

SERMON XXXVII.*

THE DIVINE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.—Rom. i. 16.

THE preceding verses of this chapter contain a declaration of the person who wrote this epistle; the apostolical authority wherewith it was wrote; and a gracious salutation of them to whom it was wrote. This verse makes an entrance upon the main subject matter designed to be treated on in the whole epistle. So that it is the centre of this glorious part of the Scripture, wherein the first general part of it doth issue, and whereon the remaining part depends.

The church at Rome was planted some while before; but it is altogether uncertain by whom. The wisdom of God foreseeing what abuses would be made of the foundation of that church, hath hid it quite from us; there is nothing in Scripture, nothing in antiquity to intimate by whom the faith was there first preached. Probably it was by some believers of the circumcision, whence those disputes arose, and contentions about the observation of Judaical ceremonies, which the apostle handles and determines, chap. xiv. xv. of this epistle. Hearing of their faith, our apostle, upon whom, as he saith, ‘was the care of all the churches,’ and to whom ‘the ministry of the uncircumcision was in an especial manner committed,’ Gal. ii. 7, 8. writes this epistle to them to instruct them in the mystery of the gospel, and confirm them in the faith thereof, and in the worship of God required therein.

To give weight to what he wrote, and commend it to their consideration, he acquaints them with that love and care he had for them, answerable to his duty from whence it did proceed; telling them, ver. 14, 15. that ‘he was debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise,

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and to the unwise; so that as much as in him was, he was ready to preach the gospel to them that were at Rome also.' And hereby he prevented a prejudice and jealousy that might possess their minds, and answers an objection they might make to him about his writing. For they might say in themselves, What makes him a stranger, at so great a distance, interpose in our concerns? Doth he not 'stretch himself beyond his measure,' or 'boast himself in another man's line,' which he affirms in another place he did not? For he was charged with such things. His zeal carrying him out to act for the gospel in a peculiar manner, he was charged to 'exceed his measure,' and 'boast in another man's line.' To obviate this, he tells them, no; I do nothing but what becomes a honest man, discharging a debt the Lord Jesus Christ hath laid upon me by virtue of my call to my office, and my susception of it. 'I am debtor to the Greek, and to the barbarian; to the wise, and to the unwise. I am called, saith he, to preach the gospel to all sorts of people under heaven; my commission is to 'go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;' Mark xvi. 15. that is, as expounded, Matt. xxviii. 19. 'to all nations,' persons of all nations as I have opportunity. Our Lord Jesus Christ, out of his love and care unto them whom he had redeemed with his blood, that they might be saved, had given the apostles to be theirs; 'all things are yours; Paul is yours, Apollos is yours;' and charged them to preach the gospel to them; so that Acts xx. 26, 27. he saith, 'Now I am free from the blood of all men.' How doth he prove it? 'I have not shunned to declare to them the whole counsel of God.' He frees himself from any surmise that they might have, that he had a design of his own, and sought some advantage to himself in thus interposing in the concerns of the gospel, by telling them he doth but discharge a debt; 'I am a debtor,' saith he. And it is truly and really the wisdom of those who in their several spheres have the dispensation of the gospel committed unto them, to let the people know, that they need not absolutely, whatsoever they do consequentially, count themselves beholden to them for preaching the word; but that indeed our Lord Jesus Christ hath engaged us in a debt, which if, in his name, we pay and discharge, we are sure of a reward; if not he will require it at

our hands. We owe the preaching of the gospel to them that are willing to hear it ; and if upon any account we withhold it from them, we do defraud them. ‘ I am debtor,’ saith the apostle. And every one that receiveth the gift and call from Christ is a debtor, and so should esteem himself. I have done nothing, saith he, but engaged in the discharge of the debt which I owe to the souls of men.

But there might likewise arise another objection ; if he be so concerned in the publication of the gospel, that he writes an epistle to Rome, the greatest theatre then upon the earth, the head of the empire, and most eminent place in the world. Why did he not come himself and preach it ? He returns an answer thereunto, ver. 15. That, saith he, is not at present in my power ; I am not my own, I am disposed of by a call of Christ, and guidance of his Spirit ; but ‘ I am ready to come to Rome,’ I have a readiness to preach the gospel wheresoever God calls me.

Now that he might not seem to have outbid himself in speaking of going thither to preach the gospel, without considering what it might cost him, he gives them the reason and ground upon which he had so engaged himself to be ready to come to Rome, in the words of the text ; ‘ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ : for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.’

In the words there are,

First, A general assertion laid down as the ground of what he had before affirmed, and that is in these words : ‘ I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.’

Secondly, He gives a reason of that assertion, what made him say so ; ‘ I am not ashamed, because the gospel is the power of God ;’ to which reason he gives a threefold limitation. First, As to the especial end of it ; ‘ The power of God.’ Whereunto ? For this or that end in the world ? No ; ‘ It is the power of God for salvation.’ Secondly, He limits it in respect of the object ; ‘ The power of God unto salvation.’ To all ? No, but ‘ to every one that believeth ;’ to all believers, consider them either antecedently to their being made believers, or consequentially having received the word. To others it is foolishness ; but to us that believe it is ‘ the power, and the wisdom of God.’ Thirdly, It hath limits as

to the manner of administration : ‘To the Jew first, and also to the Greek.’ The word ‘first’ there respects the order of dispensation, and not a priority of efficacy, or excellency. The word was first to be preached to the Jews, as you know, in many places, and that for many ends, not now to be insisted on. This is the design of the words.

I shall for the opening of them inquire into two things : 1. What is intended by the gospel ? 2. What is it to be ashamed of the gospel ? After which the great reason will ensue of the apostle’s assertion : ‘ Because it is the power of God unto salvation.’

1. What is intended by the gospel ? The gospel is taken two ways : (1.) Absolutely, as it is in itself ; (2.) Relatively, with reference unto our practice and observance of it.

(1.) Absolutely, and in itself : and so also it is taken two ways :

[1.] Strictly, according to the signification of the word, ‘good tidings’ for the good tidings of the accomplishment of the promise by the sending of Jesus Christ. The name is taken from Isa. lii. 7. ‘ How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that publisheth the good tidings of the gospel.’ And in this sense the apostle gives us a description of the gospel, Acts xiii. 32, 33. ‘ We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again :’ sent Christ according to the promise, the tidings of which is strictly the gospel.

[2.] The gospel is taken more largely for all things that were annexed to the accomplishment of the promise, the revelation of truths made there, with all the institutions and ordinances of worship that accompanied it : the whole doctrine and worship of the gospel. The first is what God doth for us in giving Christ; the second is what God requireth of us in faith and obedience, and in the whole worship of the gospel. And this is the common sense wherein this word ‘gospel’ is taken.

(2.) The gospel may be considered relatively, with reference unto believers : and then it intends our profession of the gospel ; which profession consists in the performance

of all gospel duties, when and as they are to be performed by virtue of the command of Christ, which I would desire you to consider and remember; for I can assure you all your concerns in the gospel will be found to depend upon it.

It is in reference unto the gospel in both these senses that the apostle here speaks; as it contains the promise of Christ, the doctrine of the gospel, the worship of God, the institutions therein, and every man's performance of his own duty, according to the rules and commands of Christ in the gospel. This is that which the apostle says 'he was not ashamed of.'

2. What is it to be ashamed of the gospel? Shame in general is a grief, perturbation, and trouble of mind, upon the account of things vile, foolish, or evil, rendering a man (as he thinks), liable to reproach and contempt, working a resolution in him to have no more to do with such things, if once delivered from them. As the prophet Jeremiah, chap. ii. 26. 'A thief is ashamed when he is taken.' Two things befall such a person: fear which respects his punishment; and shame which respects the vileness and reproach of the thing that he is taken in. And shame doth particularly respect honour, esteem, and repute. Hence if you can by any means take off the disrepute of a thing in men's judgment, they are no more ashamed of it. The world hath prevailed to take off among themselves, and within their own compass, the disrepute of as odious sins as can be committed in the world, and men cease thereupon to be ashamed of them. We meet with men that will not at all be ashamed of swearing, cursing, blaspheming, nay of drunkenness, scarce of uncleanness; the wickedness of the world hath taken off the disrepute of them within their own compass: yet take the same men in lying or theft, and it will fill them with shame; not but that the guilt and evil of other sins is as great, it may be greater than these; but these are under a disrepute, and therefore they are thus ashamed.

Now this shame may be considered two ways:

(1.) Objectively, as to the things that in themselves are shameful, though men may be relieved against them, so as not to have any inward shame in their minds. So the

apostle tells us, I Thess. ii. 2. That he was ‘shamefully entreated at Philippi :’ he had all manner of shameful things done unto him. And Acts v. 41. all the apostles together ‘rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame.’ They suffered shame, but they were not ashamed. Heb. vi. 6. It is said, those apostate backsliders ‘put the Son of God to open shame.’ They did those things unto him, which in their own nature cast shame upon him ; they deserted his worship and ways, as if he was not worthy to be followed. Now our apostle was very far from thinking that nothing of this shame would befall him at Rome ; that no shameful thing would befall him. He was led thither bound with a chain, and cast into prison. This is not the shame intended.

(2.) There is shame in the person. And this also may be considered two ways :

[1.] As it merely respects the affections of the mind before mentioned. When persons have a trouble and confusion of mind upon them for any thing wherein they are concerned, as that which is dishonourable, base, vile, or foolish.

[2.] When there are the effects of shame ; when men act as though they were ashamed, and will have no more to do with those things wherein they have been engaged, but leave them as if ashamed. It is said of David’s soldiers, who had done no shameful thing, but courageously acquitted themselves in the battle against Absalom, but because of David’s carriage upon that business, ‘They went every one away as men ashamed, that fly in battle.’ It may be there is that light and conviction upon most concerning the gospel, that it is impossible for them to be brought into perfect trouble and confusion of mind about it, as though it was a shameful thing ; but yet perhaps they will do like men that fly in battle, and are ashamed. And in this sense the word is principally used ; for saith Christ, Mark viii. 38. ‘Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, I will be ashamed of him.’ How is that ? What will the Lord do ? He will not own him, which is called being ashamed of him.

Now this is that which the apostle intends. For the doctrine, saith he, and worship of the gospel, and for my work in preaching and dispensing it, I have neither trouble

of mind, nor will I desert it : ‘ I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.’

But you will say, What great matter is this ? I am persuaded there is not one present, but will be ready to think, that they would be as forward as the apostle in this matter. Ashamed of the gospel of Christ ! God forbid. What is there in it, that the apostle thus signally expresses it, that he would not be ashamed ? I answer, Pray consider these three things :

1st. The apostle here expresses it with especial reference to his preaching and professing the gospel at Rome. ‘ I will come to Rome also,’ saith he, ‘ for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.’ Now there was at that time at Rome a collection of all the great, wise, and inquiring men of the world. And how did they look upon the gospel and the profession of it ? Our apostle tells you, 1 Cor. i. 23. as a foolish, weak, contemptible thing. How did they look upon them that professed it ? As the filth and off-scouring of all things ; 1 Cor iv. 13. Here is a collection of the rulers of the greatest empire of the world, of all the wise and learned men, and great philosophers, princes of the world, all looking upon this gospel, obedience to it, and the worship of God in it, to be as foolish a thing as ever men engaged in, fit for none but contemptible persons. But, saith the apostle, notwithstanding this, ‘ I am not ashamed of it.’

And we may observe here, that there was not yet at Rome any actual persecution of the gospel farther than shame and reproach. And the apostle declares by this word, that it is the duty of all men to gather up their spirits to confront present difficulties whatsoever they be. It is loaded now with shame : ‘ I am not ashamed.’ It will come to blood : ‘ I will not fear my blood.’ He expresseth the whole in this which was his present duty. And for a person of those parts, and that learning which he had, to come among all the wise men in the world, to be laughed at as a babbler, as one that came with a foolish thing in his mouth, and to say, ‘ I am not ashamed :’ it was the presence of God with him, as well as a sense of duty that enabled him hereunto.

2dly. To an ingenuous, gracious soul, in all sufferings;

nothing is more grievous than shame. Hence it is reckoned as a great part of the humiliation of Christ, that 'he made himself of no reputation;' Phil. ii. 7, 8. He forewent all the esteem he might have in the world, as the Son of God. And Isa. l. 6. 'He hid not himself from shame.' So Heb. xii. 2. 'He despised the shame.' To be dealt withal as a vile person, as the off-scouring of all things, as the 'filth and dung of the city,' as the word signifies, to be carried before the face of scorners, makes a deeper impression upon gracious and ingenuous spirits, than any thing else which can be well thought of. Therefore it is a great thing that the apostle saith, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel.'

3dly. There is also a figure in the word called 'Litotes,' wherein by a negation of one, the contrary is affirmed, and that emphatically: 'I am not ashamed'; that is, 'I am confident,' it is a thing I glory in, that I make my boast of; I am ready to do and suffer any thing, according to the mind of God, for the gospel, willing to undergo whatsoever God calls me to, or to perform any thing he hath appointed for the gospel.

The opening of these two things will give us ground for our observation from the words, which is this:

Observation. Not to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, but to own it, avow it, and profess it, as a thing holy and honourable in all the duties it requires, against all reproaches and persecutions that are in the world, is the indispensable duty of every one who desires to be saved by the gospel.

I shall not produce many testimonies of Scripture to confirm this. But let us all be advised, in such a day as this not to make darkness our refuge, and an unacquaintedness with our duty, our relief; but let us search and see what Christ hath spoken concerning such a day, where there is the profession of the gospel.

I will give you one place to which you may reduce all the rest: Luke ix. 26. 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.' The whole sum of the gospel is comprised in this; the person of Christ, and the words of Christ

The person of Christ takes up the whole work of the promise; and the words take up all the commands and institutions of Christ. We have heard before what it is to be ashamed of them. And what shall be the end of such? ‘The Son of man shall be ashamed of them, when he shall come in his own glory, and his Father’s glory.’ There can be no greater weight put upon words to strike awe and dread into the minds of men. The Son of man who loved us, redeemed us, gave his life for us, shall come again, though now he be absent, and we think things are put off for a season; and then he will inquire into our deportment about the gospel; at which time he will appear in all his own glory, the glory given him upon the account of his doing his Father’s will, and the glory of his Father and the holy angels. Certainly, we should be extremely troubled then to hear Christ say, ‘I am ashamed of you.’ You have the same repeated, Mark viii. 38. Our apostle gives the same great rule, Rom. x. 10. ‘With the heart man believeth unto righteousness:’ there is righteousness, let us rest there, what need we do more? Ay, ‘but with the mouth confession is made to salvation:’ which confession comprises all the duties the gospel requires, and salvation as indispensably depends upon that, as justification doth upon faith. We cannot be justified without faith, nor can we be saved without confession.

You will say, How can this be?

To clear it to you I shall do three things:

I. I shall shew you what there is in the gospel that we are in danger to be ashamed of, if we look not well to it.

II. How we may be ashamed of it.

III. I shall give you the reasons why we ought not to be ashamed of it.

I. What is there in the gospel that we ought in an especial manner not to be ashamed of?

We ought not to be ashamed of whatever is in an especial manner exposed in the world to shame and contempt. The truth is, we do, or have lived in days, wherein it hath been so far from being a shame to be counted a Christian, that it hath been a shame for a man to be counted no Christian. It hath not been the especial duty of believers to profess the gospel in general, but the common custom of all. The profession of the gospel which many trust to in this

world, is nothing but that conformity to the world which Christ curses. In this sense, no man is ashamed of the gospel.

But there are some things that accompany the gospel which are exposed at all times to contempt and reproach, even where Christ and the gospel are publicly professed; and these we are to take heed not to be ashamed of. I will give you four instances: 1. The special truths of the gospel; 2. The special worship of the gospel; 3. The professors of the gospel; 4. The profession of the gospel according to godliness. These are things men are very apt to be ashamed of, as being all exposed to shame and contempt.

1. There are some especial truths of the gospel that in all seasons are exposed to especial contempt and reproach. Peter, 2 Epist. i. 12. calls it 'the present truth,' which in the primitive times was twofold. The apostle had to do with Jews and Gentiles, and there were two especial truths exposed to contempt and reproach, that he principally insisted upon, and would never forego. With the Gentiles, this was exposed to contempt, reproach, and persecution, that there should be salvation by the cross, 1 Cor. i. 23. it is foolishness to all the Gentiles, saith he, that there should be salvation by the cross. What doth the apostle do, let go this doctrine, and preach some other? No: he tells you, chap. ii. 2. 'he determined to know nothing among them, but Christ, and him crucified.' But when he had to do with Jews, where lay the difference? In addition of Judaical ceremonies unto the worship of God, and some place in justification. Thus, Gal. v. 11. 'If I preach circumcision,' says he, 'why am I persecuted?' That is, if I preach circumcision as they do, they would persecute me no more. Will he do it then? No: Gal. vi. 12. He will not give place; he will preach the cross of Christ, and nothing else; and preach against them, and encourage all to do so.

How shall we know then what are the present truths of the gospel, that we may take care not to be ashamed of them?

I answer in two things:

(1.) The first is, that we must shut our eyes very hard, or all the world will not suffer us to be unacquainted with them. A man must very much hide himself, if he will not

know what the truths of the gospel are that meet with contempt and reproach in the world; for he may hear of them everywhere.

(2.) For a general rule take this: consider the ways and methods God hath proceeded in for the manifestation and declaration of himself, and we shall find whereabouts in the general the truths lie, that we are not to be ashamed of, if we will continue our testimony to God.

[1.] God made a revelation of himself principally in and as the person of the Father, the unity of the divine essence acting in the authority and power of the Father in the creation of the world, in the giving of the law, and the promise of sending Christ. What was the opposition the world made unto that declaration of God? for the world doth never make conjunct opposition to the being of God, but unto the declaration that God makes of himself. While God made that declaration under the Old Testament, what was the opposition that the world made? It was plainly in idolatry and polytheism. They would have many gods, or make gods, till he was grown among them an unknown God. The testimony then which the people of God was to bear, and not be ashamed to give, was, the unity of the divine essence.

[2.] In the fulness of time God sent his Son, and he was immediately declared and manifested in the love and work of the Son, the second person. Where lay the opposition of the world? It lay directly and immediately against the person of Christ, and against his cross; it would not believe that he was the Messiah, but called him 'a glutton, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.' Wherein then consisted the testimony that believers were to give? Why, it was to the person of the Messiah, the Son of God incarnate, and to the work he had to do. God so revealing and glorifying himself in the incarnation and mediation of the Son, the truths which concerned his person, were those which men ought not peculiarly to be ashamed of, and which the world peculiarly opposed.

[3.] Where the gospel is preached, the whole word of glorifying God is committed to the Holy Ghost: Christ promised to send him to glorify him, to do the work of God in the world, and carry on all the concerns of the covenant. The Father laid the foundation of his own glory; the Son comes, and pro-

fesses he came not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him; and promises to send the Holy Ghost to do his will, to accomplish all the concerns of the covenant of grace. Wherein then lay the opposition of the world to God? It lay in opposition unto the person, doctrine, graces, gifts, and office of the Holy Ghost, as he supplies the room of Christ, to carry on his kingdom in the world. The great opposition that is made in the world against God at this day, is immediately against the work of the Holy Ghost, as carrying on the kingdom of Christ in the world. These are the objects of reproach and contempt.

By the way observe, that the opposition which was made by the heathens in their idolatry against the Deity, against God; and that made by the Jews against the person of Christ, and that which is now made against the work of the Holy Ghost is all the same; the nature of the opposition is not changed, but only the object. The opposition that was in Cain, and the profession in Abel, is the same still: the one embraces the revelation of God, the other opposes it; and that principle that acts against the Holy Ghost, would act against God, and set up idolatry in the world.

And hence we may see, that whereas God has in the days wherein we live, given a great and illustrious testimony unto the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, it may be as great as in any age since the time he gave extraordinary gifts to the apostles, and Satan had lost the advantage of managing an opposition by open blasphemies and reproaches of the Spirit, and being somewhat impatient till it returned into his hands again, he raises up another spirit that should stand in competition with it, and do the same thing; a spirit, which like the unclean spirit that cast him into the fire and into the water, in whom he was, threw those possessed by it into all difficulties to manifest itself. But whatsoever glory it might have put upon it in some men, by enabling them to suffer and bear the rage of the world that was cast upon them, there are three things that will discover that it is not a spirit from God.

1st. The place from whence it comes: it comes not from above, it is not looked for, prayed for, to be the Spirit of Christ from heaven which he hath promised; but is a mushroom that grows up in a night, the gourd of a night that

springs up within themselves, and is called the light within them all. Now the Spirit that doth the work of God is promised from above, is given by Christ, and is expected and received from thence.

2dly. It is known also by its company. The Spirit which beareth witness with Christ is always accompanied with the word; Isa. lix. 21. ‘ This is my covenant with them, saith the Lord ; My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth,’ &c. Now the work of this spirit, is to cast the word of God out of the church, to render it useless.

3dly. It is known by its work. The work of the Spirit of God is to glorify Christ; the work of this spirit is to glorify itself, to resolve all into itself, for measure, rule, principle, and all abilities.

I could not but mention this by the way, because I put the great opposition that is made in the world in these days against the Spirit of God, his graces and gifts, and the worship which believers are enabled to perform by the Spirit, in this thing. And therefore let us try the spirits, and not believe every spirit that is gone forth.

This is the first thing we are not to be ashamed of, viz. The truths of God that are reproached in the world, especially those concerning the Spirit, his graces and gifts, and the revelation of the mystery of the gospel, while a heathenish morality is advanced in their place. God forbid we should be ashamed of the gospel in this respect; that every one of us should not bear his testimony, as God is pleased to call us.

2. There is the worship of the gospel, which is always exposed to reproach and contempt in the world in the due performance of it. I pray God to keep this always in our minds, that we have no other way to be ashamed of the gospel, but by being ashamed of these things ; and we have no other way to be ashamed of them, than by neglecting the due performance of them, as the gospel commands.

Men are ashamed of the worship of the gospel, (1.) Upon the account of the worshippers ; and, (2.) Upon the account of the worship itself.

(1.) Upon the account of the worshippers, who are for the most part poor and contemptible in the world ; for ‘ not many

great, not many noble, not many wise and learned are called.' Whatsoever work God hath to do by his, they are looked upon as the off-scouring of all things, such a company as those who are of gallant minds and spirits, do despise. I wonder what thoughts they would have had of Christ himself when followed by a company of fishermen, women, and children, crying Hosannah; and others, who said, 'This people who know not the law are cursed;' John vii. 49. Now is not a man apt to be ashamed of such abjects as follow Christ? Shall a man leave the society of great, and wise, and learned men, to join with them? Let those think of it who are upon any account lift up in the world above their brethren. Do not be ashamed of them; they are such as you must accompany, if ever you intend to come to glory. We must keep company with them here, if we intend it hereafter. And therefore be not ashamed of the worship of Christ because of the worshippers; though they can do nothing but love Christ and worship him; notwithstanding the suffrage that lies against them by great and learned men, such as were at Rome when Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

(2.) Upon the account of the worship itself. The world is, and ever was in love with a gaudy worship, which some of them have called, being well painted, the beauty of holiness. The Jews and Samaritans take them in all; the one was for the temple, the other for the mountain. The gospel comes and calls them from them both, to worship God in spirit and in truth; to a worship that hath no beauty but what is given by the Spirit of Christ; nor order, but what is given by the word. This is greatly despised in the world, and not only despised, but persecuted, I mean, sometimes it was so, I am sure formerly. Therefore the apostle gives that caution, Heb. x. 25. If you would not be ashamed, 'forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.' There is a synecdoche in the word assembling, and it is put for the whole worship of Christ, because worship was performed in their assemblies; and he that forsakes the assemblies, forsakes the worship of Christ, as some of them did when exposed to danger: and it is the manner of some still to do so. When a fair day comes, then they will go to the assemblies; but in a storm they will absent themselves, as

did the Samaritans. But what should move them to forsake their assembling? He tells you, ver. 33, 34. ‘Ye were made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions, and the spoiling of your goods. But you know in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.’ This made some weary of assembling; but be not you ashamed of assembling, or of the worship of God. This is the second thing that is exposed to shame and reproach in the world; and which in particular we are bound by our profession not to be ashamed of.

SERMON XXXVIII.*

3. WE are not to be ashamed of the professors of the gospel. Our Lord Christ hath laid it down as an everlasting rule, that in them he is honoured, or dishonoured, in the world. And it is the great rule whereby false professors will be tried at the last day; men who pretend a profession of the name of Christ, as you may see, Matt. xxv. 40. 45. ‘What you have done unto them, you have done unto me,’ saith he, and ‘what you have omitted, that ought to have been done to them, you have omitted the doing of it unto me.’ It is those alone in whom Christ may be honoured or despised in this world: for he is in himself, in his own person in that condition, that our goodness, our honour, extends not immediately unto him; and for the contempt and despising of men, he is not concerned in it. Hence this is reckoned as the great commendation of the faith of Moses, Heb. xi. 23—26. that he refused all the honours of the world, and all the reputation he might have had, to own and esteem the poor, reproached, despised, persecuted interest of Christ in the world, as he there calls it. He joined himself unto the professors of the faith, in opposition to all the world, and the greatness of it, which was his greatest commendation. And see the pathetical prayer of the apostle Paul for Onesiphorus upon the discharge of this duty, 2 Tim. i. 16—18. ‘The Lord,’ saith he, ‘give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.’ Onesiphorus was a man of some credit and repute in the world; poor Paul was a prisoner bound with a chain, that he might have been ashamed to own him; but instead of that, he sought him out, he was not ashamed of his chain. To be ashamed of the poor professors of the gospel, so in themselves, or made so by the power of oppressors, is to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, his truths, his worship, and his people.

* This sermon was preached May 26, 1670.

4. There is a special kind of profession, that in its own nature is exposed to reproach in the world. The apostle Paul tells us, 2 Tim. iii. 12. ‘They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.’ There is, John xv. 4, 5. a being in Christ by profession, and not living godly; for there are branches in the vine by profession, that bring forth no fruit; men that have a profession wherewith they do not trouble the world, and for which the world will not trouble them; that can go to that length in compliance with the world, and the ways of it, as that they shall not have one drop of the spirit of the witnesses of Christ, who torments the men of the earth. But ‘they that will live godly,’ that is, engage in a profession, that shall upon all occasions, and in all instances manifest the power of it, they ‘shall suffer persecution.’ We see many every day keep up a profession, but such a profession as will not provoke the world. Now this is to be ashamed of the gospel, to be ashamed of the power and glory of it, to be ashamed of the author of it; no man can put Jesus Christ to greater shame, than by professing the gospel without shewing the power of it.

III. I shall now give the reasons why we ought not in any thing to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. I speak unto persons that are under a conviction that such and such things belong unto the gospel. If we are not, what makes us here this day? I do not go to persuade any, that this or that worship, or this or that way, is according to the gospel; but I suppose a conviction thereof to be upon us; upon a supposition of which conviction and persuasion, I shall offer these reasons, why we ought not to be ashamed of the gospel. And,

1. The first is this; because Christ, the captain of our salvation, and the great example of our obedience, was not ashamed of all that he had to undergo for us.

There are two things that greatly aggravate things shameful, and press, if possible, shame upon a person.

(1.) The dignity of the person that is exposed to things shameful. It is more for a person honourable, noble, and in repute for wisdom in the world, to be exposed to indignities, reproaches, and things shameful, as the apostle speaks; than for beggars, poor, vile persons, of no repute. Now consider the person of Christ, who he was, and what

he was. He was the eternal Son of God, the ‘first-born of the whole creation;’ and, as in his divine nature, he was ‘the express,’ the essential ‘image of the Father,’ so in his whole person, as incarnate, he was the glory of all the works of God. And the apostle, when he would set out the great condescension of Christ in submitting unto things shameful, doth at the same time describe the greatness and glory of his person ; Phil. ii. 6—8. ‘He made himself,’ says he, ‘of no reputation; he took upon him the form of a servant, and he was obedient unto the death of the cross;’ which three things, as I could shew you, are comprehensive of all that was shameful to Christ. But at the same time that he tells us what he did, how doth he describe him? When he did so, he was ‘in the form of God, and accounted it no robbery to be equal with God:’ he was the great God in his own person, and equal with the Father; yet then this honourable one condescended to all things shameful and reproachful in the world.

(2.) Shame is aggravated from the causes and matter of it. There are various things that cause shame. Some are put to shame by reproaches, scandals, lies; some by poverty; some by imprisonment; and some by death, made shameful by the ways, means, and preparations for it. By which of these was Christ now made an object of shame? By all of them, and inconceivably more than any heart is able to apprehend, or tongue to express. He was reproached as a wine-bibber, and a glutton; as a seditious person, and mover of sedition; as a fanatic, and one besides himself. He was in that state of poverty, that during the whole course of his ministry he had not where to lay his head, nor any thing to live upon, but what good people administered unto him of their substance. In the midst of this course he was taken praying, when he told them, they might have taken him at any time. ‘I was,’ says he, ‘in the temple openly, I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.’ He was taken by soldiers with swords and staves, as a thief and malefactor; apprehended, carried away, and hanged upon a tree, the shamefulest death then in the world, in the midst of Jews and Gentiles, with both which sorts of men that kind of death was the most shameful: the Romans put none to that sort of death but slaves, thieves, and rob-

bers, the worst malefactors; and among the Jews it was the only kind of death that was accursed; Deut. xxi. 23. ‘He that is hanged on the tree is accursed of God.’ Which words our apostle repeats, and applies them to Christ, Gal. iii. 13. How did Christ behave himself now, as to all these shameful things that came upon him? Hear the prophet expressing of it in his name, Isa. 1. 6, 7. ‘I gave my back to the smiter, and my cheek to them that plucked off the hair;’ (the usual way of dealing with persons in such cases) ‘I hid not my face from shame and spitting; for the Lord God will help me, therefore I shall not be confounded; I know I shall not be ashamed.’ Did he recoil, or go back from his work? Did he repent of it? No: ‘Thy law is written in my heart;’ I am content ‘to do thy will, O God.’ And in the issue of the whole, Heb. xii. 2. ‘He despised the shame, and endured the cross,’ which made way for his glory.

Now here lies the foundation of our reason; If the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, being engaged purely out of his own love in a work for us poor, vile, sinful worms of the earth, whom he might have left justly to perish under the wrath of God, which we had deserved, underwent all these shameful things, and never had a recoiling thought to draw back, and leave us to ourselves; have we not an obligation of love, gratitude, and obedience, not to be ashamed of those few drops of this great storm that may possibly fall upon us in this world for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can we be disciples of Christ, and yet think in this matter to be above our Master? Can we be his servants, and think to be above our Lord? We are delicate and tender, and would fain have all men speak well of us. But we must come to another frame, if we intend to be the disciples of Christ. What would be the issue of our account at the last day, if he should inquire of us what we have done in reference to the profession of the gospel? Whether we have observed all those duties, that we have had a conviction upon our spirits and consciences we ought to observe and perform in the assembling of ourselves, in the dispensation of the word, in the celebration of ordinances, in prayer, fasting, hearing the word, and all those things which the gospel requires of us? Should we make that answer, Truly, Lord, we thought all very good, but were afraid if we engaged in

them, we should have been exposed to all the reproach, contempt, and trouble in the world; it would have brought trouble upon our persons, and the spoiling of our goods; it would have brought us into great distress? What would then be the reply, according to the rule of the gospel, but, Stand upon your own bottom, that was my day, these were things I required of you; you were ashamed of me, I am now ashamed of you? Certainly this would be a woful issue of it. But,

2. The second reason is this; That whatsoever state or condition we may be brought into, upon the account of the gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ will not be ashamed of us in that state and condition. I told you before, in the opening of the words, that shame principally respects dishonour and disreputation, that the things we are engaged in are vile, contemptible, exposed to reproach. Now if a man in any thing he is called in question about, have those who are great and honourable to abide by him, and own the cause wherein he is engaged, whatever other affections he may have, it will take off his shame. Now this great and honourable person will not be ashamed of us in any condition: Heb. ii. 11. ‘He is not ashamed to call them brethren.’ But suppose they are poor, and have nothing left them in this world? It is all one. Suppose they are in prison? Christ will stand by them, and say, ‘These are my brethren.’ The word *ἐπαισχύνεται*, ‘ashamed,’ is there used peculiarly in respect to those shameful things that may befall us in this world. Notwithstanding all these sufferings, yet ‘he is not ashamed to call them brethren.’ Doth he go no farther? Yes; Heb. xi. 16. ‘Wherefore’ (speaking directly to this cause in hand) ‘God is not ashamed to be called their God.’ What is the reason it is so expressed? The words are emphatical. Look upon the two parties that are in the world; the one great, wise, glorious, powerful, and at liberty; the other poor, despised, contemned all the world over. God comes into the world and sees these two parties: Which now do you think he owns? Is it not a shame for the great and glorious God to own poor, despised, contemned, reproached, persecuted ones? No: God ‘is not ashamed to be called their God;’ their God in particular, their God in covenant, one that owns them in opposition to all the world, with

whom they have to conflict. Oh, that we would persuade our hearts in every duty that this is our state, that Jesus Christ stands by, and saith, ‘I am not ashamed of you!’ God stands by, and saith, ‘I am not ashamed to be owned to be your God!’ Is not this great encouragement?

3. The third reason is, Because in the profession of the gospel we are called to nothing at all that is shameful in the judgment of any sober, wise, rational, judicious man. If the profession of the gospel called us unto any thing that is vile, dishonourable, unholy, of ill report among men, certainly we had reason to be extremely cautious of our practising of it. But is it any shame to own God to be our God, to own Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Master, to profess we must yield obedience unto the commands of Christ? Is there any shame in praying, in hearing of the word of God, in preaching of it according to his mind and will? Is there any shame in fasting, in godly conference? Let all the world be judge, whether there be any thing shameful in these things, which are good, useful, honourable to all mankind. The gospel calls to nothing that is shameful. Therefore the old heathens were so wise that they would not, against the light of nature, oppress the assemblies of Christians where there was nothing shameful; and therefore they charged all shameful things upon them. The whole vogue of the world was, that they met together to further promiscuous lusts and seditions. They made that their pretence; they durst not disturb them merely upon the account of their profession. And it is so still: men little know that we will not, dare not, cannot take the name of our God in vain, and prostitute any ordinance of God to give the least semblance to any seditious practice. Whatsoever violence may come upon the disciples of Christ, they had rather die than prostitute an ordinance of Christ, to give the least countenance or semblance to any such thing. The gospel calls us to nothing that hath any reproach in it. If men will esteem the strict profession of the gospel, praying, hearing the word, abstinence from sin, to be shameful things; if they will count it strange that we run not out into the same excess of riot with themselves; shall we stand to the judgment of such sensualists, that live in a perpetual contradiction to themselves? who profess that they honour Christ, and at the same time

reproach every thing of Christ in the world? We have no reason then to be ashamed of the gospel, which requires no shameful thing at our hands, nothing that is evil and hurtful to mankind; nothing but what is good, holy, beautiful, commendable, and useful unto all societies of mankind. And we dare not prostitute the least part of an ordinance, to the encouraging any disorder in this world, and therein take the name of our God in vain.

4. The fourth reason is that which the apostle gives us, Heb. xii. 1. ‘We are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses,’ to this very end and purpose. In the preceding chapter he had given a catalogue of many under the Old Testament, patriarchs and prophets (time would have failed him to reckon up all), who signally manifested they were not ashamed of the gospel, and the promises of it, whatever difficulties did befall them. And now, saith the apostle, you ‘have a cloud of witnesses,’ the great examples of those holy souls that are now at rest with God, enjoying the triumphs of Christ over all his adversaries: they were, as you are, conflicting in this world with reproaches, adversaries, persecution; and they had this issue by faith, they made a conquest over all. And James says, ‘ You have, my brethren, the prophets and apostles for your examples.’ The Lord help us to take the example they have set us, Acts v. 41. when they went away triumphing, that they were counted worthy to suffer shame and reproach for the name of Christ. The Lord help us that we dishonour not the gospel by giving the world reason to say, that there is a race of professors risen up now, who have no manner of conformity to them who went before them in the profession of the gospel.

5. The next reason I shall insist upon is taken out of the text, the particular reason the apostle here gives, why he was not ashamed of it. ‘I am not ashamed,’ saith he, ‘of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God to salvation to all that believe.’ We talk of profession of the gospel. What is it, say some, but canting among yourselves, speaking things unintelligible? Such kind of expressions are cast upon it in the world. But, saith the apostle, this gospel we profess is quite another thing than you dream or think of, and we profess it no other, nor ever will engage one day in the profession of the gospel any farther, than as it comes

under this account, that ‘it is the power of God unto salvation.’ Manifest to me, that any way or parcel of the gospel which we do profess, or practise, hath not the power of God in it, and upon it, towards the furtherance of salvation, and I will throw off that profession.

But you will ask, perhaps, In what sense is the gospel the power of God?

I answer, In a threefold sense.

(1.) Negatively: there is not any other power in it. The world saw that there was a great efficacy in the gospel, and they knew not whence it was; but they charged it upon two things: First, Upon the matter of it, that it was a cunningly devised fable. So the apostle Peter tells us, 2 Epist. i. 16. ‘We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power of Christ.’ The world charged it so, and thought that gave it its efficacy. Secondly, There was another thing to which they thought its efficacy was owing, and that was the eloquence and power of its preachers. The preachers of it were surely eloquent, excellent men, that they could so prevail upon the people, and win them over to the gospel. No, saith the apostle, 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. ‘My speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.’ But let not men mistake; the efficacy of the gospel is owing to neither of these causes, but to the divine power that accompanies it.

(2.) It was the power of God declaratively: it made known the power of God. So our apostle declares in the very next words to the text: ‘For therein,’ saith he, ‘is the righteousness of God revealed.’ It hath made a revelation of the way whereby God will save men. It makes a revelation of that power which God puts forth for the salvation of men.

(3.) It is the power of God instrumentally. It is the instrument God puts forth to effect his great and mighty works in the world. Preaching is looked upon as a very foolish thing in the world. ‘We preach Christ crucified, to the Greeks foolishness;’ 1 Cor. i. 23. But God hath chosen this foolish thing to confound the wise. And though the preachers of it are very weak men, mere earthen vessels, God hath

chosen this weak thing to bring to nought things that are strong and mighty, the things of this world. Therefore, Acts xx. 32. it is called ‘the word of God’s grace, which is able to build us up, and give us an inheritance among them that are sanctified.’ The plain preaching of it hath this power upon the souls of men, to convince them, convert them, draw them home to God, to expose them to all troubles in this world, to make them let go their reputation and livelihood, and expose themselves even to death itself: it is the power of God to these ends and purposes; God hath made it his instrument for that end. If it were the power of God to give peace and prosperity unto a nation, or to heal the sick, there is no man need, or ought to be ashamed of it; but to be the power of God for so excellent an end, as the eternal salvation of the souls of men, makes it much more glorious. The gospel we profess, all the parts of it, every thing wherein it is engaged, is that whereby God puts forth his power to save our poor souls, and the souls of them who believe: and the Lord God never lay it to the charge of any who would hinder the dispensation of the gospel unto this end and purpose. It were sad for men to keep corn from the poor, physic from the sick, that lie a dying; but to keep the word of God from the souls of men, that they might be saved, Lord, lay it not to the charge of any.

The author of the gospel was not ashamed of his work he engaged in on our behalf; is not ashamed of us in any of our sufferings, in any of the shameful things we may undergo. The gospel requires no shameful thing at our hands; puts us upon no duty that can justly expose us to shame; the things are good, useful, honourable to men. We have a cloud of witnesses about us: and if any man require of us, what this gospel is, which we profess, and an account whereupon we profess it, we can make this answer; ‘It is the power of God unto salvation;’ and for that end alone do we profess it.

I might speak to some farther reasons, to shew why this duty is indispensably necessary; for, as I said, it is not only that we ought not to be ashamed, but the duty is indispensable. And I thought to have spoken to those two heads, which alone make a duty indispensable, that we may not upon any account be against it; because it is necessary, as

we say, ‘necessitate præcepti;’ and likewise, ‘necessitate medii;’ that is, both upon the command of Christ, and upon the account of the order of the things themselves.

It is necessary upon the command of Christ, because he hath required it at our hands, and under that condition, that if ever we intend to be owned by him at the last day, we should own his gospel in the profession of it. All the world, and all our own things, and all the injunctions of the sons of men, cannot give a dispensation to our souls to exempt them from under the authority of the commands of Christ. Let us look unto ourselves, we are under the commands of Christ, and there is no one particular duty to be avoided, but what must be accommodated to this rule. And not only so,

But it is necessary also from the order of things : Christ hath appointed it as a means for that great end of bringing our souls to salvation. As well may a man arrive to a city, and never come into the way that leads unto it, as we go to rest with Christ, and never come to the profession of the gospel, nor abide by it : this is the way that leads unto it.

I have done with what I thought to deliver upon this doctrine, and among many uses that might be made, I shall only commend one unto you, without which it will be utterly impossible that any of us shall be able at the long run to keep up to the profession of the gospel, or any duty of it. And that is this :

Use. Get an experience of the power of the gospel, and all the ordinances of it, in and upon your own hearts, or all your profession is an expiring thing : unless, I say, you find the power of God upon your own hearts in every ordinance, expect not any continuance in your profession. If the preaching of the word be not effectual unto the renewing of your souls, the illuminating of your minds, the endearing of your hearts to God, if you do not find power in it, you will quickly reason with yourselves, upon what account should you adventure trouble and reproach for it.

If you have an experience of this power upon your hearts, it will recover all your recoiling, wandering thoughts, when you find you cannot live without it. It is so as to every ordinance whatever, unless we can have some experience of the benefit of it, and of the power and efficacy of the grace of God

in it, we can never expect to abide in our profession of it. What will you bear witness unto, an empty, bare profession, that neither honoureth God, nor doth good to your own souls?

If you would then be established in this truth, of not being ashamed of the gospel, recall to your minds what benefit you have received by it. Have you received any advantage by hearing the word? Hath it at any time restored your souls when you have been wandering? Hath it comforted you when you have been cast down? Hath it engaged your hearts unto God? Recall to mind what benefit and advantage you have had by it; and then ask, what it hath done, that now you should forsake it? And in every ordinance that you are made partakers of, inquire diligently what power of God upon your own hearts goes forth in the dispensation of that ordinance. This will confirm and strengthen you; and without this, all your profession is vain, and will signify nothing.