

overturned by having too great a fall. The believing that estate best God carves for us, makes us content; and being contented, we will not covet that which is another's.

(2.) The way to be content with such things as we have, and not to covet another's, is to consider, the less estate we have, the less account we shall have to give at the last day. Every person is a steward, and must be accountable to God. They who have great estates have the greater reckoning: God will say, what good have you done with your estates? have you honoured me with your substance? Where are the poor you have fed and clothed; if you cannot give a good account it will be sad. This may make us contented with a less portion, to consider, the less estate, the less account we have to give; the less riches, the less reckoning. This is the way to have contentment, and no better antidote against coveting that which is another's than being content with that which is our own.

So much for the Commandments.



MAN'S INABILITY TO KEEP THE MORAL LAW.

Q. LXXXII. *IS any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?*

Ans. No mere man, since the fall, is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed.

JAM. iii. 2. 'In many things we offend all.' Man in his primitive state of innocency, was endowed with ability to keep the whole moral law: Adam had rectitude of mind, sanctity of will, perfection of power: Adam had the copy of God's law written on his heart: no sooner did God command, but he did obey: as the key is suited to all the wards in the lock, and can open them; so Adam had a power suited to all God's commands, and could obey them. Adam's obedience did exactly run parallel with the moral law, as a well made dial goes exactly with the sun. Man in innocence was like a well tuned organ, he did sweetly tune to the will of God: he was adorned with holiness as the angels, but not confirmed in holiness as the angels: Adam was holy but mutable; he fell from his purity, and we with him. Sin cut the lock of original righteousness, where our strength lay; sin hath brought such a languour and faintness into our souls, and hath so weakened us, that we shall never recover our full strength till we put on immortality. The thing I am now to demonstrate, is, that we cannot yield perfect obedience to the moral law. 'In many things we offend all.'

1. The case of an unregenerate man is such, that he cannot perfectly obey all God's commands: he may as well touch the stars, or span the ocean, as yield exact obedience to the law. A person unregenerate cannot act spiritually, he cannot pray in the Holy Ghost, he cannot live by faith, he cannot do duty out of love to duty; and if he cannot do duty spiritually, then much less perfectly. Now, that a natural man cannot yield perfect obedience to the moral law, is evident; (1.) Because he is spiritually dead, Eph. ii. 1. And being so, how can he keep the commandments of God perfectly? A dead man is not fit for action. A sinner hath the symptoms of death upon him; 2. He hath no sense; a dead man hath no sense: he hath no sense of the evil of sin, of God's holiness and veracity; therefore he is said to be without feeling, Eph. iv. 19. 2. He hath no strength, Rom. v. 6. What strength hath a dead man? A natural man hath no strength to deny himself, to resist temptation; he is dead: and can a dead man fulfil the moral law? (2.) A natural man cannot perfectly keep all God's commandments, because he is so interlarded with sin, he is 'born in sin,' Psa. li. 5. Job xv. 16. 'He drinks iniquity as water.' All the imaginations of his thoughts are evil, and only evil, Gen. vi. 4. Now the least evil thought is a breach of the royal law; and, if there be defection, there cannot be perfection. And, as a natural man hath no power to keep the moral law, so he hath no will. He is not only dead, but worse than dead; a dead man doth no hurt, but there is a life of resistance against God goes along with the death of sin? a natural man not only cannot keep the law through weakness, but he breaks it through wilfulness, Jer. xlv. 17. 'We will do whatsoever goeth out of our mouth to burn incense to the queen of heaven.'

2. As the unregenerate cannot keep the moral law perfectly, so neither the regenerate, Eccl. vii. 20. 'There is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good and sinneth not;' nay, that 'sins not in doing good.' There is that in the best actions of a righteous man that is damnable, if God should weigh him in the ballance of justice. Alas! how are his duties fly-blown? He cannot pray without wandering, nor believe without doubting, Rom. vii. 18. 'To me to will is present, but how to perform I find not.' In the Greek it is, "How to do it throughly I find not." Paul though a saint of the first magnitude, was better at willing than at performing. Mary asked where they had laid Christ: she had a mind to have carried him away, but she wanted strength: so the regenerate have a will to obey God's law perfectly, but they want strength; their obedience is weak, and fickle: the mark they are to shoot at, is perfection of holiness, though they take a right aim, yet do what they can, they shoot short, Rom. vii. 19. 'The good which I would, I do

not.' A Christian, while he is serving God, is hindered: like a ferryman, that plies the oar, and rows hard, but a gust of wind carries him back again: so saith Paul, 'The good I would, I do not;' I am driven back by temptation. Now, if there be any failure in our obedience, we cannot make a perfect commentary upon God's law: no Christian alive can write a copy of holiness without blotting. The virgin Mary's obedience was not perfect, she needed Christ's blood to wash her tears. Aaron was to make atonement for the altar, Exod. xxix. 37. to shew that the most holy offering hath defilement in it, and needs atonement to be made for it.

Qu. 1. But if a man hath no power to keep the whole moral law, then why doth God require that of a man, which he is not able to perform? How doth this stand with his justice?

Ans. Though man hath lost his power of obeying, God hath not lost his right of commanding. If a master intrusts a servant with money to lay out, and the servant spends it dissolutely, may not the master justly demand this money? God gave us a power to keep the moral law; we, by tampering with sin lost it: But may not God still call for perfect obedience? or, in case of a fault, justly punish us?

Qu. 2. But why doth God suffer such an impotency to lie upon man that he cannot perfectly keep the law?

Ans. The Lord doth it, (1.) To humble us. Man is a self-exalting creature: and, if he hath but any thing of worth, he is ready to be puffed up: but when he comes to see his deficiencies and failings, and how far short he comes of the holiness and perfection God's law requires, this is a means to pull down his plumes of pride, and lay them in the dust: he weeps over his impotency, he blusheth over his leprous spots: he saith, as Job, 'I abhor myself in dust and ashes.' (2.) God lets this impotency and infirmness lie upon us, that we may have recourse to Christ, to obtain pardon for our defects, and to sprinkle our best duties, with his blood. When a man sees himself indebted, he owes perfect obedience to the law, but he hath nothing to pay: this makes him flee to Christ to be his friend, and answer all the demands and challenges of the law and set him free in the court of justice.

Use 1. Is matter of humiliation for our fall in Adam. In the state of innocency we were perfectly holy; our minds were crowned with knowledge, and our wills, as a queen, did sway the sceptre of liberty: but now we may say, as Lam. v. 16. 'The crown is fallen from our head.' We have lost that power which was inherent in us. When we look back to our primitive glory, when we shone as earthly angels, we may take up Job's words, chap. xxix. 2. 'O that it were with us as in montis pat!' O that it were with us as at first, when there

was no stain upon our virgin-nature, when there was a perfect harmony between God's law and man's will ! but, alas ! how the scene is altered, our strength is gone from us, we tread awry every step ; we come below every precept ; our dwarfishness will not reach the sublimity of God's law ; we fail in our obedience ; and while we fail, we forfeit. This may put us in close mourning, and spring a leak of sorrow in all our souls.

Uſe II. Of confutation. *Branch 1.* It confutes the Arminians, who cry up the power of the will : they hold, they have a will to ſave themſelves. But by nature, we not only want ſtrength, Rom. v. 6. but we want will to that which is good. The will is not full of impotency, but obſtinacy, Pf. lxxxii. 11. 'Iſrael would none of me.' The will hangs forth a flag of defiance againſt God. Such as ſpeak of the ſovereign power of the will, forget Phil. ii. 13. 'It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.' If the power be in the will of man, then what needs God work in us to will ? If the air can enlighten itſelf, what needs the ſun to ſhine ? Such as talk of the power of nature, and the ability they have to ſave themſelves, they diſparage Chriſt's merits. I may ſay, as Gal. v. 4. 'Chriſt has become of no effect to them.' This I affirm, ſuch as advance the power of their will in matters of ſalvation, without the medicinal grace of Chriſt, do abſolutely put themſelves under the covenant of works. And now I would aſk them, "Can they perfectly keep the moral law?" *malum oritur ex quolibet defectu.* If there be but the leaſt defect in their obedience, they are gone : for one ſinful thought the law of God curſeth them, and the juſtice of God arraigns them. Confounded be their pride, who cry up the power of nature, as if, by their own inherent abilities, they could rear up a building, the top whereof ſhould reach to heaven.

Branch 2. It confutes a ſort of people that brag of perfection ; and according to that principle, they can keep all God's commandments perfectly. I would aſk theſe, have they at no time a vain thought come into their mind ? If they have, then they are not perfect. The virgin Mary was not perfect ; tho' her womb was pure (being overſhadowed with the Holy Ghoſt) yet her ſoul was not perfect ; Chriſt doth tacitly imply a failing in her, Luke ii. 49. And, are they more perfect than the bleſſed virgin was ? Such as hold perfection, need not confeſs ſin. David confeſſed ſin, Pf. xxxii. 6. and Paul confeſſed ſin, Rom. vii. 24. But they are got beyond David and Paul ; they are perfect, they never tranſgreſs : and where there is no tranſgreſſion, what needs confeſſion ?

2dly, If they are perfect, they need not aſk pardon : they can pay God's juſtice what they owe ; therefore, what need they pray, 'Forgive us our debt?' Oh that the devil ſhould rock

mén so fast asleep, as to make them dream of perfection! and whereas they bring that, Phil. iii. 15. 'Let us therefore as many as be perfect be thus minded.' *Ans.* Perfection there, is meant of sincerity. God is best able to interpret his own word. He calls sincerity perfection, Job i. 8. 'A perfect and an upright man.' But who is exactly perfect? A man full of diseases may as well say he is healthful, as a man full of sin say, he is perfect.

Use III. To regenerate persons. Though you fail in your obedience, and cannot keep the moral law exactly, yet be not discouraged.

Qu. What comfort may be given to a regenerate person under the failures and imperfections of his obedience?

Ans. 1. That a believer is not under the covenant of works but under the covenant of grace. The covenant of works, requires perfect, personal, perpetual obedience: but in the covenant of grace, God will make some abatements: he will accept of less than he required in the covenant of works.

(1.) In the covenant of works God required perfection of degrees; in the covenant of grace, he accepts perfection of parts: there he required perfect working, here he accepts sincere believing: in the covenant of works God required us to live without sin; in the covenant of grace, God accepts of our combat with sin.

(2.) Though a Christian cannot, in his own person, perform all God's commandments; yet Christ, as his surety, and in his stead, hath fulfilled the law for him; and God accepts of Christ's obedience, which is perfect, to satisfy for that obedience which is imperfect. Christ being made a curse for believers, all the curses of the law have their sting pulled out.

(3.) Though a Christian cannot keep the commands of God to satisfaction, yet he may to approbation.

Qu. How is that?

Ans. 1. He gives his full assent and consent to the law of God, Rom. vii. 12. 'The law is holy and just: there was assent in the judgment, Rom. vii. 16. 'I consent to the law: there was consent in the will.

2. A Christian mourns that he cannot keep the commandments fully: when he fails, he weeps: he is not angry with the law, because it is so strict; but he is angry with himself, because he is so deficient.

3. He takes a sweet complacential delight in the law, Rom. vii. 22. 'I delight in the law of God in the inward man.' Gr. [*Synedomai,*] "I take pleasure in it." Psalm cxix. 97. 'O how love I thy law!' Though a Christian cannot keep God's law, yet he loves his law; though he cannot serve God perfectly, yet he serves him willingly.

4. It is his cordial desire to walk in all God's commands, Pl. cxix. 5. 'O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes?' Though his strength fails, yet his pulse beats.

5. He doth really endeavour to obey God's law perfectly: and wherein he comes short he runs to Christ's blood to make supply for his defects. This cordial desire, and real endeavour, God esteems as perfect obedience, 2 Cor. viii. 12. 'If there be a willing mind, it is accepted.' 'Let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice,' Cant. ii. 14. Though the prayers of the righteous are mixed with sin, yet God sees they would pray better: God picks out the weeds from the flowers; he sees the faith and winks at the failing. The faint's obedience, though he falls short of legal perfection, yet having sincerity in it, and Christ's merits mixed with it, finds gracious acceptance. When the Lord sees endeavours after perfect obedience, this he takes well at our hands: as a father that receives a letter from his child, though there be blots in the letter, and false spellings, yet the father takes all in good part: O what blottings are there in our holy things! but God is pleased to take all in good part: faith God, it is my child, and he would do better if he could; I will accept it.



ALL SINS NOT EQUALLY HEINOUS.

Q. LXXXIII. *ARE all transgressions of the law equally heinous?*

Ans. Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

John xix. 11. 'He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.' The Stoic philosophers held, that all sins were equal: but this scripture clearly holds forth, that there is a gradual difference in sin; some are greater than others; some are 'mighty sins,' Amos v. 12. and 'crying sins,' Gen. xviii. 21. Every sin hath a voice to speak, but some sins cry. As some diseases are worse than others, and some poisons more venomous; so some sins are more heinous, Ezek. xvi. 47. Jer. xvi. 12. 'You have done worse than your fathers, your sins have exceeded theirs.' Some sins have a blacker aspect than others: to clip the king's coin is treason, but to strike his person is a higher degree of treason. A vain thought is a sin, but a blasphemous word is a greater sin. That some sins are greater than others, appears, (1.) Because there was difference in the offerings under the law; the sin offering was greater than the trespass offerings. (2.) Because some sins are not capable of pardon as others are, therefore they must needs be more heinous, as