, patience, goodness, holiness, and righteousness. So did he with them before the flood, as is evident from Gen. vi. 3. When an utter destruction was to come, he saith, his 'Spirit shall strive with them

no more ;' that is, about their sin and rebellion. That this Spirit was the Spirit of Christ, and that the work of dealing with these ungodly men, was the work of Christ, and that it was a fruit of long-suffering, Peter declares, 1 Epist. iii. 18—20. And if he deals thus with a perishing world, by a work that perisheth also ; how much more doth he it in an effectual work upon the hearts of his own ? It is the Spirit that speaks to the churches in all their trials, Rev. ii.

By this means, I say then, Christ pleads with his saints, secretly and powerfully judging their lusts, corruptions, failings, consuming and burning them up : he first by frequent motions and instructions gives them no rest in any unequal path ; then discovers to them the beauty of holiness, the excellency of the love of Christ, the vanity and folly of every thing that hath interrupted their communion with him, and so fills them with godly sorrow, renunciation of sin, and cleaving unto God ; which is the very promise that we have, Ezek. vi. 10.

3dly. As he doth it by the inward, private, effectual operation of his Spirit ; so he doth it by the effusion of his light and gifts in the dispensation of the word. Christ seldom brings any great alteration upon the world, but together with it, or to prepare for it, he causeth much effectual light to break forth in the dispensation of his word. Before the first destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, how he dealt with them he declares, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15. ' And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.' And before the final dissolution of the heavens and earth of that church and state, he preached to them himself in the flesh. A glorious light ! Before the ruin of the antichristian world, he sends the angel with the everlasting gospel, and his two witnesses to hold forth the light of the gospel : and we must witness to this his way and wisdom in our generation. Now, though there are many rebels against light, and many whose lusts are enraged by the breaking forth of truth in its beauty and lustre ; and many, that being dazzled with it, do run out of its paths into ways of error and folly, and none of the wicked do understand ; yet among the saints, the more light, the more holiness ; for their light is transforming. This then

is another means whereby, in such a day, Christ consumes the lusts, and judges the inordinate walking of his own, even by the light which in an eminent manner he sends forth in the dispensation of the word.

Now if the time and season whereof we speak, be such a day of judgment, wherein Christ thus pleads with all men, and with his own in an especial manner; I think the inference unto eminency in universal holiness, may be left upon the thoughts and minds of all that are concerned: especially from these considerations doth the inference lie strong unto the ensuing particulars, in the ways of holiness and godliness: First, Of self-searching, and self-judging in reference to our state and condition. Dreadful are the actings of Christ in such a day on the souls and consciences, ofttimes on the names and lives of corrupt, unsound professors: in part I declared them before. If any now should be found in such a condition, his day of judgment is come, his sealing to destruction. This the apostle calls to in such a dispensation; 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32. Self-judging, as to our state and condition, ways and practices, is a great principle of holy conversation and godliness. When Christ comes to judge, we ought surely to judge ourselves; and abounding in that work is a great means of preservation from the temptations of the days whereunto we are exposed. Secondly, Of weanedness from the world and the things thereof. Christ's coming puts vanity on all these passing things. This is surely contained in the text; 'Seeing that these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons,' &c. At best they are vain and passing uncertain things; in such a dispensation as is spoken of, they are all obnoxious to dissolution, and many of them certainly to be removed and taken away. And why should the heart of any one be set upon them? Why should we not fix our souls on things more profitable, more durable? It is no small matter to meet the Lord Christ at his coming; Mal. iii. 1—3. They were all full of desires of the coming of Christ; they sought after him: 'The Lord whom ye seek.' They delighted in the thoughts of him: 'Whom ye delight in.' Well, he came according to their desires; he whom they sought was found. And what was the issue? Why very few of them would abide the day of his coming, or stand when he appeared. He had a work to do they could

not away with. They desired his coming; they desired the day of the Lord; but as the prophet says, Amos v. 18. 'Woe unto them, to what end have they desired it? it was darkness to them, not light.' That was the coming of Christ in person to his temple; it is not otherwise in any of his other comings in providential dispensations. Many men long for it, delight in it; it is 'our duty so to do: but what is the issue? One is hardened in sin and lust; another is lifted up as though himself were something, when he is nothing; a third stumbles at the coming itself, and falls; 'Woe unto them, the day of the Lord is darkness unto them, and not light.'

I proceed now to the use. But to make way for the due improvement of the apostle's exhortation unto us, some previous considerations must be laid down.

First, It is known to all the world, that we have had great providential alterations and dissolutions in these nations. He must be a stranger, not in England only, but in Europe, almost in the whole world, that knows it not. Our heavens and our earth, our sea and our dry land have been not only shaken, but removed also. The heavens of ancient and glorious fabric, both civil and ecclesiastical, have been taken down by fire and sword, and the fervent heat of God's displeasure. It is needless for me to declare, what destructions, what dissolutions, what unparalleled alterations we have had in these nations: persons, things, forms of government of old established, and newly-framed constitutions, we have seen all obnoxious to change or ruin.

Secondly, It is no less certain, that we may say concerning all these things, 'Come and see what God hath wrought.' And as to these desolations of nations, ruin of families, alterations of governments, we may say of them all as the Psalmist, Psal. xlv. 8. 'Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth.' It is his work, he hath done it himself: 'there is no evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it;' Amos iii. 6. Have there been any exaltations of men, recoveries from depression, relief of the oppressed, establishments of new frames and order of things? It hath been all from him; Dan. ii. 21. iv. 32. Indeed the days wherein we live, are full of practical atheism; some out of mere stoutness of heart and innate

unbelief will take no notice of God in all these things; Psal. x. 4. 'The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.' As things have been, so they suppose they are, and will be; but as to the consideration of him who disposeth of all as seems good unto him, they are strangers unto it. Some have had their lusts enraged, and themselves so provoked and disappointed, that flying upon the instruments which God hath used, they have been filled with prejudice, and utterly blinded as to any discovery of the ways or work of God in these revolutions. Some have been utterly cast down in their thoughts, because they have not been able to discover the righteousness, beauty, and order, of the ways of God, his footsteps having been in the deep, while his paths have not been known. And some having found an open door for the satisfaction of their lusts, pride, covetousness, ambition, love of the world, reputation, vain-glory, and uncleanness; have been so greedily engaged in the pursuit of them, that they have taken little or no notice of the hand of God in these things. And others are at a stand like the Philistine priests and diviners; 1 Sam. vi. 9. They know not whether all this hath been from the hand of God, or whether some chance hath befallen us. I shall not need to mention those in Isa. xlvii. 13. astrologers, star-gazers, and monthly prognosticators, who have endeavoured also to divert the thoughts of unbelieving, foolish men, from a due consideration of the author of all our revolutions. To all which I shall answer in general in the words of Hannah, 1 Sam. ii. 3—9. God hath done all these things; and men that will not take notice of him, and his proceedings, shall at length be forced so to do; Isa. xxvi. 11.

These things being premised; one principal inquiry, which must be the bottom and foundation of the ensuing directions, is, whether it may appear that these providential alterations and dissolutions have related to Christ and his interest in the world in an especial manner.

That we may yet a little farther clear our way, you may farther observe, what I intend, by relating unto Christ and his church in an especial manner.

1. Whereas the Lord Christ is by the appointment of the Father 'made heir of all things,' Heb. i. 2. and 'hath all

judgment committed unto him,' over all flesh, in all the world; which include his right to send his gospel into what nation and place he pleaseth: so all the alterations that are in the world, all things relate to him, and do lie in a remote tendency to the advancement of his glory. He will work out his own glorious ends from all the breakings of all the nations in the world; even where the interest of his gospel seems outwardly to be very little or nothing at all. But it is not in this sense that we make our inquiry; for so there would be nothing peculiar in the works that have been among us.

2. Things may relate unto Christ and his church, upon the account of special promise. Christ hath a special and peculiar concernment in providential dissolutions, when they so relate to him; and that appears in these things:

(1.) When the judgments that are exercised in such a dispensation, flow from provocations given unto the Lord Christ, upon the account of his church. So Isa. xxxiv. 8. All the dissolutions mentioned of the heavens and the earth, ver. 4. were on Zion's account; and the controversy that Christ had with Idumea about her. So chap. lxiii. 4. the day of vengeance, is the year of the redeemed. Whence in such a day, the saints themselves are stirred up to take notice, that the desolations wrought in the earth, are on their account, Jer. li. 35. and so it is fully expressed in the ruin of antichristian Babylon in the Revelations: where then there is a peculiar relation of any dissolving providence unto Christ and his church, the judgments exerted in and under it, regard the vengeance of the church, and proceed from the provocations of Christ on that account.

(2.) Some promises made unto Christ concerning his inheritance; some promises of Christ unto his church are in such a day brought forth unto accomplishment. The promises of Christ to the church are of two sorts: First, General, essential to the new covenant: and these belong equally to all saints, of all ages, in all places, not to one more than another. Every saint hath an equal right and interest in the essential promises of the covenant with any other saint whatever; there is no difference, but one God, Lord, and Father of all, is good unto them all alike. And, secondly, There are promises which are peculiarly suited to

the several states and conditions into which the visible kingdom of Christ is in his wisdom to be brought in several ages. Such are the promises of the calling of the Jews, of the destruction of antichrist, of the increase of light in the latter days, of the peace, rest, and prosperity of the church in some times or ages, after trials and tribulation. Now they are the promises of this latter sort, that relate unto providential dispensations.

Having premised these things, I shall now briefly offer some grounds of hope, that such have been the alterations and dissolutions wherein we have been exercised in this generation :

First, Because very many of the saints of God have obtained real, evident, soul refreshing communion with Christ in and about these things, on this foundation, that the things on the wheel amongst us have had a peculiar relation unto him. There is nothing of more certainty to the souls of any, than what they have real, spiritual experience of. When the things about which they are conversant lie only in notion, and are rationally discoursed or debated, much deceit may lie under all. But when things between God and the soul come to be realized by practical experience, they give a never failing certainty of themselves. Now by holding communion about these things with Christ, I understand the exercise of faith, love, hope, expectation, delight on and in Christ on the one hand, and the receiving relief, supportment, consolation, joy, patience, perseverance on the other : from both which, holiness, faithfulness, and thankfulness have proceeded, and been increased. Now this communion with Christ, in and about the works of his providence amongst us, very many of the saints have obtained ; and, which is the height and complement of it, died in the clear visions of Christ in such communion. Now there are two things that offer sufficient security against any deceit or mistake in this thing :

1. The goodness, care, and faithfulness of God towards his own, which will not suffer us to fear that he would lead all his people into such a temptation, wherein, in their chiefest communion, as they apprehended, with himself, they should feed on the wind and delusion. If the foundation of all this intercourse with God was false, and not

according to his mind, then so was the whole superstructure. Now that God for many years should lead his people into a way of prayer, faith, hope, thankfulness, and yet all false and an abominable thing, because all leaning on a false ground and supposition, none that consider his goodness and tender pity towards his own, with the delight of his soul in their worship and ways, can once imagine. It is true, men may be zealously engaged in ways and acts of worship, and that all their lives, wherein they think they do God good service; and yet both they and their service be abominated by him for ever. But men cannot do so in faith, love, obedience, thankfulness, which alone we speak of. At least, he will not suffer his saints to do so, of whom alone we speak. We have then the tender mercies and faithfulness of God to assure us in this case.

2. The self-evidencing efficacy of faith in spiritual experiences strengthens their persuasion. Many doubtless may persuade themselves that they have communion with God, and yet feed upon ashes; and a deceived heart turns them aside. The principle of such a delusion, I shall not now lay open. But when it is indeed obtained by faith, it is always accompanied with a soul quieting, refreshing evidence; for faith in its operation will evince itself to the soul where it is. I do not say, it always doth so. It may be so clouded with darkness of mind; so overpowered by temptations, that in its most spiritual and genuine acting, it may be hid from the soul wherein it is, which we find to be the condition of many a gracious soul; but in itself, it clears up its own actings. Things that have a self-evidencing power, may be hindered from exerting it; but when they do exert it, it is evident. Put a candle under a bushel, it cannot be seen; but take away the hinderance, and it manifests itself. It is so in faith, and its actings. They may be so clouded to the soul itself in which they act, that it may not be able to attain any comforting evidence of it. But take away the bushel, fear, prejudices, temptations, corrupt reasonings, and it will assure the soul of itself and its working. Neither is its working more evident than its fruit, or the product of its operations in the soul; it brings forth love, rest, peace, all with a spiritual sense upon the heart and spirit. Now these have been in this thing so evident in the souls of the

saints, that they have bespoken that faith which cannot deceive nor be deceived.

The bottom then of the communion which the saints had with Christ in this work, and have, must either be faith or fancy: if faith, then the communion was and is real, and the work true that it is built upon. That it was not, that it is not, the fancy or imagination of a deluded heart, may appear from these considerations:

(1.) From its extent. We know it possessed the minds of the universality of believers in this nation, who were not, nor are at this day, combined in our political interest, but are wofully divided among themselves; yet have all had, more or less, this persuasion of the work relating unto Christ. Now that this should be any corrupt imagination, seems to me impossible. I speak not of outward actions and proceedings; for so, I know whole nations may politically combine in evil; though I will not believe, that ever the generality of the saints of Christ shall do so. But I speak of the frame of their hearts and spirits as to communion with Christ in faith and love, whereunto no outward reasonings or interests could influence them in the least: '*Digitus Dei est hoc.*'

(2.) It appears from the permanency, and flourishing of this principle in straits and difficulties. A corrupt imagination, be it never so strong and vigorous in its season, and whilst its food is administered to it, in the temptation it lives upon; yet in trials, great and pressing, it sinks and withers; or if the difficulty continue, for the most part, unless where it falls on some natures of an unconquerable pertinacy, utterly vanisheth. But now, this principle of the saints' communion with Christ about the work of our generation, was never more active, vigorous, and flourishing, did never more evidence itself to be of a divine extract, than in the greatest straits and difficulties, in the mouth and entrance of the greatest deaths. Then did it commonly rise up to its greatest heights and assurance. Our temptations, whether Christ be in this work or no, have, for the most part, befallen us since we had deliverance from pressing, bloody troubles. And I think I may say, that there are very many saints in these nations, who can truly say, that the best and the most comfortable days that ever they saw

in their lives, were those wherein they were exercised with the greatest fears, dangers and troubles, and that upon the account of the strengthening of this principle of communion with Christ. And in very many hath it been tried out to the death, when corrupt fancies were of little worth.

(3.) It appears from the fruits of this persuasion. Every corrupt imagination and fancy is of the flesh; and the works of the flesh are manifest. Whatever it may do in conjunction with convictions and for a season, yet in itself, and in a course it will bring forth no fruit, but what tends to the satisfaction of the flesh. But now the principle under consideration, did bring forth fruits unto God, in godliness and righteousness.

But you will say, do we not see what fruit it hath brought forth? Is not the land full of the steam of the lusts of men engaged in the work of this age? Can hell itself afford a worse savour than is sent forth by many of them?

Ans. 1. Very many who have been engaged, never pretended to ought of this principle, but followed professedly on carnal, at best rational and human accounts solely. Now these being men of the world, and being fallen into days of notable temptations, no wonder if their lusts work and tumultuate, and that to purpose. The principle is not to suffer for their miscarriages who renounce it.

Ans. 2. There was a mixed multitude which in this business went up with the people of God, who pretended to this principle indeed, and talked, and spake of the interest of Christ; but knowing nothing of the power of it, when these men were brought into the wilderness, and there met with provocations on the one hand, and temptations on the other, they fell a lusting, and indeed they have pursued and acted their lusts to purpose also, which have been indeed the more abominable; in that some of them have still the impudence to pretend this principle of faith as to the interest of Christ, which teacheth no such things, nor produceth any such fruits as they abound withal.

Ans. 3. Many who have really the power of this principle in them, have yet been overpowered by temptations, and have brought forth fruits directly opposite unto that obedience, and holiness, and self-denial, which the principle

spoken of tends unto. This, for the most part, hath fallen out since deliverance came in; and so the vigour of faith, raised by daily exercise, was much decayed. None therefore of these things can be charged on the principle itself, whose natural, genuine effects we have experienced to be such as no corrupt fancy, or imagination could produce.

Many other reasons of this nature might be insisted on; but this is my first ground.

Secondly, Because in this, much work hath been really done for Christ. Whatever have been the designs of any, or all of the sons of men, Christ hath done so much for himself, as I can from thence with confidence conclude, that the whole hath related unto him. Indeed in the work he doth, his interest oftentimes lies very much in the dark, yea, is utterly hid from the instruments he employs. Little did the Medes and Persians think, in the destruction of Babylon, that they were executing the vengeance of Zion, and the blood of Jerusalem, a poor city ruined sixty or seventy years before. And when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, little did they think whose work they had in hand. And whatever instruments thought or intended, Christ hath done notable work for himself. The destruction of false worship as established by a law, the casting down of combinations for persecution, are no small works. I say, much work hath been done for Christ. There was a generation of men that were risen to a strange height in the contempt of the Spirit, and ways of Christ, combined in a resolution to oppose and persecute all the appearance of him either by light or holiness in his saints, setting up an outside, formal worship, in opposition unto the spiritual worship of the gospel. And upon the account of the light and truth which he began to command forth in those days, an unspeakable aggravation attended their guilt; in the pursuit of whose design, some were imprisoned, some banished into the ends of the earth, some beggared, many ruined, and given up to death itself. Now what work hath Christ made in these days on the men of that generation? What vengeance hath he taken on them? This is certain, not to insist on particulars, that whatever new sort or combination of men may rise up in their spirit and design, and whatever success they may obtain, yet the generality of the men of that provocation, at

least, the heads and rulers of it, are already sealed up under the indignation of the Lord Jesus, and the vengeance he takes for Zion. I shall not insist on more particulars; the wasting and destruction of the most eminent persecutors of the saints, the ruin and destruction of civil and ecclesiastical fabrics and combinations of men, designing the opposing and persecuting of the Spirit of Christ, the removal of all that false worship under the pretence whereof they persecuted all the spiritual appearances of Christ, hath been all work done for him.

Thirdly, The breaking forth of much glorious gospel light under this dispensation, evinces its relation unto Christ. Look upon the like outward work at any other time in the world. What is the issue of war, blood, confusion? Is it not darkness, ignorance, blindness, barrenness? Hath it not been so in other places of the world? But now in the coming forth of Christ, though he hath a sword in one hand, yet he hath the sun in the other; though he cause darkness in the destruction and desolation that attend his vengeance, yet he gives light and faith to his saints; Mal. iv. 1, 2. Christ never comes for vengeance only; his chief design is love. Love brings forth light; and that which reveals him more to his saints, and which endears his saints more to him. But I have manifested before, that he brings light with him; and he hath done so in this dispensation. Light as to the mysteries of the gospel; light as to the riches of his grace; light as to the way of his worship, of his ordinances and institutions, hath broken out amongst us. As Dan. xii. 4. It is such a day he speaks of.

I know how obnoxious this observation is to a sad objection. Call you these days of light, and knowledge? Say you that truth hath shined forth, or been diffused? Is it increased, or more scattered abroad? Is not the contrary true?

Ans. It cannot be denied, but that many grievous and enormous abominations have been broached in these times under the name and pretence of light and truth. But is that singular to these days? Hath it not been so upon every appearance of Christ? As the light hath been, so hath been the pretence of it in error and darkness. No sooner was Christ come in the flesh, but instantly there

were many false Christs : Lo, here is Christ and there is Christ, was common language in those days ; as, This is the only way, and that is the only way, is now ; and yet the true Christ was in the world. And whatever light at any time comes forth, some mock ; false light about the same thing immediately breaks forth. So was it in the first spreading of the gospel ; so in the late reformation, and so in our days ; and this is no evidence against the coming of Christ, but rather for it. For,

1. Satan pours out this flood of abominations, on purpose to bring an ill report upon the truth and light that is sent out by Christ. The great prejudice against truth in the world is, that it is new. ‘He seems to be a setter forth of strange’ or new ‘gods,’ say they, of Paul ; because he preached Jesus, and the resurrection. To increase this prejudice, the devil with it or after it sends forth his darkness ; which, first, enables the world to load the truth itself with reproaches, whilst it comes accompanied with such follies, as though it also were of the number. Secondly, It disables weak friends to find out and close with the truth amidst so many false pretenders. Where much false money is abroad in the world, every man cannot discern, and receive only that which is good. Much less will men always keep safe, when they are so unstable and uncertain, as they are for the most part about choosing of truth.

2. God permits it so to be.

(1.) For the trial of careless professors. There must be heresies, that the approved may be tried. Most men are apt to content themselves with a lazy profession. They will hold to the truth whilst nothing appears but truth. Let error come with the same pretences and advantage, they are for that also. Now God delights to judge such persons even in this world ; to manifest that they are not of the truth, that they never received it in the love thereof. And he sifts and tries the elect by it, and that for many advantages, not now to be insisted on. As, first, that they may experiment the efficacy of truth : Secondly, His power in their preservation : Thirdly, That they may hold truth upon firm and abiding grounds.

(2.) God permits it to set a greater lustre and esteem upon truth. Truth, when it is sought after, when it is con-

tended for, when it is experimented in its power and efficacy, is rendered glorious and beautiful ; and all these with innumerable other advantages it hath by the competition that is set up against it by error. When men keep to the truth by the power of God, and the sense of its sweetness and usefulness to their own souls, and shall see some by their errors turned aside to one abomination, some to another, some made to wither by them and under them, they discern the excellency of the truth they embrace. So that notwithstanding this exception, the observation stands good.

Fourthly, It appears from the general nature of the dispensation itself, which clearly answers the predictions that are of the great works to be accomplished in the latter days, upon the account of Christ and his church. This is a general head, whose particulars I shall not enter into. They cannot be managed without a consideration of all, at least, of the most principal prophecies of the last times, and of the kingdom of Christ as to its enlargement, beauty, and glory in them ; too large a task for me to enter upon at present.

And these are some of the grounds on which I am persuaded, that the alterations and providential dissolutions of these⁷ days, have related unto, and do lie in a subserviency to the interest of Christ and his church ; whatever be the issue of the individual persons who have been engaged therein.

Come we now to the uses.

SERMON XXVII.

Use 1. OF trial or examination.

Hath Christ for many years now been in an especial manner come amongst us? Do these alterations relate to him and his interest; and so require universal holiness and godliness? Let us then in the first place see, whether in their several stations the men of this generation have walked answerable to such a dispensation. Christ indeed hath done his work; but have we done ours? He hath destroyed many of his enemies, judged false professors, hardened and blinded the wicked world, sent out his Spirit to plead with his people, and taken vengeance on their inventions, he hath given out plentiful measures of truth and light: but now the whole inquiry is, Whether all or any of us have answered the mind of Christ in these dispensations, and prepared ourselves to meet him as becometh his greatness and holiness?

For the generality of the people of the nation, Christ hath been pleading with them about their unbelief, worldliness, atheism, and contempt of the gospel. And what hath been the issue? Alas! he that was filthy is filthy still; he that was profane is so still; swearers, drunkards, and other vicious persons are so still. Where is that man in a thousand in the nation, that takes notice of any peculiar plea of Christ with him about his sin, in any of these dispensations? One cries out of one party of men, another curses another party, a third is angry with God himself; but as to the call of Christ in his mighty appearances, who almost takes any notice of it? The abominable pride, folly, vanity, luxury that are found in this city, testify to their faces, that the voice of wisdom is not heard in the cry of fools. And whereas Christ's peculiar controversy with this nation hath been about the contempt of the gospel; is there any ground got upon the generality of men? Is any reformation wrought on this account among them? Nay, may we not say freely, that there is a greater spirit of hatred, enmity, and opposition to Christ, and the gospel risen up in the nation than ever before? Light hath provoked and enraged them, so

that they hate the gospel more than ever. How mad are the generality of the people on and after their idols, their old superstitious ways of worship which Christ hath witnessed against? What an enmity against the very doctrine of the gospel? What a combination in all places is there against the reforming dispensation of it? And is this any good omen of a comfortable issue of this dispensation? Is not Christ ready to say of such a people, 'Why should you be smitten any more, you will revolt more and more?' and to swear in his wrath, that 'they shall not enter into his rest?' Nay, may he not justly take his gospel from us, and give it to a people that will bring forth fruit? O England, that in this thy day, thou hadst known the things of thy peace! I fear they will be hidden from thee. The temptations of the day, the divisions of thy teachers, with other their miscarriages, and thine own lusts, have deceived thee, and without mercy, insuperable mercy, will ruin thee. Shall this shame be thy glory that Christ hath not conquered thee, that thou hast hardened thyself against him?

But passing them, let us inquire, whether the mind of Christ hath in these dispensations been answered in a due manner by the saints themselves? Have they made it their business to meet him in all holy conversation and godliness? Indeed to me, the contrary appears upon these considerations: (1.) Their great differences among themselves about lesser things; (2.) Their little difference from the world in great things; (3.) The general miscarriage of them all, in things prejudicial to the progress of the gospel; (4.) The particular deviation of some into ways of scandal and offence; (5) The backsliding of most if not of all of them.

(1.) Consider their great differences among themselves about lesser things. I cannot insist on the weight that is laid by our Saviour on the union of his disciples; with the condescension and love which he requires of them to that purpose; the motives and exhortations given by the Holy Ghost unto them on that account; the provision of principles and means made in the gospel for it; the necessity of it to the promotion of the interest of Christ in the world; the benefit and advantage of it to the saints themselves; the testimony given by it to the power of Christ, and truth of his word; the blasphemies and woful soul-ruining offences that

ensue on the contrary frame; the weakening of faith, hindrance of prayer, quenching of zeal, strengthening of the men of the world, that attend the neglect of it: I must not, I say, insist on these things; but see John xvii. 21—23. and Phil. ii. 1—3. of a hundred places that might be mentioned; how little the mind of Christ, and his expectation at his coming hath been answered by his saints in this particular, is evident unto all.

[1.] Who is there almost who having got any private opinion, true or false, wherein he differs from all or any of his brethren, who is not ready to proclaim it, without due regard to scandal and division, and even to quarrel with and divide from all that will not think as he thinks, and speak as he speaks? Now the pride, self-fulness, vanity of mind, unlikeness to Christ, folly, want of faith and love that is in such a frame can never be expressed, nor sufficiently lamented. Christ abhors such a frame of spirit, as he doth the pollution of the world.

[2.] Neither is this all; but men will lay more weight on their mint and cummin, on the lesser things, wherein they differ from their brethren, spend more time about them, write more books of them, labour more in their prosecution, than they will do in and about the weighty things of law and gospel; all which will appear at length to have been but the laying of hay and stubble on the foundation, that must be consumed.

[3.] And farther; men fall to judging and censuring each other, as to their interest in Christ, or their eternal condition. By what rule? the everlasting gospel? the covenant of grace? no; but of the disciples: ‘Master, they follow not with us.’ They that believe not our opinion, we are apt to think believe not in Jesus Christ; and because we delight not in them, that Christ does not delight in them. This digs up the roots of love, weakens prayer, increases evil surmises, which are of the works of the flesh, genders strife, and contempt; things that the soul of Christ abhors.

[4.] The abomination of this wickedness ends not here; persecution, banishment, the blood of one another hath on this account lain in the hearts and minds of some of the saints themselves: not only have expressions to that purpose broken out from particular men; but it is to be feared,

that designs for it have been managed by parties and combinations. And are they not ready to dress up one another with such names and titles as may fit them for ruin? Sectaries, heretics, schismatics on the one side; priests, anti-christian dogs on the other: and all this while Christ is in the midst of us! And doth this answer the expectation of Christ? Is this a preparation to meet him in all holy conversation and godliness? Can we render ourselves more unlike him, more unmeet for communion with him? Are not saints ready to join with the world against saints? To take the vilest men into their bosom, that will close with them in defaming, deriding, or it may be, destroying their brethren? Doth Christ look for this usage in the house of his friends?

(2.) Consider their little difference from the world in great things. The great separation that Christ requires and commands of his saints, is, from the world: he died to redeem them from it, and out of it; to deliver them from the present evil world, the ways, works, fellowship, and ends of it; so providing, that in all holy conversation his people should dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations.

Now there are five things wherein Christ calls for his own to be differenced from the world, and the men thereof: [1.] In spirit; [2.] In principle; [3.] In conversation; [4.] In ends; [5.] In worship.

[1.] In spirit. He tells us everywhere, that it is one spirit that is in his, another that is in the world; 1 John iv. 4. 'Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.' There is a 'he' in you, and a 'he' in the world, and they are different and opposite. There is dwelling in you the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, nor doth it know him; John xiv. 17. And when his disciples began to act in the power of a carnal spirit, he tells them, they 'knew not what spirit they were of.'

[2.] In principle. The principle that Christ requires in his saints, is faith working by love, and guided by that wisdom which is from above; 1 Tim. i. 5. Here are the saints' principles, I mean, should be so of all their operations. A pure heart and love, which is the end of all faith, is their great principle; this cleanses the conscience, and so sets them on work; by this they take in strength for operation

from Christ, without whom they can do nothing; John xv. 5. By this they receive light and guidance from Christ, and that wisdom which is from above, enabling them to order their affairs with discretion; Jam. iii. 17, 18. Now the principle that is in the world, is self, self acted and guided by carnal wisdom, which is sensual and devilish; on the account whereof, they despise the principle and actings of the saints; Psal. xiv. 6.

[3.] In conversation. He 'hath redeemed us from a vain conversation;' 1 Pet. i. 18. There is a peculiar emphasis put upon a conversation that becomes the gospel. There is a twofold conversation; one that becometh the world, and the men of the world; another that becometh the gospel, and the profession thereof: that these be kept unmixed is the great exhortation of the apostle, Rom. xii. 2. And if you would know wherein a worldly conversation consists, the apostle telleth us, 1 John ii. 16. A conversation wherein any of these things bear sway, is a conversation of this world. That all holiness, all manner of holiness, universal holiness and godliness is in the gospel conversation to which the saints are called, shall be afterward spoken unto.

[4.] In ends. There is a double end of men's working and acting in this world: 1st. General, which regulates the course of their lives and conversations; 2dly. Particular, which regulates their particular actings and works: and in both these are the saints and the world differenced.

1st. The general end of the saints is the glory of God; this lies in their eye, in their design; how God may be glorified by them, his name exalted, his interest promoted; this way the bent of their minds and spirits tend. The general end of the men of the world is self; all is resolved into self; whatever they do or act in public or private, whatever their pretence be, yet self is their end; self-admiration, self-ostentation, self-satisfaction, all centres in self. Sometimes indeed they may perform things that seem to be of a public tendency, for the good of mankind, the good of nations, yea, it may be the good of the church; so that it is hard for themselves to discover, or for others to charge them, it may be, that they act for self. But there are these two things that will evince men to make self their general end and aim, even then when they act for public ends.

(1st.) This is a rule that will not fail men: whatever in public actings is not done with a single eye for the glory of God, is done for self. These two divide all the general ends of men; and where one is not enthroned, the other is. Now though some men may so far proceed in public actings, that it may not be evident wherein their self-interest lies, though that also be but seldom, yet if they do not eye the glory of God with a single eye in these their actings, it is all for self, and so it will be found at the last day. Now how few will be left not turning into self on this rule, now pretences run so high of public aims, might be easily evinced. It were no hard matter to discover, how in things of a public tendency, men make some fleshly imagination or other the god they worship; so that be enthroned, they are little solicitous about the glory of God himself.

(2dly.) The difference of these ends even in public actings may be seen from the ways, means, and frame of spirit in which they are carried on. Let men pretend what they will to public ends, yet if they press after them with a proud, carnal, wrathful, envious, spirit, by the ways, wisdom, and in the spirit of the world, without faith and submission to God, it is self and not God that is their aim. And this also might be improved to strip men of glorying in their public designs, were that my present business. Jehu's spirit spoiled his work.

2dly. There is a particular end that regulates the public actings of men. This in the saints is their doing the work of their generation; that, as Noah, they may walk with God in their generation. This is their integrity as to the special course of their lives, and their particular employment, how they may fulfil the work of their generation. The special end of the men of the world, is the satisfaction of one particular lust or other. Will this increase my wealth, my power, my carnal interest in this world, my reputation for wisdom and ability, or give me advantage to grow in this or that corrupt end, in particular? This is the secret inquiry of their deceived hearts; this influences and regulates all their particular actings.

[5.] As to their separation in worship, I shall only point to that one place, and leave it, 2 Cor. vi. 14—18, and chap. vii. 1. which belongs to that discourse.

Now I wish I had a more difficult task in hand : I wish it were harder for me to manage any principle of conviction, that we have not been prepared to meet Christ in his coming, from this consideration of our little difference from the world in these great things of principle, spirit, walking, ends, and worship. For

What a fleshly, wrathful, carnal, worldly spirit hath discovered itself in many professors, nay, in the most? How little of the humble, lowly, meek, loving spirit of Christ? Many think it their glory to be unlike Christ in the spirit of their minds, high, heady, self-full, proud, revengeful: what little difference between them, and the men of the world? How like to one another? What oneness is found in them? Is this to learn Christ? To put on Christ? Is this the image of Christ, that manifests itself in most professors? Nor

Are they at a distance from the world, as to the principle of their walking and working. Do they walk by faith, and work by faith? Are they guided by the wisdom that is from above? Make they God their refuge? Or are any men more dipped into a principle of carnal wisdom, than most professors are? To seek counsel of God, to take the law of their proceedings at his mouth, to look up to him for guidance and direction, to derive strength from the Lord Christ by believing for the work of their employments; in how few are these things found? Their own wisdom, their own counsel, their own contrivance, their own abilities, shall do their work. Carnal policy, and fleshly wisdom are their net and drag.

Moreover, what is our conversation? How like the world in our persons, in our families, in our spirits, callings, in whatever the world may properly call its own? Professors have justled the men of the world out of the possession of the ways of the world. How few are found walking in a world-condemning conversation? a gospel-glorifying conversation? a fruitful, holy conversation? We are known from the world by word more than by deed; which is not the way that James directs us unto.

I might go through with the rest of the considerations mentioned, and manifest that there is another evil found amongst us; for as we have great differences among our-

selves about little things, so we have little difference from the world in those which are great and weighty.

(3.) Consider the general miscarriage almost of all professors in things prejudicial to the advancement of the gospel; the pretence, whereof we have served ourselves all along, hath been of the furtherance, propagation, and advancement of the gospel. Our Lord Christ hath sent out light, and given opportunities suitable unto such a design. Never greater advantages, nor greater opportunities from the foundation of the world. If ever they be required at the hands of this generation, they will be found to have been so: whence then hath it been, that the work hath not gone on and prospered? Why doth it yet stick? Hath it not been from the woful miscarriage of those, who were looked on as the means and instruments of carrying it on? Have there been a few saints in a place? It is odds, that they have been at variance among themselves, and made sport for the vain multitude by their divisions: or they have walked frowardly, provokingly, uselessly, worldly, that their pretence for the gospel hath been despised, because of their persons. Have they, as men concerned in the honour of Christ and the gospel, as men enjoying the blessed principle of his Spirit, laboured to be useful, fruitful, to do good to all, to be meek, lowly, self-denying, charitable, abounding in good works, patient towards opposers, not reviling again, not returning evil for evil, bearing, suffering, committing all to Christ? Alas, how few are there who have so walked! Could some see believers making it their business to be like Christ in the world, to deny themselves as he did, to do good to all as he did, to be patient under persecution and reproaches as he was, to be tender, pitiful, merciful like him, to abide in faith and prayer as he did; what might we not expect, as to the advancement of the gospel amongst us? We complain of cold preaching among ministers, of dead and dull attendance in hearers, of contempt of the word in the most, whereby the power of the gospel is kept within narrow bounds; but the truth is, the prejudices that have been raised by the miscarriages of professors, have had a greater influence unto that evil event, than any of the rest. And hath this been to meet Christ in his coming?

(4.) Of the like nature are the scandalous offences of

many. I shall not insist on the scandalous apostacies of many professors, who, some by one great sin, some by another, are fallen off from the profession of the gospel. I wish that too many other instances might not be found among them that remain. Are there not some proud unto scandal, or sensual unto scandal, or covetous unto scandal, or negligent of their families and relations unto scandal, or conformable to the ways, customs, and fashions of the world unto scandal? I wish no such things might be found among us.

(5.) Add hereunto, the general backsliding, or going back from God, that is amongst professors; we scarce seem to be the same generation of men that we were fifteen or sixteen years ago: some have utterly lost their principle. Zeal for God, reformation, purity of ordinances, interest of Christ in his saints, are things to be despised, things that have no concernment in our condition and affairs; as though we had no more need of Christ, or his interest amongst us: and in the best, is not a fresh spirit of our present engagement almost lost?

But why should I insist farther on these things? Are not the things that have been spoken, sufficient for a rebuke, or a conviction at least, that the professing people of Christ have not walked as though they had a just respect to his coming, or his peculiar presence amongst them? May we not justly fear, that our multiplied provocations may at length prevail with him to withdraw, to put a stop to his work that is upon the wheel; not only to leave us to manifold entanglements in the carrying of it on, but also utterly to forsake it, to cast down the tower, and pluck up the hedge that he hath made about his vineyard, and leave it to be laid waste? He must have a heart like the flint in the rock of stone, that doth not tremble at it. But complaints will not be our relief. That which is incumbent on us, if yet there may be hope, is our answering the exhortation in my text. If then any sense do fall upon our spirits, that Christ is come amongst us in a peculiar manner, in the providential alterations and dissolutions that have been among us; and that we have not hitherto demeaned ourselves as becometh them who are called to meet him, and to walk with him in such ways and paths as his amongst us have been; then I say, let

us apply ourselves in our next use to the exhortation that lies before us, to all manner of 'holy conversation.'

Use 2. Of exhortation. That I say then which we are now to attend unto, is the exhortation that is included in this expression: 'What manner of persons ought we to be?' To further the efficacy of this exhortation, give me leave to premise some few things.

First, There are general reasons of holiness and godliness, and there are special motives unto them. I am not now dealing upon the general reasons of holiness on the account of the covenant of grace, and so shall not press it on those considerations, upon believers as such. But I speak of it in reference unto the peculiar motive mentioned in the text; namely, The providential dissolution of temporal concerns, and so speak to believers as men interested therein, as persons whom Christ hath a special regard unto in these his dispensations. It is one thing to say, What manner of persons ought ye to be, whom God hath loved with an everlasting love, whom Christ hath washed in his own blood, who have received the Spirit of Christ? and another to say, Ye that are loved with an everlasting love, are washed in the blood of Christ, and made partakers of the Holy Ghost. Seeing that Christ is come amongst us, to the dissolution of the great things of the nations, what manner of persons ought you to be? That is it in a peculiar pressing unto holiness on the account of the motive that is intended.

Secondly, There is a holiness and godliness that is required universally at all times, in all places and seasons, and in all persons whatever by the gospel; and there is a peculiar improvement of that holiness and godliness at some seasons, and in some persons, that is not required at some times, and of some persons. Christ hath work for all the grace of his people in this world; and according as opportunities for that work are presented unto them, they ought to stir up their grace for it. In the times of Christ's coming, he hath great work to do for and by the holiness and godliness of his people: a great testimony is to be given to himself thereby; his work is much to be promoted by it; the world to be convinced, condemned, his judgments against them justified in the sight of all; and much more hath Christ to do with the holiness of his people at such a season. Now

it is this peculiar improvement of covenant gospel holiness that is required; not only that holiness that is indispensably incumbent on us by the virtue of the covenant, but that heightening and improvement of it which the season wherein we live, and the work that Christ hath to do, do require of us.

These things being premised, let us now proceed to the management of our exhortation; and observe,

(1.) That the apostle calls us to a consideration how this work may be effected: 'What manner of persons ought ye to be?' Consider with yourselves the equity of the matter, the greatness of the motive, and the ways whereby it may be answered. The business is not now to be left at an ordinary rate, nor unto private meditations; it is to be made a matter of solemn consideration and design; it is to be managed with advice and counsel: consider, I say, 'what manner of persons.' It is not about holiness in general that I speak, but about that holiness which becomes us in such a season. This then is the first part of this exhortation, that as to the improvement of holiness answerable to the season of this coming of Christ, we would carry it on by design, by counsel, by deliberate consideration; not only labouring to be holy ourselves, but to promote the work of holiness, the eminency, the activity, the usefulness of it in one another, in all believers, so far as our prayers, exhortations and examples can reach. This the apostle pleads for on the same account, Heb. iii. 13. and chap. x. 23, 24. to the same purpose. And we have the practice of it, Mal. iii. 16. It was such a time and season as that we treat of, Christ was coming to his temple, ver. 1—3. The earth was full of wickedness and contempt of him. What do the saints do? Do they content themselves with their ordinary measures? Do they keep all close to themselves? No, they confer, advise, consult, and that frequently, how, wherein, whereby the expectation of their coming Lord may be answered. The reasons, arguments, way of carrying on such a counsel and design, the apostle declares, Rom. xiii. 11—14. The time requires it, the duty is urgent, temptations are many, failings have been great, the Lord is nigh at hand. Let then believers enter together into this plot, this design, draw as many as they can into it, promote it by all ways and means possible. Let them get together; make this their aim, their

design, engage in it as the duty of their day, of their time and season. This would be a plot that the men of the world would have more just cause to fear, than ever they had of any, and yet dare not question, disturb, or interrupt. A design that would blow up their contrivance, disappoint their counsel, ruin their interest, shake heaven and earth. Let every one contribute the best of his counsel, the best of his grace, the best of his interest in heaven, the utmost of his self-denial to the carrying of it on. Methinks we have dwelt long enough upon others' failings, fruitless, selfish designs; the world is full of the noise, the steam, the filth of them. Oh, that the stream of our endeavours might now be another way! Oh, that God would stir up some that might stand up and cry, Who is for God? Who is on our side, for holiness now? If ministers at their meetings; if Christians at theirs would make this their business; if all would agree to sacrifice their lusts, their self-love, their by-opinions to this work, what glory would redound to Christ? What salvation would be wrought in the earth? Why do any of us lie complaining? Let us up and be doing, there is no doubt, no question to be made; this is that which Christ lengthens his controversy with us about, that he will bring us to, or ruin us, and destroy us as to this world. Ministers meet: What do they? Pray awhile, and spend their time in and about differences, controversies, how they may do this or that which I shall not name. Christians meet, and pray, and go away as they came. Lusts are not sacrificed; faults are not confessed to one another; exhortations mutual are not used; no ground is got for holiness or godliness, but things remain as they did, or rather grow worse and worse every day; at best profession rises, and the power of religion falls and decreases.

I heartily wish professors would be persuaded to come together, to advise, to consult for God, for the glory of Christ and the gospel, and for their own interest in this thing: to consider what are the pressing temptations of the days wherein we live; what are the corruptions and lusts that are apt to be provoked and excited by these temptations, or by the state of things amongst us; what duties seem to be neglected; and what are the common, visible failings and scandal of professors, wherein themselves through

party, or neglect, or selfishness have been wanting ; and to advise and pray for the remedying of all these evils. I wish they would seriously stir up and exhort one another, to contend mightily for the crucifying of all their secret lusts and bosom sins ; for heart purity, and likeness to Christ in all things : that they would incite others, and draw all they can into their society and combination in all parts of the nation. In particular, let not us of this place stand still, expecting when others will begin the work ; the meaner, poorer, worse we are, the more incumbent is it on us to rise and be doing ; the water is moved, teaching is in it, and we strive not who shall enter first, but rather stand striving, contesting with others, to put them before us.

This is the first direction : let us make the matter of holiness and godliness, suited to the coming of Christ, a business of design, counsel, and common engagement. Whereunto every one may contribute of the store which from God he hath received. Blessed will be those servants, whom their Master, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

SERMON XXVIII.

I SHALL now add some cautions as to the pursuit of the first direction.

[1.] Take heed of a degeneration into self-righteousness. Intendments of holiness have more than once been ruined by Satan through this deceit: they have set out upon conviction, and ended in pharisaism. Now this hath been done many ways.

(1st.) Some really convinced of the vanity of an empty profession, and of boasting of saintship upon the account of faith and light without holiness and godliness, which was the way of many when James and John wrote their epistles, fall to dispute and contend, as well they may, for the absolute necessity of holiness and strict obedience, of fruitfulness and good works. But Satan here gets advantage upon men's natural spirits, their heats, and contentions, and insinuates an inherent righteousness, upon the account whereof we should under one pretence or other expect acceptation with God, as to the justification of our persons. So he prevailed upon the Galatians. The way is narrow and strait that lies between the indispensable necessity of holiness, and its influence into our righteousness. Because no faith will justify us before God, but that also which will justify itself by fruitfulness before men, a great mistake arises, as though what it doth for its own justification were to be reckoned unto ours. Many in our days have gone off from the mystery of the gospel on this account.

2dly. It prevails from a secret self-pleasing, that is apt to grow on the minds of men, from a singularity in the performance of duties. This is that which the heart-searcher aims to prevent in his command, that 'when we have done all, we should say, we are unprofitable servants;' that is, in the secrets of our hearts to sit down in a sense of our own worthlessness. And here lies another great practical difficulty, namely, to have the rejoicing of a good conscience in our integrity and constancy in duties, without a reflection upon something of self, that the soul may please itself, and

rest in. Nehemiah fixes on the medium, chap. xiii. 22. He had in the sight of God the testimony of his conscience, concerning the service he had done for the house of God; but as to the rest, he winds up all in mercy, pardon, and grace. 'God, I thank thee I am not as other men,' is apt to creep into the heart in a strict course of duties. And this self-pleasing is the very root of self-righteousness, which as it may defile the saints themselves, so it will destroy those who only in the strength of their convictions go forth after a holiness and righteousness; for it quickly produceth the deadly poisonous effect of spiritual pride, which is the greatest assimilation to the nature of the devil that the nature of man is capable of.

3dly. Our own holiness hath an advantage upon spiritual sense against the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness of Christ, is utterly a strange thing to the best of unbelievers; and this puts them by all means upon the setting up of their own; Rom. x. 3. And believers themselves know it only by faith, Rom. i. 17. which is 'of things not seen.' But what we are ourselves, what we do, what we aim at, and in what manner, this we have a near sense of. And holiness is apt to insinuate itself into the conscience with a beauty that is none of its own, to proffer itself to the soul's embraces instead of Jesus Christ. Its native beauty consists in its answering the will of God, conforming the soul to the likeness of Christ, and being useful in the world, in a covenant of mere mercy. From its presence, and the sense we have of it, the heart is apt to put a varnish and false beauty upon it, as to the relief of conscience upon the account of justification. As it was of old with the children of Israel, when Moses was in the mount, and not seen, nor had they any visible pledge of the presence of God, instantly they turned their gold into a calf that would be always present with them. Being in the dark as to the righteousness of Christ, which is as it were, absent from them, men set up their own holiness in the stead of it; which, though of itself it be of God, yet turned into self-righteousness, is but a calf, an idol, that cannot save them.

This is my first caution. But that we may make the better improvement of it, as unto present practice, I shall add some evidences of the prevalency, or at least contending

of self-righteousness for an interest in the soul, under a pretence of duty and holiness. As,

(1st.) When under a design of holiness, there is an increase of a bondage frame of spirit. When the mind begins to be enslaved to the duties which it doth itself perform. When that amplitude, freedom, and largeness of mind, which is in a gracious frame of heart, decays; and a servile, bondage-frame grows in the room of it, so that the soul doth what it doth under this notion, that it dare not do otherwise. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;' 2 Cor. iii. 17. Those that come to Christ, he makes free; John viii. 36. There is freedom and spiritual largeness of heart unto obedience and duty. A will unto duty enlarged, dilated, and sweetened by love, delight, joy, complacency in the matter of obedience, is the freedom we speak of. This frame, I confess, is not always alike prevalent in gracious souls: they may have things ready to die; sin within, temptations without, desertion from God, all of them together, each of them may disturb this harmony, and bring them for a time, it may be a long time, under an indisposition unto such a frame: but this is for the most part predominant. When such a frame decays, or is not, all endeavours, pains, attempts, severities in duties, do all relate to the law, to bondage; and consequently lead to self-righteousness, fear, subjection of conscience to duties, not God in Christ in the duty, fluctuating of peace according to performances; the soul in its strictest course had need fear a snare.

(2.) Increasing in form, and withering in power. Forms are of three sorts: [1st.] Those of institution; [2dly.] Moral; [3dly.] Arbitrary in conversation.

[1st.] There are forms and ways of worship, whereof some are, and all pretend to be, of Christ's institution. Let us at present take it for granted, that they are all what they are apprehended to be, namely, from Christ. For a man to grow high, earnest, zealous, in and about them, to be strict and severe in contending for them, and yet find no spiritual refreshment in them, or communion with God, nor to grow in faith and love by them, is to dwell on the confines of self-righteousness, if not hypocrisy. This was the very sin of the Jews, about their institutions so much condemned in the Scripture. None use instituted ways or forms of wor-

ship profitably, but such as find communion with God in them, or are seriously humbled because they do not.

[2dly.] The outward form of moral duties, that depend not merely on institution, is the same. Such are praying, preaching, hearing, abounding in them without a suitable increase in grace, power, liberty, love, meekness, lowliness of mind, argues, though under the highest light to the contrary, a real mixture of self.

[3dly.] There are also outward forms in conversation, that are used to the same purpose. We have had some who have changed their outward form in a few years, as often as Laban changed Jacob's wages. What shape they will next turn themselves into, I know not. This is not going from strength to strength, and increasing in life and power, but from one shape to another; and in their word and prophecy is directly proportioned, and answerable in its outward appearance to the administration of the Old Testament, and not at all to the spiritual dispensation of the New. So it may be feared that in the principle of their obedience, they lie under a legal bondage and self-righteousness, which hath utterly spoiled that which perhaps in its first design set out for mortification and holiness.

(2dly.) Where self-righteousness is getting ground, these two, bondage and form, at length bring forth burdensomeness and wearisomeness. This God charges on such justiciaries, Isa. xliii. 22. 'Thou hast been weary of me.' The ways and worship of God grow very grievous and burdensome to such a soul. He is a stranger to that of the apostle, 'His commandments are not grievous:' and that of our Saviour himself, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden light.' The easiness of the yoke of Christ ariseth from the assistance that is given to him that bears it by the Holy Ghost; as also the connaturalness that is wrought in the heart to all the duties of it. Both these accompany a gospel frame. But when a soul is deserted of these, the yoke grows heavy, and galleth him, but yet he must go on; this is from self-righteousness. Let this then be our first caution.

[2.] Take heed of monastic uselessness. I am persuaded monkery came into the world not only with a glorious pretence, but also with a sincere intention. Men weary of the ways, weary of the lusts, and sin of the world, designing

personal holiness left their stations, and withdrew themselves into retirement. David was almost gone with this design; Psal. lv. 6. 'O that I had wings,' and Jer. ix. 2. 'O that I had a lodging in the wilderness.' Whose heart hath not been exercised with reasonings of this kind? Oh that we could be freed from the incumbrances and provocations of this world; what manner of persons might we be in all holy conversation and godliness? But consider,

1st. What success this design prosecuted hath had in others. How quickly did it degenerate into wretched superstition, and was thereon blasted and rejected of God?

2dly. God can suffer temptation to pursue us into a wilderness, that shall more obstruct us in the progress of holiness, than all the difficulties we meet withal in this world. It is not of what kind our temptations are, but what assistance we are to expect under them, that we are to look after.

3dly. Not our communion, but God's work is to be considered. God hath work to do in this world, and to desert it because of its difficulties and entanglements, is to cast off his authority. Universal holiness is required of us, that we may do the will of God in our generation; Gen. vi. 9. It is not enough that we be just, that we be righteous, and walk with God in holiness; but we must also serve our generation, as David did, before he fell asleep. God hath a work to do, and not to help him, is to oppose him.

[3.] Take heed of laying a design for holiness in a subserviency unto any carnal interest; of crying with Jehu, 'Come see my zeal for the Lord of hosts,' thereby to do our own work, and compass our own ends. The great scandal that hath befallen the days wherein we live, and which hath hardened the spirits of many against all the ways of God, is, that religion, godliness, zeal, holiness, have been made a cloak for carnal and secular ends. What of this hath been really given, and what hath been taken on false imaginations, the last day will discover. In the mean time this is certain, that there is a corruption in the heart of man, rising up to such a visible prostitution of the whole profession of religion, which of all things must be carefully avoided.

And this is the grand exhortation that I shall insist on: let it be our design to promote generation holiness in ourselves and others, with the cautions insisted on.

(2.) That which in the next place is considerable, is the proposing of the ingredients that lie in the motive to holiness here expressed by the apostle: 'Seeing that these things shall be dissolved.' As,

[1.] It will be a furtherance of holiness to take off our hearts from an esteem and valuation of all things, that are so obnoxious to dissolution. An estimation or valuation of earthly things is on all accounts the greatest hinderance to the promotion of holiness. Earthly-mindedness, pride of spirit, elation above our brethren, self-estimation, carnal confidence, contempt of the wisdom and grace of others, aptness to wrath and anger; some, or all of these, always accompany such a frame.

The apostle also makes this an effectual means of the improvement of holiness, that the mind be taken off from the delightful contemplation of visible things; 2 Cor. iv. 18. Things will work towards 'a weight of glory:' in which words the apostle alludes to the Hebrew word, כבוד 'glory,' which comes from a root, signifying to 'weigh,' or 'to be heavy;' that being the only weighty thing, and all others light and of no moment. This way, I say, things will work, whilst our minds are taken off from things that are seen. The mind's valuation of them is as great an obstruction to the growth of holiness, as any thing whatever that can beset us in our pilgrimage. Now what can give a greater allay to the warmth of our thoughts and minds, than their continual obnoxiousness to dissolution and change? This the apostle makes his argument everywhere. They are temporal things, saith he, things that abide not, things obnoxious to change and ruin: 'The world passeth away, and the figure of it. Wilt thou set thine heart upon that which is not?' And there lies the force of the inference under consideration: 'Seeing that these things shall be dissolved,' and it may be in a way of judgment, in a dreadful, fearful manner; how is it incumbent on us to fix our hearts on more durable things, to choose the better part, the better portion? What advantage can it be to enlarge our hearts to the love of the things that are upon the wing? To cleave to parting things with our affections? To grow in our desires after that which withdraws itself from us continually? Let us then consider, how many duties have been omitted, how many

temptations have been offered, and objected to us; how many spiritual frames of heart prevented or expelled; how much looseness and vanity of mind introduced; how much self-confidence promoted, by an over-valuation of these things: and we shall then see what influence a watching against it may have to the furtherance of a design of holiness.

[2.] It will be so, to take off our care about them. This also is a worm that lies at the root of obedience, and is of itself able to wither it, if not removed. Our Lord Jesus Christ, giving us instruction how we should be prepared for the coming of such a day, as that whereof we are speaking, charges us, among other things, to take heed that we 'be not overcharged with the cares of this life;' Luke xxi. 34. Indeed there is nothing so opposite to that peculiar holiness and godliness that is required of us in and under great providential dissolutions, as this of care about perishing things. The special holiness that we press after, is a due mixture of faith, love, self-denial, fruitfulness, all working in a peculiar and eminent manner. Now to every one of these is this care a canker and a gangrene, fitted to eat out and devour the life and spirit of them. The very nature of faith consists in a universal casting of our care on God; 1 Pet. v. 7. 'Cast all your care on him.' All our care about temporal, spiritual, eternal things, let us cast all this on God, our whole burden; this is believing, this is faith: and what is more opposite unto it, than this care and solicitousness of the soul about the obtaining or retaining of these things? Resignation, acquiescency, rest, all which are acts or effects of faith, are devoured by it. Trust in God, affiance, delight in his will, ruins them all. How can a soul glorify God in believing in a difficult season, that is overlaid with this distemper? Nothing is more diametrically opposite thereunto.

Love enlarges the heart to Christ, and every thing of Christ; valuation, delight, satisfaction accompany it: it makes the heart free, noble, ready for service, compassionate, zealous; nothing is more called for in such a day: and the decay of faith in the trials and temptations of such a season, is called, the 'waxing cold of love;' as the fruit decays, when the root is consumed. To think of glorifying God in the days wherein we live, without hearts warmed, enlarged, made tender, compassionate by gospel love, is to think to

fly without wings, or to walk without feet. What day almost, what business, wherein our love is not put to the trial in all the properties of it; whether it can bear and forbear; whether it can pity and relieve; whether it can hope all things, and believe all things; whether it can exercise itself towards friends and towards enemies; whether it can give allowance for men's weakness and temptations; whether it can value Christ above all, and rejoice in him in the loss of all; and many the like things is it continually tried withal. Now nothing so contracts and withers the heart, as to all these things, as the cares of this world do. Whatever is selfish, fearful, unbelieving, is inwrapped in them. They sometimes pine, wither, and render useless the whole man, always drink up the spirit, and deprive it of any communion with God in any thing it hath to do.

The same may be said concerning self-denial and fruitfulness; which in an eminent manner Christ now calls upon us for. Love, care, and fear about the things that shall be dissolved, unframes the soul for them.

On these considerations, and the like which might be added, may this direction be improved, and no small obstacle unto a course of universal holiness and godliness, be taken away. Is the power, are the riches, the pleasures of the world valuable? Alas! they are all passing away. It is but 'yet a little while, and their place shall know them no more.' Yet could we take off our hearts from an undue valuation of these things, and care about them, half our work was done.

(3.) That which remains for the closing of our discourse on this subject, is to give some few motives unto the duty proposed: and I shall only mention three generals: [1.] Relating unto ourselves; [2.] Unto others; [3.] Unto Christ himself.

[1.] As to ourselves; this alone will maintain peace and quiet in our souls in and under those dissolutions of things that we are to be exercised with. We know what desolations, what ruin of families, what destruction of all outward enjoyments in many, they have already in these nations been attended with: and we know not how soon, nor by what ways or means, the bitterest part of the cup, as to outward pressures and calamities, may become our portion. We

have seen somewhat of the beginning of the work of Christ; where he will cease, what he hath yet farther to do, we know not. Our concernment then certainly was never greater than it is at this day, to keep up peace and rest within. If there should be a confederacy of outward and inward trouble, who can stand before it? A wounded body, a wounded, it may be, ruined estate, and a wounded spirit altogether, who can bear? This is that alone which the world cannot take from us; which is not obnoxious to sword, fire, plots, conspiracies, nothing without us: even the peace that is left us, left to our own keeping, through the Holy Ghost by Jesus Christ. It is not committed to parliaments, to armies, to rulers to keep for us; it is committed to our own souls to keep, through the Holy Ghost, and no man can take it from us. Again, as it is valuable on this account, that it cannot be taken from us; so on this also, that it will countervail and support us under the loss of all that can. Peace in God, rest in sole retirement, quietness, and security of mind on spiritual gospel accounts, sense of God's love in Christ, will support and keep life and vigour in the soul in the loss of outward peace, with whatever is desirable and valuable unto us on any account that relates to this world.

Now there is no maintaining of this peace and rest in such a season, without the performance of this duty. So dealt Habbakuk, chap. iii. 16. 'I trembled in myself that I might rest in the day of trouble.' That which God required of him in that season, that he brought up his soul unto, that he might have rest; and his endeavour had the glorious issue mentioned, ver. 17, 18. Though spiritual peace may radically and virtually live under many sins and provocations; yet it will not flourish under them, or bring forth any refreshing fruit. To have the fruit and effect of peace under a continuance in any known sin, is impossible. Now the omission of any known duty, is a known sin; and that a peculiar pressing after eminency in universal holiness and godliness in such a season is a known duty, I have before evinced: no maintaining of inward peace, rest in God without it: and we shall be sure to be tried, whether it be in us of a truth, or not. I discourse not what the carnal security of seared, blinded, hardened sinners will do; but I am sure, the weak, tottering, uncertain peace of many believers, will

not support them in such trials, as it is not only possible that we may, but probable that we shall meet withal. Would you now desire that your Master should find you unprepared; that he should make his entrance whilst all things were in disorder? If the heavens should thunder over you, and the earth tremble under you, and the sword stand ready to devour; oh! what sad thoughts must you have, if at the same time you should be forced to say, oh my soul, is not God mine enemy also? May not wrath, and hell, and judgment be at the end of this dispensation? What is the reason, that a very rumour, a noise oftentimes is ready to fill many of our souls with such disturbances? Is it not because this peace doth not flourish in the inward man? And what shall we do in the day of trial itself? Let us then endeavour as Peter exhorts, 2 Epist. iii. 14. 'to be found of Christ in peace.' And what may we do that we may be found of him in peace? Why, saith he, 'be without spot and blameless.' Let him come when he will, in what way he pleases, we shall be found in a way of peace, if we be found spotless and blameless in a way of holiness: 'And blessed is that servant, whom his Master, when he cometh shall find so doing.' This will give light in a dungeon, as it did to Paul and Silas; ease in the fire, in the furnace, as to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; contentment in the loss of all, as it did to Job; satisfaction on the foresight of future trouble, as it did to David, 'Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant.' Whatever sword be in the hand of Christ; whatever fire or tempest be before him, and round about him; what vengeance soever he is to take on any, or all of the sons of men, this peace kept up by the holiness he requires in such a season, will make a way to his bosom-love, and there repose the soul in rest and quietness.

[2.] As to others, what Paul saith to Timothy, in another case about preaching of the gospel, may in some sense be spoken in this: 'Take heed,' saith he, 'to the doctrine; for thereby thou shalt save thyself, and them that hear thee.' Who knows but that hereby we may save ourselves, and the nation wherein we live. The Lord Christ hath certainly a controversy with these nations, he hath begun to deal with them in his indignation; and we know that there are provo-

cations enough amongst us, to stir him up unto our ruin. Who knows, I say, but that by meeting him in a way of generation-holiness, we may divert deserved ruin, at least hinder that it be not brought upon us for the provocations of his sons and daughters?

Now there are several ways, whereby this may have an influence into the safety and deliverance of the nations themselves.

1st. By setting all things right between Christ and the saints, that he may have no need farther to shake the earth, and dissolve the heavens of the nations, to awaken his own from their security, to loosen them from perishing things, or to accomplish any other glorious end towards them. Christ sometimes sifts nations, that his wheat may be separated from the chaff; he sets nations on fire, that they may be a furnace for the trial of his own; and when their dross is cleansed, he will quench his fire. When there was but one saint in a ship, yet it was for his sake that a storm came on all the rest. It is not always for the sins of the wicked, that they may be destroyed, that he comes in a way of judgment; but for the sins of his people, that they may be cleansed. So 'judgment,' as Peter speaks, 'begins at the house of God.' It is not unlikely, that our troubles were brought on these nations, for the sins of the nations in their persecution of Christ, his truths, and saints against great light. Nor is it less unlikely, that troubles are continued on these nations, for the sins of the saints themselves, such as those before insisted on. Now what is it that in such trials Christ calls for, and which he will not cease calling for, until he prevails? Is it not the work which we are in the pursuit of, weanedness from the world, self-denial, zeal for truth, humbleness, fruitfulness, faithfulness, universal holiness? If here then lies the root of Christ's controversy with these nations, as most probably it doth; if this be the cause of our troubles, as to me questionless it is, an engagement into the pursuit of this work, is the only remedy and cure of the evils that we either feel or fear in these nations. Other remedies have been tried, and all in vain. O that we had hearts through the Holy Ghost to make trial of this, which the great physician Jesus Christ hath prescribed unto us! Heaven and earth call for it at our hands: the nations groan under our sin; if

we regard not ourselves, yet let us make it our business to deliver England out of the hand of the Lord ; Josh. xxii. 31.

2dly. In that it may be an effectual means for the reformation of the nation. Reformation is the great thing that we have been talking of many years ; and this hath been our condition in our attempts after it ; the more that light for it hath broken forth amongst us, the more unreformed hath the body of the people been, yea, the more opposite for the most part unto reformation ; and may not this, among other things, be one occasion, yea, the principal cause of it ; the light of truth hath been accompanied with so many scandals in some, with so little power and evidence in the most, that prejudices have been strengthened in the minds of men against all that hath been pretended or professed. I am persuaded, that a design for generation-holiness, carried on according to the light that we have received, would have a greater influence on the the minds of the men of the world to look after reformation, than any of our entreaties or exhortations have yet obtained. We are contemptible to the nation in our pressing after reformation, whilst we are divided amongst ourselves, conformable to the world ; whilst we proclaim our unmortified lusts, pride, covetousness, ambition, revenge, self-seeking. Would all the people of God stir up themselves to shew forth the power of that faith and life they have received, and so take away advantage from obdurate opposers of the gospel, and give an eminent example to others, who now abhor them on the account of many prejudices that they have taken ; the nation would be more awakened unto their duty than now they are. Were we agreed and united on this principle, that we would jointly and severally make this our design ; what work might be wrought in families, counsels, counties, cities ? Now reformation is acknowledged to be the means, the only means of the preservation of a nation, and this the only means of that.

3dly. This is the most effectual way of standing in the gap, to turn away the indignation of the Lord against the nation. Whatever is required thereunto, is contained in this design of holiness ; there is reformation, there is wrestling by prayer, sundry promises improving our interest in Christ, all included in this duty. Now this is the most common way of saving nations. When wrath is ready to break forth, some

Moses or Samuel, stands up, and pleads for a deliverance, and prevails. Says God, Destroy not the cluster; there is a blessing in it. When the greatest and most dreadful judgment, that God ever executed on sinners in this world, was coming forth, had there been ten persons following after holiness, its accomplishment had been prevented. Here then we have a project to save three nations by; and without this, in vain shall they use any other remedies, they shall not be healed.

[3.] Consider this thing, how it relates unto Christ and his glory. All the revenue of glory or honour that we bring unto Christ in this world, is by our obedience or holiness. He did not die for us, that we might be great, or wise, or learned, or powerful in the world; but that he might purify us to be a peculiar people unto himself, zealous of good works. This was his design and aim, that he might have a holy people, a faithful people in the world. He tells us, that herein his Father is glorified, that we bear much fruit; not that we be successful, that we rule and prevail, that we are in credit and reputation, but that we bring forth much fruit; and in the glory of the Father, is the Son glorified also. It is this alone that adorns the doctrine of his gospel, and lifts up his name in the world; but especially is Christ glorified, by the holiness of his saints in such a season; because

1st. Thereby we bear witness to the world, that indeed we believe him to be come forth amongst us, and that the works that are on the wheel relate to his kingdom and interest. Let us talk of it whilst we please, unless we live and walk as those who have communion with Christ in the works he doth, the world will yet think that whatever we profess, yet indeed we believe as they do, that it is a common thing that hath befallen us. But when indeed they shall see, that there is a real reverence of his person upon our spirits, and that we bestir ourselves in his ways, like servants in the presence of their master; this carries a conviction along with it. To hear men talk of the coming of Christ, and the day of Christ, and the great and terrible things that Christ hath done in these days; and yet in the mean time to walk as the men of the world, in a spirit of pride, selfishness, and wrath, in sensuality or pleasure, in neglect of prayer and humiliation: yea, of all gospel duties, swearers and drunkards do

not so dishonour Christ as such men do. But let men but see professors making it their business to be holy, humble, self-denying, useful in the world, condescending in love, resigning all to God, they cannot but say, Well, this is a great day to the saints; they verily believe that Christ is among them. This is a professing that brings conviction; words are but as speaking with tongues, that work not out the glory of Christ.

2dly. Thereby we bear witness unto what sort of kingdom it is, that Christ hath in the world, and what a kind of king he is. I cannot but fear that our talking of the kingdom of Christ, and managing our notions of it, at least in the world's apprehensions, to carnal advantages, hath been a notable hinderance of the coming of it forth in beauty and glory amongst us. Every party talks of the kingdom of Christ, some more, some less, all pretend unto it; but it is evident, that many would set him on his throne with the petition of Zebedee's children in their mouths, that they may sit on his right hand, and his left. Hence the world doth really persuade itself, and is hardened every day in that persuasion, that whatever is pretended of Christ, it is self-interest that carries all before it; and that men do entertain that notion for the promotion of self-ends. But now this design of abounding in real holiness sets up the pure, unmixed interest of Christ, and casts a conviction upon the world to that purpose. When the world may read in our lives, that the kingdom we look for, though it be in this world, yet it is not indeed of this world, but is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; this brings that honour to Christ, wherein he is delighted; and the ignorance of foolish men is put to silence.

3dly. This brings honour unto Christ, and glorifies him in all the vengeance that he executes on his enemies, and all the care that he takes of his own. The world itself is hereby made to see, that there is a real difference indeed in them, between whom Christ puts a difference, and is convinced of the righteousness of his judgments. Every one may answer them, when they inquire the reason of the dispensations amongst us. Yea, they may answer themselves, the Lord hath done great things for these, even these that serve him.