

DISCOURSE V.*

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.—1 COR. xi. 28.

I HAVE been treating of that special communion which believers have with Christ, in the administration of the ordinance of the supper of the Lord; and thought I should have treated no more of that subject; having gone through all the particulars of it, which were practical, such as might be reduced to present practice. But I remember I said nothing concerning preparation for it, which yet is a needful duty: and therefore I shall a little speak to that also; not what may doctrinally be delivered upon it, but those things, or some of them at least, in which every soul will find a practical concern that intends to be a partaker of that ordinance to benefit and advantage: and I have taken these words of the apostle for my groundwork. ‘But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.’

There were many disorders fallen in this church at Corinth; and that various ways, in schisms and divisions, in neglect of discipline, in false opinions, and particularly in a great abuse of the administration of this great ordinance of the supper of the Lord. And though I do not, I dare not, I ought not to bless God for their sin; yet I bless God for his providence. Had it not been for their disorders, we had all of us been much in darkness as to all church way. The correction of their disorders contain the principal rule for church communion, and the administration of this sacrament that we have in the whole Scripture; which might have been hid from us, but that God suffered them to fall into them on purpose, that through their fall in them, and by them, he might instruct his church in all ages to the end of the world.

The apostle is here rectifying abuses about the administration of the Lord’s supper, which were many; and he applies particular directions to all their particular miscar-

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riages, not now to be insisted on; and he gathers up all directions into this one general rule that I have here read, 'Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat,' &c. Now this self-examination extends itself unto the whole due preparation of the souls of men for the actual participation of this ordinance. And I shall endeavour, by plain instances out of the Scripture (which is my way in these familiar exercises), to manifest that there is a preparation necessary for the celebration, or observance of all solemn ordinances. And I shall shew you what that preparation is, and wherein it doth consist. And then I shall deduce from thence what is that particular preparation which is incumbent upon us, in reference unto this special ordinance, that is superadded unto the general preparation that is required unto all ordinances.

I. I shall manifest, that there is a preparation necessary for the celebration of solemn worship. We have an early instance of it in Gen. xxxv. 1—5. In the first verse, 'God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and make there an altar unto God.' It was a solemn ordinance Jacob was called unto, to build an altar unto God, and to offer sacrifice. What course did he take? you may see, ver. 2, 3. 'And Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments; and let us arise, and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto God.' I will not engage, saith he, in this great duty without a preparation for it; and, saith he, the preparation shall be suitable. Peculiar, special preparation (to observe that by the way) for any ordinance, consists in the removal of that from us which stands in peculiar opposition to that ordinance, whatever it be. 'I am to build an altar unto God; put away the strange gods;' and accordingly he did so.

When God came to treat with the people in that great ordinance of giving the law, which was the foundation of all following ordinances; Exod. xix. 10, 11. 'The Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to-day, and to-morrow; and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day. For the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai.' I will not insist on these typical preparations, but only say, it sufficiently proves the

general thesis, that there ought to be such a preparation for any meeting with God in any of his ordinances. Saith he, 'sanctify yourselves,' &c. 'and on the third day I will come.' God is a great God, with whom we have to do. It is not good to have carnal boldness in our accesses and approaches to him; and therefore, he teaches us, that there is a preparation due. And what weight God lays upon this, you may see, 2 Chron. xxx. 18—20. A multitude of people came to the sacrifice of the passover; but, saith he, 'they had not cleansed themselves,' there was not due preparation; but 'Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one, that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.' Perhaps the people might have thought it enough, that they had their personal qualification, that they were believers, that they had prepared their hearts to seek the Lord God of their fathers; a thing most persons trust unto in this matter. No, saith the king, in praying for them; they did prepare their hearts for the Lord God of their fathers, but 'they were not prepared according to the preparation of the sanctuary.' There is an instituted preparation, as well as a personal disposition, which if not observed, God will smite them: God had smote the people; given them some token of his displeasure: they come with great willingness and desire to be partakers of this holy ordinance; yet, because they were not prepared according to the purification of the sanctuary, God smites them.

It was an ordinance of God that Paul had to perform, and we would have thought it a thing that he might easily have done, without any great forethought, but it had that weight upon his spirit, Rom. xv. 30, 31. that with all earnestness he begs the prayers of others, that he might be carried through the performance of it; 'Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints.' He had a service to do at Jerusalem. He was gathering the contributions of the saints (an ordinance of God) to carry it up to the poor of Jerusalem; and

it was upon his heart, that this his service might find acceptance with them; therefore he begs with all his soul, 'I beseech you, brethren,' &c. So great weight did he lay upon the performance of an ordinance, that one would think might be easily passed over, without any great regard.

The caution we have, Eccles. v. 1. is to the same purpose: 'Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil.' I shall not stand upon the particular exposition of any of these expressions, but it is a plain caution of diligent consideration of ourselves in all things we have to do in the house of God. A bold venturing upon an ordinance is but the sacrifice of fools: 'Keep thy foot,' look to thy affections; 'be more ready to hear,' saith he; that is, to attend unto the command, what God requires from thee, and the way and manner of it, than merely to run upon a sacrifice, or the performance of the duty itself.

I will name one place more: Psal. xxvi. 6. 'I will wash my hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord.'

I have a little confirmed this general proposition, that all take for granted; and I fear we content ourselves for the most part with the state and condition of those mentioned, who prepared their hearts to meet the Lord God of their fathers, not considering how they may be prepared 'according to the preparation of the sanctuary.' You will ask, What is that preparation?

This question brings me to the

II. Second general head I propounded to speak unto: I answer, That the general preparation that respects all ordinances hath reference unto God; to ourselves; to the ordinance itself.

1. It hath respect unto God. This is the first thing to be considered; for this he lays down as the great law of his ordinances. 'I will be sanctified in them, that draw nigh unto me:' Lev. x. 3. God is, in the first place, to be considered in all our drawings nigh unto him; as that is the general name of all ordinances, a drawing nigh, an access unto God. 'I will be sanctified,' &c. Now God is to be considered three ways, that he may be sanctified in any ordinance: as the author; as the object; as the end of it.

I shall speak only to those things that lie practically before us, and are indispensably required of us in waiting upon God, in any and every ordinance.

(1.) Our preparation, in reference unto God, consists in due consideration of God, as the author of any ordinance wherein we draw nigh unto him. For this is the foundation of all ordinances. Rom. xiv. 11. 'As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to me.' A practical sense of the authority of God in every ordinance, is that which is required in the very first place for our preparation. I know full well how that the mind of man is to be influenced by general convictions and particular customs. Particular usages built upon general convictions carry most people through their duties: but that is no preparation of heart. There is to be an immediate sense of the authority and command of God.

(2.) We are to consider God in Christ, as the immediate object of that worship which in every ordinance we do perform. You will ask, What special apprehensions concerning God are particularly necessary to this duty of preparation for communion with God in an ordinance? I answer, Two are particularly necessary, that should be practically upon our thoughts in every ordinance; the presence of God, and the holiness of God. As God is the object of our worship, these two properties of God are principally to be considered in all our preparations.

[1] The presence of God. When Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 27. derided the worshippers of Baal, the chief part of his derision was, 'he is in a journey;' you have a God that is absent, saith Elijah: and the end of all idolatry in the world, is to feign the presence of an absent Deity. All images and idols are set up for no other end, but to feign the presence of what really is absent. Our God is present, and in all his ordinances. I beg of God, I may have a double sense of his presence, 1st. A special sense of his omnipresence. God requires, that we should put in all ordinances a specialty of faith upon his general attributes. Gen. xxviii. 16. Jacob, when God appeared unto him, though but in a dream, awaked out of sleep, and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.' I would say so concerning every ordinance whereunto I go; the Lord is in

that place. I speak now only concerning his real presence : for if idolaters adorn all their places of worship with pictures, images and idols, that they might feign the presence of a God ; I ought to act faith particularly upon the real presence of the immense and omnipresent God. He bids us consider it in the business of his worship ; Jer. xxiii. 23. ‘ Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off ? ’ Consider my glorious presence is every where. As we ought always, wherever we are, and whatever we do, to carry a sense with us of the presence of God, to say, God is here, that we may not be surprised in our journies, or in any thing that may befall us, suppose a broken leg or a broken arm ; then we may say, ‘ God is in this place, and I knew it not. ’ So particularly where we have to do in his ordinances, let there be an antecedent remembrance that God is in that place.

2dly. We are to remember the gracious presence of God. There was a twofold presence of God of old, the one temporary, by an extraordinary appearance ; the other standing, by a continued institution. Wherever God made an extraordinary appearance, there he required of his people to look upon him to have a special presence : it was but temporary, when God appeared to Moses in the bush : ‘ Draw not nigh,’ saith God : ‘ put off thy shoes from off thy feet ; for the ground whereon thou standest is holy ;’ because of God’s special appearance : but the next day, as far as I know, sheep fed upon that holy ground. It was no longer holy than God’s appearance made it so. So he said to Joshua, when he was by Jericho, ‘ Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy,’ Josh. v. 15. It was a temporary appearance of God ; there was his special presence. It was so on the institution of the tabernacle and temple ; God instituted them, and gave his special presence to them by virtue of his institution. Our Saviour tells us, all this is departed under the gospel, John iv. 21. ‘ You shall no longer worship God,’ saith he, ‘ neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem ; but he that worshippeth God must worship him in spirit and in truth.’ Is there no special presence of God remains then ? Yea, there is a special presence of God in all his ordinances and institutions. ‘ Wherever I record my name’ (as the name of God is upon all his institutions), ‘ there I will come unto you, and I will bless you,’ saith God in

Exod. xx. 24. Let us exercise our thoughts then to this especial promised presence of God in every ordinance and institution; it belongs greatly to our preparation for an ordinance. It was no hard thing for them, you may think, of old, where God had put his presence in a place, to go thither, and expect the presence of God; things that are absent are hard; things that are present are not so. But it is no harder matter for us to go and expect God's presence in his instituted ordinances now, than for them to go to the temple; considering God, as the object of our worship, is no less present with us.

[2.] The second property which is principally to be considered in God, in his ordinances, as he is the object of them, is his holiness. This is the general rule that God gives in all ordinances, 'Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.' And Joshua, chap. xxiv. 19. tells the people what they were principally to consider in serving the Lord. 'We will serve the Lord,' say the people: saith Joshua, 'You cannot serve him, for the Lord is a holy God;' intimating, that they were to have due apprehensions of his holiness; and without it, there is no approaching unto him in his service. The apostle gives a great and plain rule to this purpose, Heb. xii. 28, 29. 'Let us have grace,' saith he, 'whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.' What doth he propose now as the principal reason why he requires this preparation? 'For,' saith he, 'our God is a consuming fire.' What property of God is expressed by this word 'consuming fire?' It is the holiness of God, the purity of God's nature, that can bear no corrupt, nor defiled thing. It is set forth by that metaphorical expression, 'a consuming fire.' As fire is the most pure and unmixed element, and so powerful of itself, as that it will consume and destroy every thing that is not perfectly of its own nature; so is God, saith he, 'a consuming fire;' and in all your serving of him, and approaches unto him, labour to obtain a frame of spirit that becomes them who have to do with that God who is so pure and holy.

I do but choose out these things, which, in the way of ordinances, I would say, are, I may say, desire, should be most upon my heart and spirit: I might easily enlarge it to other considerations. But let these two considerations dwell upon

our minds, as our preparation for our access unto God; thoughts of his glorious and gracious presence, and of his holiness. Psal. xciii. 5. 'Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever.' That is the second thing with respect to God, as the object of all the ordinances of our worship.

(3.) Our preparation respects God as he is the end of ordinances; and that to these three purposes, if I could insist upon them. He is the end of them, as we aim in them to 'give glory unto him:' he is the end of them, as we aim in them 'to be accepted with him:' he is the end of them, as we aim in them 'to be blessed by him.' These are the three things that are our end in all ordinances that we celebrate.

[1.] The first is, the general end of all that we do in this world; we are to do all to the glory of God: it is the immediate end of all our worship. 'If I am a father,' saith he, 'where is my honour?' Where is my glory? Mal. i. 6. Do you come to worship me? you are to give me honour as to a father, glory as to a master, as to a lord. We come to own him as our Father, acknowledge our dependence upon him as a Father, our submission to him as our Lord and Master, and thus give glory to him. He hath never taken one step to the preparing of his heart according to the preparation of the sanctuary, in the celebration of ordinances, who hath not designed in them to give glory unto God.

[2.] Another end is, to be accepted with him; according to that great promise, which you have, Ezek. xliiii. 27. 'You shall make your burnt-offerings upon the altar, and I will accept you, saith the Lord God.' It is a promise of gospel-times; for it is in the description of the new, glorious temple. We come to God to have our persons and offerings accepted by Jesus Christ. And,

[3.] To 'be blessed according to his promise.' That 'God will bless us out of Zion.' What the particular blessings are we look for in particular ordinances, in due time, God assisting, I shall acquaint you with, when we come to the special and particular preparation for that ordinance we aim at. But this is necessary to all, and so to that.

2. This preparation respects ourselves. There are three things which I desire my heart may be prepared by in reference to the ordinances of God.

(1.) The first is indispensably necessary, laid down in that

great rule, Psal. lxvi. 18. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;' that I bring a heart to ordinances without regard to any particular iniquity. We have the dreadful instance of Judas, who came to that great ordinance of the passover, with regard to iniquity in his heart, which particular iniquity was covetousness, and went away with the devil in his whole mind and soul.

Ezek. xiv. 4. is another place to this purpose: 'Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the Lord will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols.' There is no more effectual course in the world to make poor souls incorrigible, than to come to ordinances, and to be able to digest under them a regard to iniquity in our hearts. If we have idols, God will answer us according to our idols. What is the answering of men according to their idols? Why, plainly, it is this, allotting them peace while they have their idols; you shall have peace with regard to iniquity; you come for peace, take peace; which is the saddest condition any soul can be left under: you shall have peace and your idols together. Whenever we prepare ourselves, if this part of our preparation be wanting, if we do not all of us cast out the idols of our hearts, and cease regarding of iniquity, all is lost.

(2.) The second head of preparation on our own part, is self-abasement, out of a deep sense of the infinite distance that is between God and us, whom we go to meet. I have taken upon myself to speak to the great Possessor of heaven and earth, who am but dust and ashes. Nothing brings God and man so near together, as a due sense of our infinite distance. Isa. lvii. 15. 'Thus saith the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.'

(3.) A heart filled with love to ordinances, is a great preparation for an ordinance. How doth David, in the eighty-fourth Psalm, pant and long, and breathe after the ordinances of God! To love prayer, to love the word, is a great preparation for both. To love the presence of Christ

in the supper, is a great preparation for it. To keep an habitual frame of love in the heart for ordinances.

I would not load your memories with particulars. I mention plain practical things unto those, for whose spiritual welfare I am more particularly concerned; that we may retain them for our use, and know them for ourselves; and they are such as I know more or less (though perhaps not so distinctly) all our hearts work after, and in these things our souls do live.

3. Our preparation in reference unto any ordinance itself; which consists in two things: (1.) A satisfactory persuasion of the institution of the ordinance itself; that it is that which God hath appointed. If God should meet us, and say, 'Who hath required these things at your hands?' And Christ should come and tell us, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be plucked up:' or, 'In vain do you worship me; teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.' How would such words fill the hearts of poor creatures with confusion, if engaged in such ways that God hath not required? We must be careful then that for the substance of the duty, it be appointed of God.

(2.) That it be performed in a due manner. One failure herein, what a disturbance did it bring upon poor David? It is observed by many, that search the whole course of David's life, that which he was most eminent in, which God did so bless him for, and own him in, was his love to the ordinances of God. And I cannot but think with what a full heart David went to bring home the ark; with what longings after God; with what rejoicings in him; with what promises to himself; what glorious things there would be after he had the ark of God to be with him: and yet, when he went to do this, you know what a breach God made upon him, dashed all his hopes, and all the good frame in him: God made a breach upon Uzzah; and it is said, the thing God did displeased David, it quite unframed him, and threw a damp on his joy and delight for the present. But he afterward gathers it up, 1 Chron. xv. 12, 13. 'He spake to the Levites, sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethen, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it; for because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we

sought him not after the due order.' He sought him, saith he, 'but not after the due order.' And what that due order was, he shews in the next verses, where he declares, that the Levites carried the ark upon their own shoulders, with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded, according to the word of the Lord; whereas before, they carried it in a cart, which was not for that service. It is a great thing to have the administration of an ordinance in the due order. God lays great weight upon it, and we ought to take care that the order be observed.

This is what we have to offer to you concerning the two general propositions: that there is a preparation required of us for the observance of all solemn ordinances; and that this preparation consists in a due regard to God, to ourselves, and to the ordinance, whatever it be. To God, as the author, as the object, and as the end of ordinances; to ourselves, to remove that which would hinder, not to regard iniquity; to be self-abased in our hearts with respect to the infinite distance that there is between God and us, and with a love unto ordinances: with respect unto the ordinance itself, that it be of God's appointment for the matter and manner. These things may help us to a due consideration, whether we have failed in any of them, or not.

I have mentioned nothing but what is plain and evident from the Scripture, and what is practicable; nothing but what is really required of us; such things as we ought not to esteem a burden, but an advantage: and whereinsoever we have been wanting we should do well to labour to have our hearts affected with it; for it hath been one cause why so many of us have laboured in the fire under ordinances, and have had no profit nor benefit by them. As I said before, conviction is the foundation, custom is the building of most in their observation of ordinances. Some grow weary of them; some wear them on their necks as a burden; some seek relief from them, and do not find it; and is it any wonder, if this great duty be wanting? having neither considered God, nor ourselves, in what we go about? And above all things take heed of that deceit I mentioned, which is certainly very apt to impose itself upon us; that where there is a disposition in the person there needs no preparation for the duty. There was a preparation in those whom God

broke out upon, because they were not prepared according to the preparation of the sanctuary; that is, in that way and manner of preparation; they had not gone through those cleansings which were instituted under the law.

DISCOURSE VI.*

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.—1 COR. xi. 28.

I HAVE been treating in sundry of these familiar exercises about communion with Jesus Christ in that great ordinance of the Lord's supper, intending principally, if not solely, the instruction of those who have, it may be, been least exercised in such duties. I have spoke something of preparation for it, and on the last opportunity of this kind I did insist upon these two things, that there is a preparation required unto the due observance of every solemn ordinance; and I did manifest, what in general was required to that preparation. I have nothing to do at present, but to consider the application of those general rules to the special ordinance of the supper of the Lord. For the special preparation for an ordinance consists in the special respect which we have to that ordinance in our general preparation: and I shall speak to it plainly, so as that the weakest, who are concerned, may see their interest in it, and have some guidance to their practice.

And there are two things which may be considered to this purpose, The time wherein this duty is to be performed; and, The duty of preparation itself.

I. The time of the performance of the duty; for that indeed regards as well what hath been said concerning preparation in general, as what shall now be farther added concerning preparation in particular, with respect to this ordinance.

Time hath a double respect unto the worship of God, as a part of it; so it is when it is separated by the appointment

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of God himself; and as a necessary adjunct of those actions whereby the worship of God is performed; for there is nothing can be done, but it must be done in time, the inseparable adjunct of all actions.

And therefore having proved that a preparation is necessary, I shall prove that there is a time necessary, for there can be no duty performed, but it must be performed, as I said, in some time.

For the right stating of that therefore, I shall give you these rules:

1. That there is a time antecedent to the celebration of this ordinance to be set apart for preparation unto it. The very nature of the duty, which we call preparation, doth inevitably include this, that the time for it must be antecedent to the great duty of observing the ordinance itself. So Matt. xxvii. 62. the evening before the passover is called, 'The preparation of the passover,' time set apart for the preparation of it.

2. The second rule is this, That there is no particular set time, neither as to the day, or season of the day, as to the beginning or ending of it, that is determined for this duty, in the Scripture: but the duty itself being commanded, the time is left unto our own prudence, to be regulated according to what duty doth require; so that you are not to expect that I should precisely determine this or that time, this or that day, this or that hour, so long or so short; for God hath left these things to our liberty, to be regulated by our own duty and necessity.

3. There are three things that will greatly guide a man in the determination of the time, which is thus left unto his own judgment according to the apprehension of his duty.

(1.) That he choose a time wherein the preparation of it may probably influence his mind and spirit in and unto the ordinance itself. Persons may choose a time for preparation when there may be such an interposition of worldly thoughts and business, between the preparation and the ordinance, that their minds may be no way influenced by it in the performance and observation of the duty. The time ought to be so fixed, that the duty may leave a savour upon the soul unto the time of the celebration of the ordinance

itself, whether it be the preceding day, or whether it be the same day. The work is lost unless a man endeavours to keep up a sense of those impressions which he received in that work.

(2.) Providential occurrences and intimations are great rules for the choosing of time and season for duties. Paul comes to Athens, Acts xvii. and in all probability he intended not to preach immediately upon his journey. He intended to take some time for his refreshment. But observing the wickedness of the place, ver. 16. 'that they were wholly given to idolatry,' and observing their altar to 'the unknown God;' ver. 32. He laid hold of that hint of providence, that intimation given him by God's providence from these things, and immediately fell upon his work, which God blessed with great success. There be a thousand ways, if I may so say, wherein an observing Christian may find God hinting and intimating duties unto him. The sins of other men, their graces, mercies, dangers, may be all unto us intimations of a season for duty. Were none of us ever sent to God by the outrageous wickedness of others? By the very observation of it? And it is a sign of a good spirit to turn providential intimations into duties. The psalmist speaks to that purpose, Psal. xxxii. 8, 9. 'I will guide thee by mine eye,' saith he. The next words are, 'Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which hath no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle.' God loves a pliable spirit, that upon every look of his eye will be guided to a duty. But those who are like horses and mules, that must be held with a strong rein, that will not be turned, till God puts great strength to it, are possessed with such a frame of spirit which God approves not. You are left at liberty to choose a time, but observe any intimation of providence that may direct to that time.

(3.) Be sure to improve surprisals with gracious dispositions, I mean, in the approach of solemn ordinances. Sometimes the soul is surprised with a gracious disposition, as in Canticles vi. 12. 'Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib.' I knew it not, saith the church, I was not aware of it, but I found my soul in a special willing manner drawn forth to communion with Christ. Is God pleased at any time to give us such gracious

surprisals with a holy disposition to be dealing with him, it will be the best season ; let it not be omitted.

These things will a little direct us in the determination of the time for preparation, which is left unto our own liberty.

4. Take care, that the time designed and allotted, does neither too much intrench upon the occasions of the outward man, nor upon the weakness of the inward man. If it doth, they will be too hard for us. I confess, in this general observation which professors are fallen into, and that custom which is in the observation of duties, there is little need to give this rule. But we are not to accommodate our rule unto our corruptions, but unto our duties ; and so there is a double rule in Scripture fortifies this rule ; the one is that great rule of our Saviour, ' That God will have mercy and not sacrifice.' Where these duties of observing sacrifices do sensibly intrench upon duties of mercy, God doth not require it ; which hath a great regard even unto our outward occasions. And the other rule is this, That bodily exercise profits little. When we assign so long a time as wearies out our spirits, and observe the time because of the time, it is bodily exercise ; when the vigour of our spirits is gone, which is a sacrifice God delights not in. As Jacob told Esau, If the cattle were driven beyond their pace they would die ; so we find by experience, that though with strong resolutions we may engage unto duties in such a manner as may intrench upon these outward occasions, or those weaknesses ; they will return, and be too hard for us, and instead of getting ground, they will drive us off of ours ; so that there is prudence to be required therein.

5. Let not the time allotted be so short as to be unmeet for the going through with the duty effectually. Men may be ready to turn their private prayers into a few ejaculations, and going in or out of a room may serve them for preparation for the most solemn ordinance. This hath lost us the power, the glory, the beauty of our profession. Never was profession held up to more glory and beauty, than when persons were most exact in their preparation for the duties of their profession ; nothing will serve their turn, but their souls having real and suitable converse with God, as unto the duty that lies before them.

6. The time of preparation is to be exercised and made

more solemn upon extraordinary occasions. The intervention of extraordinary occasions must add a solemnity to the time of preparation, if we intend to walk with God in a due manner. These extraordinary occasions may be referred to three heads: particular sins; particular mercies; particular duties.

(1.) Is there an interveniency upon the conscience of any special sin, that either the soul hath been really overtaken with, or that God is pleased to set home afresh upon the Spirit; there is then an addition to be made unto the time of our preparation, to bring things to that issue between God and our souls, that we may attend upon the ordinance, to hearken what God the Lord will now speak, and then he will speak peace. This is the first principal extraordinary interveniency that must make an addition to the time of preparation for this ordinance.

(2.) The interveniencies of mercies. The ordinance hath the nature of a thank-offering, and is the great medium, or means of our returning praise unto God, that we can make use of in this world. And then are we truly thankful for a temporal mercy, when it engages our hearts to thank God for Christ, by whom all mercies are blessed to us. Hath God cast in any special mercy, add unto the special preparation, that the heart may be fit to bless God for him, who is the fountain and cause of all mercies.

(3.) Special duties require the like. For it being the solemn time of our renewing covenant with God, we stand in need of a renewal of strength from God if we intend to perform special duties; and in our renewing covenant with God, we receive that especial strength for these special duties.

These rules I have offered you concerning the time of this great duty of preparation, which I am speaking unto; and I shall add one more, without which you will easily grant that all the rest will fall to the ground, and with which God will teach you all the rest; and that is, Be sure you set apart some time. I am greatly afraid of customariness in this matter. Persons complain that in waiting upon God in that ordinance, they do not receive that entertainment at the hand of God, that refreshment which they looked for. They have more reason to wonder, that they were not cast out, as those who came without 'a wedding garment.' That

is not only required of us, that we come with our wedding garment, which every believer hath, but that we come decked with this garment. A man may have a garment that may fit very ill, very unhandsomely, about him. The bride decks herself with her garments for the bridegroom. We are to do so for the meeting with Christ in this ordinance, to stir up all the graces God hath bestowed upon us, that we may be decked for Christ. There lies the unprofitableness under that ordinance, that though God has given us the wedding garment that we are not to cast out, yet we take not care to deck ourselves, that God and Christ may give us refreshing entertainment when we come into his presence. Our failing herein evidently and apparently witnesses to the faces of most professors, that this is the ground of their unprofitableness under that ordinance. So much for the time.

II. I shall now speak a little to the duty itself of preparation for that ordinance; remembering what I spake before of preparation in general unto all solemn ordinances, which must still be supposed.

Now the duty may be reduced to these four heads: meditation; examination; supplication; expectation. And if I mistake not, they are all given us in one verse; and though not directly applied to this ordinance, yet to this among other ways of our intimate communion with Christ; Zech. xii. 10. 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.' There is, 1. Meditation: 'They shall look upon him;' this is no otherwise to be performed but by the meditation of faith. Our looking upon Christ is by believing meditation. Looking argues the fixing of the sight; and meditation is the fixing of faith in its actings. Looking is a fixing of the eye; faith is the eye of the soul; and to look is to fix faith in meditation. And there is, 2. Examination which produceth the mourning here mentioned. For though it is said, 'They shall mourn for him;' it was not to mourn for his sufferings; for so he said, 'Weep not for me;' but to mourn upon the account of those things wherein they were concerned in his sufferings.

It brings to repentance, which is the principal design of this examination. 3. There is supplication; for there shall be poured out a spirit of grace and supplication. And, 4. There is expectation; which is included also in that of looking unto Christ.

1. The first part of this duty of preparation consists in meditation: and meditation is a duty, that by reason of the vanity of our own minds, and the variety of objects which they are apt to fix upon, even believers themselves do find as great a difficulty therein as any.

I shall only mention those special objects which our thoughts are to be fixed upon in this preparatory duty; and you may reduce them to the following heads:

1. The principal object of meditation in our preparation for this ordinance, 'is the horrible guilt and provocation that is in sin.' There is a representation of the guilt of sin made in the cross of Christ. There was a great representation of it in the punishment of angels; a great representation of it is made in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; and both these are proposed unto us in a special manner, 2 Pet. ii. 4—6. to set forth the heinous nature of the guilt of sin: but they come very short, nay, give me leave to say, that hell itself comes short of representing the guilt of sin in comparison of the cross of Christ. And the Holy Ghost would have us mind it, where he saith, 'He was made sin for us;' 2 Cor. v. 21. See what comes of sin, saith he, what demerit, what provocation there is in it; to see the Son of God praying, crying, trembling, bleeding, dying, God hiding his face from him; the earth trembling under him; darkness round about him; how can the soul but cry out, O Lord, is this the effect of sin! Is all this in sin! Here then take a view of sin. Others look on it in its pleasures and the advantages of it; and cry, is it not a little one? as Lot of Zoar. But look on it in the cross of Christ, and there it appears in another hue. All this is from my sin, saith the contrite soul.

2. The purity, the holiness, and the severity of God, that would not pass by sin, when it was charged upon his Son. 'He set him forth,' Rom. iii. 25. 'to declare his righteousness.' As there was a representation of the guilt of

sin, so there was an everlasting representation of the holiness and righteousness of God in the cross of Jesus Christ. He spared him not. And may the soul say, Is God thus holy in his nature, thus severe in the execution of his wrath, so to punish, and so to revenge sin, when his Son undertook to answer for it? How dreadful is this God! How glorious! What a consuming fire! It is that which will make sinners in Zion cry, 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' Isa. xxxiii. 14. Consider the holiness and the severity of God in the cross of Christ, and it will make the soul look about him, how to appear in the presence of that God.

3. Would you have another object of your meditation in this matter; let it be the infinite wisdom and the infinite love of God that found out this way of glorifying his holiness and justice, and dealing with sin according to its demerit. 'God so loved the world,' John iii. 16. 'as to send his only begotten Son.' 'And herein is love,' love indeed! 1 John iv. 10. 'that God sent his Son to die for us.' And the apostle, Eph. iii. 10. lays it upon 'the manifold wisdom of God.' Bring forth your faith; be your faith never so weak, never so little a reality, do but realize it, and do not let common thoughts and notions take up and possess your spirits. Here is a glorious object for it to work upon, to consider the infinite wisdom and love that found out this way. It was out of love unsearchable. And now what may not my poor sinful soul expect from this love? What difficulties can I be entangled in, but this wisdom can disentangle me? And what distempers can I be under, but this love may heal and recover? There is hope then, saith the soul, in preparation for these things.

4. Let the infinite love of Jesus Christ himself be also at such a season had in remembrance. Gal. ii. 20. 'Who loved me, and gave himself for me.' Rev. i. 5. 'Who loved us, and washed us in his own blood.' Phil. ii. 6—8. 'Who when he was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.' 2 Cor. viii. 9. 'This was the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye

through his poverty might be rich.' The all-conquering and all-endearing love of Christ, is a blessed preparative meditation for this great ordinance.

5. There is the end, what all this came to: this guilt of sin, this holiness of God, this wisdom of grace, this love of Christ; what did all this come to? Why the apostle tells us, Col. i. 20. 'He hath made peace through the blood of his cross.' The end of it all was to make peace between God and us; and this undertaking issued in his blood, that was able to do it, and nothing else; yea, that hath done it. It is a very hard thing for a soul to believe that there is peace made with God for him and for his sin; but really trace it through these steps, and it will give a great deal of strength to faith. Derive it from the lowest, the deepest pit of the guilt of sin; carry it into the presence of the severity of God, and so bring it to the love of Christ, and the issue which the Scriptures testify of all these things was, to make peace and reconciliation.

Some may say that they would willingly meditate upon these things, but they cannot remember them, they cannot retain them, and it would be long work to go through and think of them all; and such as they have not strength and season for.

I answer, first, My intention is not to burden your memory, or your practice, but to help your faith. I do not prescribe these things, as all of them necessary to be gone through in every duty of preparation; but you all know, they are such as may be used, every one of them singly in the duty; though, they that would go through them all again and again, would be no losers by it, but will find something that will be food and refreshment for their souls. But,

Secondly, Let your peculiar meditation be regulated by your peculiar present condition. Suppose, for instance, the soul is pressed with a sense of the guilt of any sin, or of many sins; let the preparative meditation be fixed upon the grace of God, and upon the love of Jesus Christ, that are suited to give relief unto the soul in such a condition. Is the soul burdened with the senselessness of sin? Doth it not find itself so sensible of sin as it would be? but rather, that it can entertain slight thoughts of sin; let meditation

be principally directed unto the great guilt of sin as represented in the death and cross of Christ, and to the severity of God as there represented. Other things may lay hold upon our carnal affections, but if this lay not hold upon faith, nothing will.

I have one rule more in these meditations; Doth any thing fall in that doth peculiarly affect your spirits, as to that regard which you have to God? Set it down. Most Christians are poor in experience; they have no stock; they have not laid up any thing for a dear year, or a hard time: though they may have had many tokens for good, yet they have forgot them. When your hearts are raised by intercourse between God and yourselves in the performance of this duty, be at pains to set them down for your own use; if any thing do immediately affect your spirits, you will be no looser by it; it is as easy a way to grow rich in spiritual experiences as any I know. This is the first part of this duty of preparation, which, with the rules given, may be constantly so observed, as to be no way burdensome nor wearisome to you; but very much to your advantage. The other duties I shall but name, and so have done.

2. There is examination. Examination is the word of my text, and that duty which most have commonly spoke unto, that have treated any thing about preparation for this ordinance. It respects principally two things, viz. repentance and faith.

(1.) Our examination as to repentance, as far as it concerns preparation unto this duty, may be referred to three heads:

[1.] To call ourselves to account, whether indeed we have habitually that mourning frame of spirit upon us which is required in them who converse with God in the cross of Jesus Christ. 'They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and mourn.' There is an habitual mourning frame of spirit required in us, and we may do well to search ourselves about it, whether it is maintained, and kept up or no? Whether worldly security and carnal joys do not devour it? For spiritual joys will not do it. Spiritual joys will take off nothing from spiritual mourning; but worldly security and carnal joy and pleasures will devour that frame of spirit.

[2.] Our examination as to repentance respects actual

sins, especially as for those who have the privilege and advantage of frequent and ordinary participation of this ordinance. It respects the surprisals that have befallen us (as there is no man that doth good and sinneth not) since we received the last pledge of the love of God in the administration of that ordinance. Friends, let us not be afraid of calling ourselves to a strict account. We have to do with him 'that is greater than we, and knoweth all things.' Let us not be afraid to look into the book of conscience and conversation, to look over our surprisals, our neglects, our sinful failings and miscarriages. These things belong to this preparation, to look over them and mourn over them also. I would not be thought to myself or you, to prescribe a hard burden in this duty of preparation. It is nothing but what God expects from us, and what we must do if we intend any communion with him in this ordinance. I may add,

[3.] Whether we have kept alive our last received pledges of the love of God? It may be at an ordinance we have received some special intimations of the good will of God. It is our duty to keep them alive in our spirits; and let us never be afraid we shall have no room for more. The keeping of them makes way for what farther is to come. Have we lost such sensible impressions, there is then matter for repentance and humiliation.

(2.) Examination also concerns faith; and that in general and in particular. In general; Is not my heart hypocritical? or do I really do what in this ordinance I profess? which is placing all my faith and hope in Jesus Christ for life, mercy, salvation, and for peace with God. And in particular, Do I stir up and act faith to meet Christ in this ordinance? I shall not enlarge upon these things that are commonly spoken unto.

3. The third part of our preparation is supplication; that is, adding prayer to this meditation and examination. Add prayer, which may inlay and digest all the rest in the soul. Pray over what we have thought on, what we have conceived, what we have apprehended, what we desire, and what we fear; gather all up into supplications to God.

4. There belongs unto this duty expectation also; that is, to expect that God will answer his promise, and meet us

according to the desire of our hearts. We should look to meet God, because he hath promised to meet us there; and we go upon his promise of grace, expecting he will answer his word and meet us. Not going at all adventures, as not knowing whether we shall find him or not; God may indeed then surprise us as he did Jacob when he appeared unto him, and made him say, 'God is in this place, and I knew it not.' But we go where we know God is. He hath placed his name upon his ordinances, and there he is; go to them with expectation, and rise from the rest of the duties with this expectation.

This is the substance of what might be of use to some in reference unto this duty of preparation for this great and solemn ordinance, which God hath graciously given unto any of you the privilege to be made partakers of.

Have we failed in these things or in things of a like nature? Let us admire the infinite patience of God, that hath borne with us all this while, that he hath not cast us out of his house, that he hath not deprived us of these enjoyments, which he might justly have done, when we have so undervalued them, as far as lay in us, and despised them; when we have had so little care to make entertainment for the receiving of the great God and our Lord Jesus Christ, who comes to visit us in this ordinance. We may be ready to complain of what outward concerns, in and about the worship of God, some have been deprived of. We have infinite more reason to admire, that there is any thing left unto us, any name, any place, any nail, any remembrance in the house of God; considering the regardlessness which hath been upon our spirits in our communion with him. Go away, and 'sin no more, lest a worse thing befall us.' If there be any, that have not risen up in a due manner in this duty, any conviction of the necessity and usefulness of it, God forbid we should be found sinning against this conviction.