

sure as you shall now be brought to Jesus Christ by spiritual union, so sure shall you be brought to God in full fruition.

Blessed be God for Jesus Christ, the new and living way to the Father.

And thus I have finished the motives drawn from the titles and benefits of Christ, serving to enforce and quicken the great gospel-exhortation of coming to, and effectually applying the Lord Jesus Christ in the way of faith. O that the blessings of the Spirit might follow these calls, and fix these considerations as nails in sure places! But seeing the great hindrance and obstruction to faith is the false opinion and persuasion of most unregenerate men, that they are already in Christ; my next work therefore shall be, in a second use of conviction, to undeceive men in that matter; and that, by shewing them the undoubted certainty of these two things:

First, That there is no coming ordinarily to Christ without the application of the law to our consciences, in a way of effectual conviction.

Secondly, Nor by that neither, without the teachings of God, in the way of spiritual illumination. The first of these will be fully confirmed and opened in the following sermon.

SERMON XX.

The great usefulness of the Law or Word of GOD, in order to the Application of CHRIST.

ROM. vii. 9.

For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

THE scope of the apostle in this epistle, and more particularly in this chapter, is to state the due use and excellency of the law, which he doth accordingly.

First, By denying to it a power to justify us, which is the peculiar honour of Christ.

Secondly, By ascribing to it a power to convince us, and so prepare us for Christ*.

Neither attributing to it more honour than belongeth to it, nor yet detracting from it that honour and usefulness which God hath given it. It cannot make us righteous, but it can convince us that

* The author means that it shews us our need of Christ. *Editor.*

we are unrighteous; it cannot heal, but it can open and discover the wounds that sin hath given us; which he proves in this place by an argument drawn from his own experience, confirmed also by the general experience of believers, in whose persons and names we must here understand him to speak; "For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Wherein three particulars are very observable.

First, The opinion Paul had, and all unregenerate men have of themselves before conversion: *I was alive once*. By *life*, understand here liveliness, cheerfulness, and confidence of his good estate and condition: he was full of vain hope, false joy, and presumptuous confidence; a very brisk and jovial man.

Secondly, The sense and opinion he had, and all others will have of themselves, if ever they come under the regenerating work of the Spirit in his ordinary method of working: *I died*. The death he here speaks of, stands opposed to that life before mentioned; and signifies the sorrows, fears, and tremblings that seized upon his soul, when his state and temper were upon the change: the apprehensions he then had of his condition struck him home to the heart, and damped all his carnal mirth: *I died*.

Thirdly, The ground and reason of this wonderful alteration and change of his judgment, and apprehension of his own condition; *the commandment came, and sin revived*: The commandment came, i. e. it came home to my conscience, it was fixed with a divine and mighty efficacy upon my heart: the commandment was come before by way of promulgation, and the literal knowledge of it; but it never came till now in its spiritual sense and convincing power to his soul; though he had often read, and heard the law before, yet he never clearly understood the meaning and extent, he never felt the mighty efficacy thereof upon his heart before; it so came at this time, as it never came before. From hence the observations are,

Doct. 1. *That unregenerate persons are generally full of groundless confidence and cheerfulness, though their condition be sad and miserable.*

Doct. 2. *That there is a mighty efficacy in the word or law of God, to kill vain confidence, and quench carnal mirth in the hearts of men, when God sets it home upon their consciences.*

We shall take both these points under consideration, and improve them to the design in hand.

Doct. 1. *That unregenerate persons are generally full of ground-*

less confidence and cheerfulness, though their condition be sad and miserable; Rev. iii. 17. Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; *This is the very life that unregenerate men do live.*

In opening whereof, I shall shew you,

1. What is the life of the unregenerate.
2. What maintains that life.
3. How it appears that this is the life the generality of the world do live.
4. The danger of living such a life as this: and then apply it.

First, What is the life of the unregenerate, and wherein it consists? Now there being, among others, three things in which the life of the unregenerate doth principally consist, viz.

Carnal security,
Presumptuous hope, and
False joy,

Of these briefly in their order.

First, There is in unregenerate men a great deal of carnal security; they dread no danger; Luke xi. 21. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are at peace:" There is generally a great stillness and silence in the consciences of such men; when others, in a better condition, are watching and trembling, they sleep securely: so they live, and so oftentimes they die, Psal. lxxiii. 4. "They have no bonds in their death," [Hebrew, on knots], no difficulties that puzzle them. It is true, the consciences of few men are so perfectly stupified, but that some time or other they twang and gird them; but it seldom works to that height, or continues with them so long as to give any considerable interruption to their carnal peace and quietness.

Secondly, The life of the unregenerate consisteth in presumptuous hope: this is the very foundation of their carnal security. So Christ tells the Jews, John viii. 54, 55. "Of whom ye say that he is your God, and yet ye have not known him." The world is full of hope without a promise, which is but as a spider's web, when a stress comes to be laid upon it, John xxvii. 8. Unregenerate men are said indeed to be without hope, Ephes. ii. 12. but the meaning is, they are without any solid, well-grounded hope; for in scripture-account, vain hope is no hope, except it be a lively hope, 1 Pet. i. 3. A hope flowing from union with Christ, Col. i. 27. A hope nourished by experience, Rom. v. 4. A hope for which a man can give a reason, 1 Pet. iii. 15. a hope that puts men upon heart-purifying endeavours, 1 John iii. 3. It is in the account

of God a cypher, a vanity, not deserving the name of hope; and yet such a groundless, dead, christless, irrational, idle hope is that which the unregenerate live upon.

Thirdly, The life of the unregenerate consisteth in false joy, the immediate offspring of ungrounded hope, Mat. xiii. 28. The stony ground receive the word with joy.

There are two sorts of joy upon which the unregenerate live, viz.

1. A sensitive joy in things carnal.
2. A delusive joy in things spiritual.

They rejoice in corn, wine, and oil, in their estates and children, in the pleasant fruitions of the creature; yea, and they rejoice also in Christ and the promises, in heaven and in glory: with all which they have just such a kind of communion as a man hath in a dream with a full feast and curious music; and just so their joy will vanish when they awake. Now these three, *security, hope, and joy*, make up the livelihood of the carnal world.

Secondly, Next it concerns us to enquire what are the things that maintain and support this security, hope and joy in the hearts of unregenerate men; and if we consider duly, we shall find that church-privileges, natural ignorance, false evidences of the love of God, slight workings of the gospel, self-love, comparing themselves with the more profane, and Satan's policy managing all these in order to their eternal ruin, are so many springs to feed and maintain this life of delusion in the unregenerate.

1. *First*, Church privileges lay the foundation to this strong delusion. Thus the Jews deceived themselves, saying in their hearts, "We have Abraham for our father," Mat. iii. 9. ¶ This propt up the vain hopes that Abraham's blood ran in their veins, though Abraham's faith and obedience never wrought in their hearts.

2. *Secondly*, Natural ignorance; this keeps all in peace: they that see not, fear not. There are but two ways to quiet the hearts of men about their spiritual and eternal concerns, viz. *the way of assurance* and faith, or *the way of ignorance* and self-deceit; by the one we are put beyond danger, by the other beyond fear, though the danger be greater. Satan could never quiet men, if he did not first blind them.

3. *Thirdly*, False evidences of the love of God is another spring feeding this security, vain hope, and false joy in the hearts of men: see the power of it to hush and still the conscience, Mat. vii. 22. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" &c. The things upon which they built their evidence and confidence, were external things in religion; yet they had a quieting power upon them, as if they had been the best evidences in the world.

4. *Fourthly*, Slight workings of the gospel; such are transient motions of the affections under the word, Heb. vi. 8. the working of their desires about spiritual objects, John vi. 34. Math. xxv. 8. the external change and reformation of their ways, Mat. xii. 43. all which serve to nourish the vain hopes of the unregenerate.

5. *Fifthly*, Self-love is an apparent reason and ground of security and false hope, Mat. vii. 3. It makes a man to overlook great evils in himself, whilst he is sharp-sighted to discover and censure lesser evils in others: self-love takes away the sight of sin, by bringing it too near the eye.

6. *Sixthly*, Mens comparing themselves with those that are more profane and grossly wicked than themselves, serves notably to quiet and hush the conscience asleep; "God, I thank thee, (said the Pharisee), I am not as other men, or as this publican." O what a saint did he seem to himself, when he stood by those that were externally more wicked.

7. *Seventhly*, and *lastly*, The policy of Satan to manage all these things to the blinding and ruining of the souls of men, is another great reason they live so securely and pleasantly as they do, in a state of so much danger and misery, 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not."

Thirdly, You have seen what the life of the unregenerate is, and what maintains that life. In the next place, I shall give you evidence that this is the life the generality of the world do live; a life of carnal security, vain hope, and false joy; this will evidently appear, if we consider,

First, The activity and liveliness of men's spirits in pursuit of the world. O how lively and vigorous are their hearts in the management of earthly designs! Psal. vi. 4. "Who will shew us any good?" The world eats up their hearts, time, and strength. Now this could never be, if their eyes were but opened to see the danger and misery their souls are in. How few designs for the world run in the thoughts of a condemned man? O if God had ever made the light of conviction to shine into their consciences, certainly the temptations would lie the quite contrary way, even in too great a neglect of things of this life! But this briskness and liveliness plainly shew the great security which is upon most men.

Secondly, The marvellous quietness and stillness that is in the thoughts and consciences of men, about their everlasting concerns, plainly shews this to be the life of the unregenerate: How few scruples, doubts, or fears shall you hear from them? How many years may a man live in carnal families, before he shall hear such a question as this seriously propounded, "What shall I do to be saved?" There are no questions in their lips, because no fear or sense of danger in their hearts.

Thirdly, The general contentedness, and professed willingness of carnal men to die, give clear evidence that such a life of security and vain hope is the life they live; "Like sheep they are laid in the grave," Psal. xlix. 14. O how quiet and still are their consciences, when there are but a few breaths more between them and everlasting burnings! Had God opened their eyes to apprehend the consequences of death, and what follows the *pale horse*, Rev. vi. 8. it were impossible but that every unregenerate man should make that bed on which he dies shake and tremble under him.

Fourthly, and lastly, The low esteem men have for Christ, and the total neglect of, at least the mere trifling with, those duties in which he is to be found, plainly discover this stupid secure life to be the life that the generality of the world do live; for were men sensible of the disease of sin, there could be no quieting them without "Christ the physician," Phil. iii. 8. All the business they have to do in this world could never keep them from their knees, or make them strangers to their closets; all which, and much more that might be said of the like nature, gives too full and clear proof of this sad assertion, that this is the life the ungenerate world generally lives.

Fourthly, In the last place, I would speak a few words to discover the danger of such a life as hath been described; to which purpose let the following brief hints be seriously minded.

First, By these things souls are inevitably betrayed into hell and eternal ruin; this blinding is in order to damning, 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; whose eyes the god of this world hath blinded." Those that are turned over into eternal death are thus generally hoodwinked and blinded in order thereunto, Isa. vi. 9, 10. "And he said go and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not: and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the hearts of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert, and be healed."

Secondly, As damning is the event of blinding, so nothing makes hell a more terrible surprize to the soul than this doth: By this means the wrath of God is felt before its danger be apprehended; a man is past all hope, before he begins to have any fear: his eternal ruin, like a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, cometh suddenly at an instant, Isa. xxx. 13. and as it damns surely and surprizingly, so,

Thirdly, Nothing more aggravates a man's damnation than to sink suddenly into it, from amidst so many hopes, and high confidence of safety: For a man to find himself in hell, when he thought and concluded himself within a step of heaven, O what a hell will it be to such men! The higher vain hopes lifted them up, the

more dreadful must their fall be, Matth. vii. 22. And as it damns surely, surprizingly, and with highest aggravations, so,

Fourthly, This life of security and vain hope frustrates all the means of recovery and salvation, in the only season wherein they can be useful and beneficial to us: By reason of these things the word hath no power to convince men's consciences, nothing can bring them to a sight and sense of their condition: Therefore Christ told the self-confident and blind Jews, Matth. xxi. 21. "That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before them:" And the reason is, because their hearts lie more open and fair to the strokes of conviction and compunction for sin than those do, who are blinded by vain hopes and confidences.

Inference 1. *Is this the life that the unregenerate world lives? Then it is not to be wondered at that the preaching of the gospel hath so little success:* "Who hath believed our report? (saith the prophet) and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Isa. liii.

1. Ministers study for truths apt to awaken and convince the consciences of them that hear them, but their words return again to them: They turn to God, and mourn over the matter; we have laboured in vain, and spent our strength for nought: And this security is the cause of all; vain hopes bar fast the doors of men's hearts against all the convictions and persuasions of the word. The greater cause have they to admire the grace of God, who have found, or shall find the convictions of the word sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit; to whose hearts God brings home the commandment by an effectual application.

Inf. 2. *If this be the life of the unregenerate world, what deadly enemies are they that nourish and strengthen the groundless confidences and vain hopes of salvation in men?* This the scripture calls the healing of the hurt of souls slightly, by crying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace," Jer. vi. 14. The sewing of pillows under their arm-holes, Ezek. xiii. 18. That they may lie soft and easy under the ministry; and this is the doctrine which the people love: but oh, what will the end of these things be! And what an account have those men to give to God for the blood of those souls by them betrayed to the everlasting burnings! Such flattery is the greatest cruelty: Those whom you bless upon earth, will curse you in hell, and the day in which they trusted their souls to your conduct.

Inf. 3. *How great a mercy is it to be awakened out of that general sleep and security which is fallen upon the world!* You cannot estimate the value of that mercy, for it is a peculiar mercy. O that ever the Spirit of the Lord should touch thy soul under the ministry of the word, startle, and rouse thy conscience, whilst others are left

in the dead sleep of security round about thee! When the Lord dealt with thy soul much after the same manner he did with Paul in the way to Damascus, who not only saw a light shining from heaven, which those that travelled with him saw as well as he, but heard that voice from heaven which did the work upon his heart, though his companions heard it not. Besides, it is not only a peculiar mercy, but it is a leading, introductive mercy, to all other spiritual mercies that follow it to all eternity. If God had not done this for thee, thou hadst never been brought to faith, to Christ, or heaven. From this act of the Spirit all other saving acts take their rise; so that you have cause for ever to admire the goodness of God in such a favour as this is.

Inf. 4. Lastly, *Hence it follows that the generality of the world are in the direct way to eternal ruin; and whatever their vain confidences are, they cannot be saved.* "Narrow is the way, and strait is the gate that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Hear me all you that live this dangerous life of carnal security and vain hope, whatever your persuasions and confidences are, except you give them up, and get better grounds for your hope, you cannot be saved. For,

First, Such hopes and confidences as yours are directly contradictory to the established order of the gospel, which requires repentance, Acts v. 31. faith, Acts xiii. 39. and regeneration, John iii. 3. in all that shall be saved. And this order shall never be altered for any man's sake.

Secondly, If such as you be saved, all the threatenings in scripture must be reversed, which lie in full opposition to your vain hopes, Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 16. Rom. iii. 8, 9. Either the truth of God, in these threatenings must fail, or your vain hopes must fail.

Thirdly, If ever such as you be saved, new conditions must be set to all the promises; for there is no condition of any special promise found in any unregenerate person*. Compare your hearts with these scriptures, Matth. v. 3, 4, 5, 6. Psal. xxiv. 4. Psal. lxxxiv. 11. Gen. xvii. 1, 2.

Fourthly, If ever such a hope as yours bring you to heaven, then the saving hope of God's elect is not rightly described to us in the scriptures. Scripture-hope is the effect of regeneration, 1 Pet. i. 3. And purity of heart is the effect of that hope, 1 John iii. 3. Nay,

Fifthly, The very nature of heaven is mistaken in scripture, if such as you be subjects qualified for its enjoyment: For assimilation, or the conformity of the soul to God in holiness, is, in the

* The author by *condition* must be understood here, as meaning *evidence* of interest in these promises. *Editor.*

scripture account, a principal ingredient of that blessedness : By all which it manifestly appears that the hopes of most men are in vain, and will never bring them to heaven.

SERMON XXI.

ROM. vii. 9.

For I was alive without the law once : But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

Doct. 2. **T**HAT there is a mighty efficacy in the word or law of God, to kill vain confidence, and quench carnal mirth in the hearts of men, when God sets it home upon their consciences. “ The weapons of the word are not carnal, but mighty through God ; to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,” 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

In the opening of this point I shall,

1. Demonstrate the efficacy of the word or law of God.

2. Shew wherein the efficacy thereof lies.

3. From whence it hath all this mighty power and efficacy.

First, I shall give you some demonstrations of the mighty power and efficacy that there are in the word or law of God ; which will appear with the fullest evidence,

First, From the various *subjects* upon whom it works : The hearts and consciences of men of all orders and qualities, have been reached and wounded to the quick by the two-edged sword of God’s law. Some, among the *great* and *honourable* of the earth, (though indeed the fewest of that rank) have been made to stoop and tremble under the word, Acts xxiv. 16. Mark vi. 20. 1 Sam. xv. 24. The wise and learned of the world have felt its power, and been brought over to embrace the humbling and self-denying ways of Christ, Acts xvii. 34. Thus Origen, Hierom, Tertullian, Bradwardine, and many more, came into Canaan laden with the Egyptian gold, as one speaks, i. e. they came into the church of God abundantly enriched and furnished with the learned arts and sciences, devoting them all to the service of Christ. Yea, and which is as strange, *the most simple, weak, and illiterate* have been wonderfully changed, and wrought upon by the power of the word : “ The testimonies of the Lord make wise the simple :” Men

of weak understandings, in all other matters, have been made wise to salvation by the power of the word, Matth. xi. 25. 1 Cor. i. 27. Nay the most malicious and obstinate enemies of Christ have been wounded and converted by the word, 1 Tim. i. 13. Acts xvi. 25. Those that have been under the prejudice of the worst and most *idolatrous education*, have been the subjects of its mighty power, Acts xix. 26. To conclude, men of the most profligate and debauched lives have been wonderfully changed and altered by the power of the word, 1 Cor. vi. 10, 11.

Secondly, The mighty efficacy of the law of God appears in the *manner of its operation*; it works suddenly; strikes like a dart through the hearts and consciences of men, Acts ii. 37. A wonderful change is made in a short time: And, as it works quickly and suddenly, so it works irresistibly, with an uncontroled power upon the spirits of men, 1 Thes. i. 5. Rom. i. 16. Let the soul be armed against conviction with the thickest ignorance, strongest prejudice, or most obstinate resolution, the word of God will wound the breast even of such a man, when God sends it forth in his authority and power.

Thirdly, The wonderful power of the law or word of God is evidently seen in the strange effects which are produced by it in the hearts and lives of men. For,

First, It changes and alters the frame and temper of the mind: It moulds a man into a quite contrary temper, Gal. i. 23. "He which persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the faith, which once he destroyed:" Thus a tyger is transformed into a lamb, by the power of the word of God.

Secondly, It makes the soul, upon which it works, to forego and quit the dearest interests it hath in this world for Jesus Christ, Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9. Riches, honours, self-righteousness, dearest relations, are denied and forsaken. Reproach, poverty, and death itself, are willingly embraced for Christ's sake, when once the efficacy of the word hath been upon the hearts of men, 1 Thes. i. 6. Those that were their companions in sin, are declined, renounced, and cast off with abhorrence, 1 Pet. iv. 3, 4. In such things as these the mighty power of the word discovers itself.

Secondly, Next, let us see wherein the efficacy of the word upon the souls of men principally consisteth: and we find in scripture it exerteth its power in five distinct acts upon the soul; by all which it strikes at the life, and kills the very heart of vain hopes. For,

First, It hath an awakening efficacy upon secure and sleepy sinners: It rouses the conscience, and brings a man to a sense and feeling apprehension, Eph. v. 13, 14. The first effectual touch of the word startles the drowsy conscience. A poor sinner lies in his

sins, as Peter did in his chains, fast asleep, though a warrant was signed for his execution the next day : but the Spirit in the word awakens him as the angel did Peter : And this awakening power of the word is in order, both of time and nature, antecedent to all its operations and effects.

Secondly, The law of God hath an enlightening efficacy upon the minds of men : It is eye-salve to the blinded eye, Rev. iii. 18. A light shining in a dark place, 2 Pet. i. 19. A light shining into the very heart of man, 2 Cor. iv. 6. When the word comes in power, all things appear with another face : The sins that were hid from our eyes, and the danger which was concealed by the policy of Satan from our souls, now lie clear and open before us, Eph. v. 8.

Thirdly, The word of God hath a convincing efficacy : It sets sin in order before the soul, Psal. l. 21. As an army is drawn up in an exact order, so are the sins of nature and practice, the sins of youth and age, even a great and terrible army is drawn up before the eye of the conscience ; the convictions of the word are clear and full, 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. The very secrets of a sinner's heart are made manifest ; his mouth is stopped ; his pleas are silenced ; his conscience yields to the charge of guilt, and to the equity of the sentence of the law, so that the soul stands mute, and self-condemned at the bar of conscience : It hath got nothing to say why the wrath of God should not come upon it to the uttermost, Rom. iii. 19.

Fourthly, The law of God hath a soul-wounding, an heart-cutting efficacy : It pierces into the very soul and spirit of man, Acts ii. 37. " When they heard this, they were pricked at their hearts, " and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles ; men and " brethren, what shall we do ? " A dreadful sound is in the sinner's ears ; his soul is in deep distress ; he knows not which way to turn for ease ; no plaister but the blood of Christ can heal these wounds which the word makes : No outward trouble, affliction, disgrace, or loss, ever touched the quick as the word of God doth.

Fifthly, The word hath a heart-turning, a soul converting efficacy in it : It is a regenerating, as well as a convincing word, 1 Pet. i. 23. 1 Thes. i. 9. The law wounds, the gospel cures ; the law discovers the evil that is in sin, and the misery that follows it ; and the Spirit of God, working in fellowship with the word, effectually turns the heart from sin. And thus we see in what glorious acts the efficacy of the word discovers itself upon the hearts of men ; and all these acts lie in order to each other : For, until the soul be awakened, it cannot be enlightened, Eph. v. 14. Till it be enlightened, it cannot be convinced, Eph. v. 13. Conviction being nothing else but the application of the light that shines in

the mind to the conscience of a sinner : Till it be convinced, it cannot be wounded for sin, Acts ii. 37. And until it be wounded for sin, it will never be converted from sin, and brought effectually to Jesus Christ. And thus you see what the power of the word is.

Thirdly, In the last place, it will concern us to enquire whence the word of God hath all this power? And it is most certain, that it is not a power inherent in itself, nor derived from the instrument by which it is managed, but from the Spirit of the Lord, who communicates to it all that power and efficacy which it hath upon our souls.

1. Its power is not in, or from itself: It works not in a *physical way*, as natural agents do; for then the effect would always follow, except it were miraculously hindered: But this spiritual efficacy is in the word, as the healing virtue was in the waters of Bethesda, John v. 4. "An angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: Whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." It is not a power naturally inherent in it at all times, but communicated to it at some special seasons. How often is the word preached, and no man awaked or convinced by it!

2. The power of the word is not communicated to it by the instrument that manageth it, 1 Cor. iii. 7. "Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth." Ministers are nothing to such an effect and purpose as this is; he doth not mean that they are useless and altogether unnecessary, but insufficient of themselves to produce such mighty effects: It works not as it is the word of man, 2 Thess. ii. 13. Ministers may say of the ordinary, as Peter said of the extraordinary effects of the Spirit, Acts iii. 12. "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" If the effects of the word were in the power, and at the command of him that preacheth it, then the blood of all the souls that perish under our ministry must lie at our door, as was formerly noted.

3. If you say, whence then hath the word all this power? Our answer is, It derives it all from the Spirit of God*, 1 Thes. ii. 13. "For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." It is a successful instrument only when it is in the hand of the Spirit, without whose influence it never did, nor can convince, convert, or save

* What is commanded by the word, is given by the Spirit. *Aug. Ep. 157.*

any soul. Now, the Spirit of God hath a sovereignty over three things in order to the conversion of sinners.

1. Over the word which works.
2. Over the soul wrought upon.
3. Over the time and season of working.

First, The Spirit hath a glorious sovereignty over the word itself whose instrument it is to make it successful or not, as it pleaseth him, Isa. lv. 10, 11. "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow "from heaven, &c. so shall my word be that goeth out of my "mouth:" as the clouds, so the word is carried and directed by divine pleasure. It is the Lord that makes them both give down their blessings, or to pass away fruitless and empty: yea, it is from the Spirit that this part of the word works, and not another. Those things upon which ministers bestow greatest labour in their preparation, and from which accordingly they have the greatest expectation; these do nothing, when, mean time, something that dropped occasionally from them, like a chosen shaft, strikes the mark and doth the work.

Secondly, The Spirit of the Lord hath a glorious sovereignty over the souls wrought upon: it is his peculiar work "to take away the "stony heart out of our flesh, and to give us an heart of flesh," Ezek. xxxvi. 26. We may reason, exhort, and reprove, but nothing will abide till the Lord set it home. The Lord opened the heart of Lydia under Paul's ministry: he opens every heart that is effectually opened to receive Christ in the word: if the word can get no entrance, if your hearts remain dead under it still, we may say concerning such souls, as Martha did concerning her brother Lazarus; "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not "died." So, Lord, if thou hadst been in this sermon, in this prayer, or in that counsel, these souls had not remained dead under them.

Thirdly, The Spirit hath dominion over the times and seasons of conviction and conversion. Therefore the day in which souls are wrought upon is called "the day of his power," Psal. cx. 3. That shall work at one time, which had no efficacy at all at another time; because this, and not that, was the time appointed. And thus you see whence the word derives that mighty power it hath.

Now this word of God, when it is set home by the Spirit, is mighty to convince, humble, and break the hearts of sinners, John xvi. 9. "The Spirit when it cometh shall convince the world of "sin." The word signifies conviction by such clear demonstration as compelleth assent: it not only convinces men in general that they are sinners, but it convinceth men particularly of their own sins, and the aggravations of them. So in the text, *Sin revived*, that is, the Lord revived his sins, the very circumstances and aggravations with which they were committed: and so it will be

with us when the commandment comes; sins that we had forgotten, committed so far back as our youth or childhood; sins that lay slighted in our consciences, shall now be roused up as so many sleepy lions to affright and terrify us: for now the soul hears the voice of God in the word, as Adam heard it in the cool of the day and was afraid, and hides itself; but all will not do, for the Lord is come in the word; sin is held up before the eyes of the conscience in its dreadful aggravations and fearful consequences, as committed against the holy law, clear light, warnings of conscience, manifold mercies, God's long-suffering, Christ's precious blood, many warnings of judgment, the wages and demerit whereof, by the verdict of a man's own conscience, is death, eternal death, Rom. vi. 23. Rom. i. 32. Rom. ii. 9. Thus the commandment comes, sin revives, and vain hope gives up the ghost.

Inf. 1. Is there such a mighty power in the word? then certainly the word is of divine authority. There cannot be a more clear and satisfying proof that it is no human invention, than the common sense that all believers have of the Almighty power in which it works upon their hearts. So speaks the apostle, 1 Thes. ii. 13. "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." Can the power of any creature, the word of a mere man, so convince the conscience, so terrify the heart, so discover the very secret thoughts of the soul, as to put a man into such tremblings? No, a greater than man must needs be here; none but a God can so open the eyes of the blind, so open the graves of the dead, so quicken and enliven the conscience that was seared, so bind over the soul of a sinner to the judgment to come, so change and alter the frame and temper of a man's spirit, or so powerfully raise, refresh and comfort a drooping dying soul; certainly the power of God is in all this; and, if there were no more, yet this alone were sufficient to make full proof of the divine authority of the scriptures.

Inf. 2. Judge from hence what an invaluable mercy the preaching of the word is to the world: It is a blessing far above our estimation of it; little do we know what a treasure God committeth to us in the ordinances, Acts xiii. 25. "To you is the word of this salvation sent." It is the very power of God to salvation, Rom. i. 16. And salvation is ordinarily denied to whom the preaching of the word is denied, Rom. x. 14. It is called *the word of life*, Phil. ii. 16. and deserves to be valued by every one of us as our life. The eternal decree of God's election is executed by it upon our souls; as many as he ordained to eternal life shall believe by the preaching of it. Great is the ingratitude of this generation, which so slighted and undervalues this invaluable treasure; which is a sad

presage of the most terrible judgment, even in the removing our candlestick out of its place, except we repent.

Inf. 3. How sore and terrible a judgment lies upon the souls of those men to whom no word of God is made powerful enough to convince and awaken them! Yet so stands the case with thousands, who constantly sit under the preaching of the word; many arrows are shot at their consciences, but none goes home to the mark, all fall short of the end; the commandment hath come unto them many thousand times, by way of *promulgation* and ministerial *inculcation*, but yet never came home to their souls by the Spirit's effectual *application*. O friends! you have often heard the voice of man, but you never yet heard the voice of God; your understandings have been *instructed*, but your consciences to this day were never thoroughly *convinced*. "We have mourned unto you, but ye have not lamented," Matth. xi. 17. "Who hath believed our report? And unto whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Alas! we have laboured in vain, we have spent our strength for nought; our word returns unto us empty; but O what a stupendous judgment is here! Heb. vi. 7, 8. "The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." What a sore judgment and sign of God's displeasure would you account it, if your fields were cursed; if you should manure, dress, plow, and sow them, but never reap the fruit of your labour; the increase being still blasted? And yet this were nothing, compared with the blasting of the word to your souls: that which is a savour of life unto life unto some, becomes the savour of death unto death to others, 2 Cor. ii. 16. The Lord affect our hearts with the terrible strokes of God upon the souls of men!

Use of Exhortation.

I shall conclude this point with a few words of exhortation to three sorts of men, *viz.*

1. To those that never felt the power of the word.
2. To those that have only felt some slight and common effects thereof.
3. To those unto whose very hearts the commandment is come, in its effectual and saving power.

First, You that never felt any power in the word at all, I beg you in the name of him that made you, and by all the regard and value you have for those precious souls within you, that now at last such considerations as these may find place in your souls, and that you will bethink yourselves.

Consideration 1.

Whose word is that which cannot gain entrance into your hearts? Is it not the word of God which you despise and slight? "Thou castest my word behind thy back," Psal. l. 17. O what an affront and provocation to God is this! You despise not man, but God; the great and terrible God, in whose hand your breath and soul are: This contempt runs higher than you imagine.

Consideration 2.

Consider, that however the word hath no power upon you, the commandment cannot come home to your hearts; yet it doth work, and comes home with power to the hearts of others: Whilst you are hardened, others are melted under it; whilst you sleep, others tremble; whilst your hearts are fast locked up, others are opened. How can you choose but reflect with fear and trembling upon these contrary effects of the word; especially when you consider that the eternal decrees, both of election and reprobation, are now executed upon the souls of men, by the preaching of the word; some believe, and others are hardened.

Consideration 3.

That no judgment of God, on this side hell, is greater than a hard heart and stupid conscience under the word; it were much better that the providence of God should blast thy estate, take away thy children, or destroy thy health, than harden thy heart, and sear thy conscience under the word: So much as thy soul is better than thy body, so much as eternity is more valuable than time, so much is this spiritual judgment more dreadful than all temporal ones. God doth not inflict a more terrible stroke than this upon any man in this world.

O therefore, as you love your own souls, and are loth to ruin them to all eternity, attend upon every opportunity that God affords you; for you know not in which of them the Lord may work upon your hearts. Lay aside your prejudices against the word or the weaknesses and infirmities of them that preach it; for the word works not as it is the word of man, as it is thus neat and elegant, but as it is the word of God. Pray for the blessing of God upon the word; for except his word of blessing go forth with it, it can never come home to thy soul. Meditate upon what you hear; for, without meditation, it is not like to have any effectual operation upon you. Search your souls by it, and consider whether that be not your very case and state which it describes; your very danger whereof it gives warning. Take heed, lest after you have heard it, the cares of the world choke what you have heard, and cause those budding convictions which begin to put forth, to blast

and wither. Carefully attend to all those *items* and *memorandums* your consciences give you under the word, and conclude that the Lord is then come nigh unto you.

Secondly, Let this be matter of serious consideration and caution to all such as have only felt some slight, transient, and ineffectual operations of the gospel upon their souls: The Lord hath come nigh to some of our souls; we have felt a strange power in the ordinances, sometimes terrifying, and sometimes transporting our hearts; but, alas! it proves but a morning-dew, or an early cloud, Hos. vi. 4. We rejoice in the word, but it is but for a season, John iii. 25. Gal. iv. 14, 15. They are vanishing motions, and come to nothing. Look, as in nature there are many *abortives*, as well as perfect children, so it is in religion; yea, where the new creature is perfectly formed in one soul, there be many abortives and miscarriages in others; and there may be three reasons assigned for it, *viz.*

First, The subtilty and deep policy of Satan, who never more effectually deceives and destroys the souls of men, than in such a method, and by such an artifice as this; for when men have once felt their consciences terrified under the word, and their hearts at other times ravished with the joys and comforts of it, they now seem to have attained all that is necessary to conversion, and constitutive of the new creature; these things look so well like the regenerating effects of the Spirit, that many are easily deceived by them. The devil beguiles the hearts of the unwary by such false appearances: for it is not every man that can distinguish betwixt the natural and spiritual motions of the affections under the word: It is very frequently seen that even carnal and unrenewed hearts have their meltings and transports, as well as spiritual hearts. The subject-matter upon which the word treats, are the weighty things of the world to come; heaven and hell are very awful and affecting things, and an unrenewed heart is apt to thaw and melt at them: Now here is the cheat of Satan, to persuade a man that these must needs be spiritual affections, because the objects about which they are conversant are spiritual; whereas it is certain the objects of the affections may be very spiritual and heavenly, and yet the workings of man's affections about them may be in a mere natural way.

Secondly, The dampening efficacy of the world is a true and proper cause of these abortions and miscarriages under the word, Luke viii. 12, 13, 14. There are hopeful and promising beginnings and buddings of affections in some persons, especially in their youth; but when once they come to be engaged in the world, how soon are they damped and quenched! As the cares of a family grow on, so does the care of salvation wear off. It is not as it was wont to be, What shall I do to be saved? How shall I get interest in Christ?

But what shall I eat, and drink, and wherewith shall I, and mine, be maintained? Thus earth justles out heaven, and the present world drowns all thoughts of that to come. Good had it been for many men, they had never been engaged so deep in the world as they are; their life is but a constant hurry of business, and a perpetual diversion from Christ, and things that are eternal.

Thirdly, and lastly, The deceitfulness and treachery of the heart, which too easily gives way to the designs of Satan, suffers itself to be imposed upon by him, is not the least cause why so many hopeful beginnings come to nothing, and the effects of the word vanish. Pride and self-love are very apt to over-rule every little good, and slight or undervalue every ill that is in us; and so quickly choke those convictions that begin to work in our souls.

But oh! that such men would consider, that the dying away of their convictions is that which threatens the life of their souls for ever; now is the bud withered, the blossom blasted: and what expectation is there of fruit after this, except the Lord revive them again? The Lord open men's eyes to discern the danger of such things as these are! Jude 12. Heb. x. 58. Yet I deny not but there are many stands and pauses in the work of conversion; it seems to die away, and then revives again; and revive it must, or we are lost. But how many are there who never recover it more! This is a sore judgment of a most terrible consequence to the souls of men!

Thirdly, In the last place, let it be a word of counsel and advice to them, upon whom the word works effectually and powerfully; to whose hearts the commandment is come home to revive sin, and kill their vain hopes; and these are of two sorts.

1. Embryos under the first workings of the Spirit.
2. Complete births of the Spirit, regenerated souls.

First, Embryos that are under the first workings of the Spirit in the word. O let it not seem a misery, or unhappiness to you, that the commandment is come, and sin revived, and your former hopes overthrown. It must be thus, if ever God intend mercy for you. Had you gone on in that dangerous security you were in before, you had certainly been lost for ever: God hath stopt you in that path that leads down to hell, and none that go in there do ever return again, or take hold of the paths of life. O! it is better to weep, tremble, and be distressed now, than to mourn without hope for ever. Let it not trouble you that sin hath found you out; you could never have found out the remedy in Christ, if you had not found out the disease and danger, by the coming of the commandment. And I beseech you carefully to observe, whether the effects and operations of the word upon your hearts be deeper and more powerful than they are found to be in such souls as miscarry

under it: the commandment comes to them, and shews them this or that more gross and startling sin. Doth it come to you, and shew you not only this or that particular sin, but all the evils of your heart and life; the corruption of your natures, as well as the transgressions of your lives? If so, it promises well, and looks hopefully and comfortably to you. The commandment comes to others, and startles them with the fears of damnation for their sin: it puts them into a grievous fright at hell, and the everlasting burnings: but doth it come to thee and discover the infinite evil that is in thy sin, as it is committed against the great, holy, righteous, and good God, and so melts thy heart into tears for the wrong that thou hast done him, as well as the danger into which thou hast brought thyself? This is a hopeful work, and may encourage thee. It comes to others, and greatly shakes, but never destroys and razes the foundation of their vain hopes: if it so revive sin as to kill all vain hopes in thee, and send thee to Christ alone, as thy only door of hope, fear not; these troubles will prove the greatest mercies that ever befel thee in this world, if thus they work, and continue to work upon thy soul.

Secondly, Others there are upon whom the word hath had its full effect as to conversion. O bless God for ever for this mercy; you cannot sufficiently value it! God hath not only made it a convincing and wounding, but a converting and healing word to your souls; he hath not only revived your sins, and killed your vain hopes, but begotten you again to a lively hope; see that you be thankful for this mercy. How many have sate under the same word, but never felt such effects of it? As Christ said in another case, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, but unto none of them was the prophet sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, to a certain widow there, Luke iv. 46. So I may say, in this case, there were many souls in the same congregation, at the same time, but unto none of them was the word sent with a commission to convince and save, but such a one as thyself; one as improbable to be wrought upon as any soul there. O let this beget thankfulness in your souls; and let it make you love the word as long as you live: "I will never forget thy precepts, for by them thou hast quickened me," Psal. cxix. 93.

But above all, I beseech you make it appear that the commandment hath come home to your hearts, with power to convince you of the evil of sin, by your tenderness and care to shun it as long as you live. If ever you have seen the face of sin, in the glass of the law of God; if your hearts have been humbled and broken for it in the days of your trouble and distress, certainly you will choose the worst affliction rather than sin: It would be the greatest folly in the world to return again to iniquity, Psal. lxxxv. 8. You that

have seen so much of the evil that is in it, and the danger that follows it; you that have had such inward terrors and fears of spirit about it, when that terrible representation was made you, will be loth to feel those gripes and distresses of conscience again, for the best enjoyment in this world.

Blessed be God if any word has been brought home to our hearts, which hath been instrumental to bring us to Christ!

SERMON XXII.

The Teachings of God opened, in their Nature and Necessity.

JOHN vi. 45.

It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.

HOW necessary to our union with Jesus Christ, the application of the law, or coming home of the commandment to the heart of a sinner is, we have heard in the last discourse; and how impossible it is, either for the commandment to come to us, or for us to come to Christ without illumination and instruction from above, you shall hear in this.

This scripture hath much of the mind of God in it; and he that is to open it, had need himself to be taught of God. In the foregoing verses, Christ offers himself as the bread of life unto the souls of men: against this doctrine they oppose their carnal reason, ver. 41, 42. Christ strikes at the root of all their cavils and objections in his reply, ver. 43, 44. "Murmur not among yourselves: no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him;" q. d. you slight me because you do not know me; you do not know me because you are not taught of God; of these divine teachings, the prophets of old have spoken, and what they foretold is at this day fulfilled in our sight; so many as are taught of God, and no more, come unto me in the way of faith: it is impossible to come without the teachings of God, ver. 44. It is as impossible not to come, or to miscarry in their coming unto me, under the influence of these divine teachings, ver. 45.

The words read, consist of two parts, viz.

1. An allegation out of the prophets.
2. The application thereof made by Christ.

First, An allegation out of the prophets: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God." The places in