

may be together for ever praising him. It will be so, if you really have the value you ought to have for their souls, and for your own.

THE FOLLY
OF
DESPISING OUR OWN WAYS.

PROVERBS XIX. 16.

But he that despiseth his ways shall die.

WE have here a fair warning to a careless world ; a fair warning given, O that it were but taken ! There are those by whom it is taken. David speaks of it with comfort, that he had taken the alarms which God's commands gave, and, therefore, hoped for the rewards they proposed ; *by them is thy servant warned ; and in keeping them there is great reward.* The written word is a word of warning.^a The work of ministers is to warn sinners, they are set as watchmen for this purpose, and are to hear the word from God's mouth, and to warn them from him, and in his name. And this is that warning which they are to give from him ; *O wicked man ! thou shalt surely die,*^b if thou go on still in thy trespasses. O drunkard ! O swearer ! O sabbath-breaker ! O extortioner ! O unclean person ! Whoever thou art, thou shalt surely die ; the God of heaven has said it, and he will never unsay it, nor can all the world gainsay it, *The soul that sinneth it shall die.*

I am here to-day in God's name to warn you, from this text, whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, *O thou that despiseth thine own ways, thou shalt die !* if thou persist in this contumacy and contempt, thou shalt surely die. O that I may give the warning so as to deliver my own soul, and that you may all receive it so as to deliver yours !

There are two things in the text :

1. The sinner's fall and ruin, which we are here warned of : *He shall die ; the wages of sin is death.* It is that which sin, when it is finished, brings forth. It is the birth from that conception, the harvest from that seedness. The end of all those things is death ; that is it which sin has a direct tendency to.

There is a death that is the common lot of mankind ; it is appointed to men, to all men, once to die : and that is the general effect of sin ; it came in at the same door, at the same time : *By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin.* And if our breasts were but as susceptible of just resentments as they are of unjust ones, surely mankind would by

consent detest and abhor all sin, because that is the mother of all mischief ; that was it that introduced all that death which sullies the world's beauty, ruffles its peace, and stains the pride of all its glory.

But there is a death which is the particular lot of impenitent sinners. We lie under a sentence of death for the breach of the original law, but this speaks another death, a much sorer condemnation, which is inflicted for the contempt of the remedial law.

(1.) It is a spiritual death. An impenitent soul dies as a soul can die ; it lies under the wrath and curse of God, which is killing to the soul, is its death ; it is destitute of spiritual life, and of its principles and powers. It is under the dominion of corruption, which is as killing a sickness to the soul as the curse of God is a killing sentence. When Christ threatens concerning those who believe not in him, that they shall die in their sins,^c or as it is, v. 21. *εν τη αμαρτια ημων, in your sin,* in that sin of unbelief ; he means not so much that you shall die the death of the body, in an unconverted state, but you shall die spiritually, in the same sense that we are said to be dead in trespasses and sins, Eph. ii. 1. Sinners shall die, that is, their disease shall be incurable, and consequently mortal ; they shall languish of it awhile, and die of it at last.

They shall die, that is, they shall be cut off from all communion with God, which is the life of the soul, and from all hope of his loving-kindness, which is better than life. They shall die ; that is, they shall be dead to God, and to all good ; dead to Christ, as branches in the vine that are withered, which have no communication with the root, nor derive any virtue from it.

This spiritual death is a thousand times worse than the death of the body, and more to be dreaded. The body separated from the soul, which is its life, is only made a just and easy prey to the worms, which feed sweetly on it ; but a soul separated from God becomes a just and easy prey to the devils, as tempters, tormentors, or both. The death of the body is not to be called death to any but to those who die in their sins, and to them it is followed by the second death : to the saints it is but a sleep, for they die in Christ, and the toil of their work ceases while the comfort and recompence of them remains. Those are dead indeed who are twice dead ; the body dying, and the soul dead. O dread this spiritual death ; *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from this death, and Christ shall give thee light and life.*

(2.) It is an eternal death : this is but the perfection of the former, the sinfulness of man and the wrath of God both immutably fastened. He shall die ; that is, he shall perish eternally, he shall die

^a Ps. xix. 11.

^b Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8.

^c John viii. 24.

the second death. The learned Mr. Mede observes, that in Solomon's proverbs hell is called the "congregation of the dead," of *Rephaim*, of the *giants*, so some render it,^d alluding to the sinners of the old world, who were cut off by the deluge, and died together, which was a figure of the eternal punishment of sin in hell,^e and he supposes that Solomon has an eye to that future state of torment, when he says, of the strange and foolish woman, that her house inclines to death, and her paths to the dead;^f and, that the dead are there, and her guests are in the depths of hell.^g Agreeable to which it is here said of the wilful sinner, that he shall die, he shall die eternally, shall go down to the congregation of the dead and damned.

That misery which those inevitably fall into who live and die in their sins, is fitly called death, because, though it is not the extinguishing of their being, yet, which is equivalent, it is the extinguishing of their bliss, and *non est vivere sed valere vita—life consists not in existence but in enjoyment*; they are ever dying, and yet never dead. Death is the most terrible thing we can conceive, especially death by exquisite tortures, when death itself is courted as ease and release;^h and, therefore, hell is represented by the most killing tortures, to which that period is denied, because it is indeed more terrible than we can conceive. The metaphors are nothing to what the thing itself will be; nothing to what it is represented to us, when it is stript of the metaphors. It is *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, to the soul of man that doeth evil*; it is the wrath of an immortal God, filling the conscience of an immortal soul, that went out of this world unpardoned and unsanctified, and has in that world its faculties vastly enlarged, to receive the impressions of that wrath, and to make bitter reflections upon itself; that has no delights of sense to divert the thoughts of its own misery with, nor any hope of ever having benefit by the rejected Saviour, and the resisted Sanctifier.

This is no pleasing subject, nor is it any pleasure to me to dwell upon it, but we dare not pass by it when it comes in our way. I hope you do not desire we should; that you are not of those who would have only smooth things prophesied to you. You had better hear of it than feel it, especially when you hear of it for no other end but that for which the rich man in hell desired his five brethren might have it testified to them, lest they should also come into this place of torment. They who blame ministers for preaching these terrors of the Lord, and with them persuading men, who turn it to their reproach, that they fill their pulpits with hell and damnation, forget how frequently our Lord Jesus preached upon this subject, of being cast into utter darkness, where

there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; of the destruction both of soul and body in hell; of the furnace of fire into which the wicked shall be cast; of the worm that dies not, and the fire that shall not be quenched, the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels; of those who cannot escape the damnation of hell; and many, very many, the like passages we find in Christ's preaching. Such are the warnings we have received from his mouth, and we should be false to our Master, and false to your souls, if we did not give you this warning; and we should fall under his curse, and yours too, for our unfaithfulness. Give me leave therefore briefly to tell you,

[1.] That this second death, of which we give you warning, is a real thing, and no fancy. It is undoubtedly true, that there is a state of misery and torment in the other world, which will certainly be the portion of all who live and die ungodly. It is not the product of a crazed or terrified imagination, nor an engine of state wherewith to keep the world in awe: no, sirs, what we tell you concerning the torments of hell, as well as concerning the joys of heaven, are the true sayings of God. This branch of God's wrath is plainly revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.ⁱ It is so far from being inconsistent with the justice of God to punish sin to this degree, that considering the pomp, pleasure, and prosperity of many wicked people in this world, it is necessary to the maintaining and asserting of the divine justice and holiness; for considering how wickedness seems to be connived at and countenanced in this world, how would it appear that God hates it, and as a governor punishes it, if there were not such a place of torment reserved for it: and, therefore, the day of wrath is called the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.^k And even natural conscience witnesses to the truth of it, when the terrors of the Lord set themselves in array against it. Some have felt such a hell within them, as has been a plain indication of a hell before them.

O that all our hearts were possessed with the firm belief of this truth, that the wrath of God abides, and will eternally abide, upon all those who believe not in Jesus Christ, and submit not to the laws of his holy religion. The devil drew our first parents in to eat the forbidden fruit, by promising them impunity, and facing down the truth of the threatening; though in it he gave the lie to eternal truth. God had said, *In the day ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die*; and has said to us as plainly, *He that believes not shall be damned*: yet, as Satan said then to those who ate of the forbidden tree, *Ye shall not die*, he still says to those who persist in unbelief and impenitence, *Ye shall not be damned*. And shall

^c Prov. xxi. 16.
^f Prov. ii. 18.

^e 2 Pet. ii. 18.
^g Cā. ix. 18.

^h Rev. ix. 5, 6.

^k Rom. ii. 5.

ⁱ Rom. i. 18.

we suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by the same fallacy, or impudent falsehood rather, which was so fatal to our first parents, and to us in them? Shall we credit the father of lies, who seeks our destruction, rather than the God of truth, who desires our welfare?

You who are young, in this age of infidelity, have need to guard against temptations of this kind. Be firmly established in this truth, and hold it fast. The revelation of it plainly comes from God, and, therefore, every suggestion, how plausible soever, that tends to shake your belief of it, must come from Satan, and must be accordingly rejected with abhorrence. Live not a carnal, sensual, wicked life, for then you will be tempted to wish there were no hell, and so by degrees to believe there is none: but by your belief of it be driven to Christ, be restrained from sin, and kept in the way of your duty, and by such good influence upon your hearts and lives, you will have your belief of it confirmed; and it will be so far from being a terror to you, that it will furnish you with matter of comfort and praise, to think that through grace you are delivered from the wrath to come.

[2.] The second death, as it is a real thing, so it is a fearful thing, inconceivably dreadful; for who knows what is the power of God's anger, either what he can inflict, or what it is possible for a soul to suffer; or what a fearful thing it is for a sinner, who has made himself obnoxious to God's justice, and would not come up to the terms of pardoning mercy offered, and has made himself odious to God's holiness, and would not come under the power of sanctifying grace, offered likewise; to fall into the hands of the living God, when he comes to take vengeance, not only for his injured holiness and justice, but (which will add greatly to the account) for his despised grace and mercy?

The condition of all those will no doubt be very sad and doleful, who shall be shut out from the vision and fruition of God in heaven; as all those will be who are not, by the grace of God, made meet for it: but it is observable, and it is what ought to be observed to you who enjoy the gospel, and profess Christianity, that the extremities of the torments of hell are always spoken of as the portion of those, who either might have had a place and a name in the church of Christ, and would not, or have a place and name in it, and do not live up to it. They are the children of the kingdom, the unbelieving Jews who shall be cast into outer darkness,¹ who were invited into the Christian church, but refused the invitation. They are the tares found in the field of the church, and the bad fish enclosed by the gospel net, who shall be cast into the furnace of fire.^m And hypocrites, who shall not escape the damna-

tion of hell, even those who come to the wedding-feast without a wedding-garment.^a It is he who follows Christ, and yet betrays him, whose condition will be so miserable, that it had been better for that man he had never been born.^o And they are those who had talents but buried them; who had opportunity of relieving Christ's poor, and shut up the bowels of their compassion from them, who shall be most severely reckoned with. So that we, for our parts, are all concerned to fear the worst, and with the utmost diligence to flee from the wrath to come; for if we fall under it, (how charitably soever some may be willing to hope concerning those who never enjoyed the advantages that we enjoy, nor made the profession that we make,) it is certain that our condemnation will be more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, (so the Judge himself has told us,) though theirs is no less than the vengeance of eternal fire.^p

Let our holy faith therefore produce a holy fear, as Noah's did, who by faith being warned of a deluge coming, was moved with fear to prepare an ark.^q O that the sinners in Sion might hereby be made afraid, because, of all sinners, it will fare worst with the sinners in Sion! O that fearfulness might surprise the hypocrites, whose doom will be the most fearful; that by this fear sinners may be awakened to cast away the filthy rags of their iniquity, and hypocrites to trust no longer to the cloak of their hypocrisy; that sinners may become saints, and hypocrites sincere: for when we preach such terrible doctrine as this, it is not, as we are sometimes told, to frighten you out of your wits, but to frighten you out of your sins.

[3.] This second death is very near to all who are going on still in their trespasses. If Satan cannot prevail to take away the influence of this truth upon men's minds, by denying the reality or eternity of hell-torments, or by diminishing the terror of them, he then endeavours to do it by representing them at a vast distance, that in that view they may appear small and inconsiderable, in comparison with the things that are present and near. When we tell wicked people that they shall surely die, if they go on in sin, they are ready to tell us, perhaps it may prove so at last; but the vision that we see is for many days to come, and we prophesy of the times that are very far off,^r as the people said to the prophet. If there be such an evil day coming, yet they put it as far off from them as they can, and so it makes no impression upon them.

And is it so indeed? No, certainly; I am to tell thee, sinner, thou who goest on frowardly in the way of thy heart, that there is but a step between thee and this second death, and it may be a short step, and soon taken. There is but one life between thee

¹ Matt. viii. 12. ^m Matt. xiii. 42. ⁿ Matt. xxii. 13.

^o Matt. xxvi. 24. ^p Jude 7. ^q Heb. xi. 7. ^r Ezek. xii. 27.

and hell, and that is thy own, which, perhaps, will be shortly at an end; *Behold the Judge standeth before the door.* As the Saviour of the saints, though he tarry, yet will come, and *will not tarry*; so the judgment of sinners, though it seem to linger, seem to slumber, yet now of a long time it lingers not, it slumbers not.*

It would amaze us if we could see it with our bodily eyes, but (which is next door to it to a believer) our Saviour has set it before us in two parables, what a sudden change death makes with a secure worldling, whose soul is promised the enjoyment of goods laid up for many years, and yet is this night required; or with a secure sensualist, who fares sumptuously every day, and the next news that is heard of him is, he is dead and in hell torments.† In a moment they go down to the grave, from the height of prosperity to the depth of misery.

O that the nearness of this dreadful doom might awaken sinners to a speedy repentance and return to God! Believe it, sirs, it is not a time to trifle, or to be dilatory, yet a little, little while, and the veil will be rent. The days of your probation will be numbered and finished, and you will enter upon the state of recompence and retribution. O that you would bethink yourselves in time, now, at length, in this your day, that you would know and consider the things that belong to your everlasting peace; for though they are not yet hid from your eyes, thanks be to God they are not, yet you know not how soon they may; when the misery, that might have been in time prevented, must be to eternity rued, but cannot to eternity be remedied.

Those are very awakening words of Mr. Baxter's, in a sermon before the House of Commons, which Dr. Bates quotes in his sermon at his funeral, and which I shall crave leave to transcribe here. "The wretch that is condemned to die to-morrow cannot forget it; and yet poor sinners, that continually are uncertain to live an hour, and certain speedily to see the majesty of the Lord to their inconceivable joy or terror, as sure as they now live on earth, can forget these things, for which they have their memory, and which one would think should drown the matters of this world, as the report of a cannon doth a whisper, or as the sun obscures the poorest glow-worm. O wonderful stupidity of an unrenewed soul! O wonderful folly and distractedness of the ungodly! that ever men can forget, I say again, that they can forget, eternal joy, eternal woe, and the eternal God, and the place of their eternal, unchangeable abodes, when those stand even at the door, and there is but the thin veil of flesh between them and that amazing sight, that eternal gulf, and they are daily dying and stepping in!"

Be convinced of the certainty of these truths; that

if we live after the flesh we shall die; that the broad way of sin leads to destruction, and ends in it; that except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish; and then tremble to think how miserable the condition of that man is, who has brought himself to this fearful dilemma, that either God must be false, or he must be damned. But I hope better things of you, my brethren, and things that accompany salvation, though it is needful I should thus speak.

2. Here is the sinner's fault and folly, which brings him to this ruin, and which we are here warned against, and that is, despising his own ways; and the opening of this is what I chiefly aimed at in the choice of this text. Having yesterday in another place, upon a like occasion, showed the folly and danger of despising our own souls, as those do who are careless about their spiritual state, I thought this might fitly follow it, to show the gross absurdity they are guilty of who are careless about their particular actions, and never heed whether what they do be right or wrong; than which nothing can be of more pernicious consequence, especially to young people. And this is that which is here meant by the sinner's despising his own way;—*Qui negligenter instituit vitam et mores—who is careless in the regulation of his life and manners*; so *Piscator: Non curans quo modo vivat—who is heedless how he lives*; so *Mercer.*—The former part of the verse explains it, *He that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.* Those who walk circumspectly in the way of duty secure all the true interests of their own souls, and will be happy for ever. But those who despise their way, and do not govern themselves according to the commandment, do not keep to that, they ruin their own souls.

So that hence we may gather this doctrine,

That it is a very foolish and dangerous thing for men to despise their own ways. Or thus: Those who despise their own ways are in the high road to utter ruin.

In the prosecution of this, as of the former, I must, I. Show when we may be said to despise our own ways; and, II. The folly and danger of doing so; and then make application.

I. When may we be said to despise our own ways, our conversation, and the particular actions of it, which we ought to have a very tender and careful regard to? You shall see the crime opened in six particulars:

1. When we are altogether unconcerned about the end of our ways, we may then be truly said to despise our own way. This inconsideration of the end of our way includes two things, which are both fatal.

(1.) Not designing the great end, which in our way we should aim at, nor directing our ways towards that end. We know very well, that the God

* 2 Pet. ii. 3.

† Luke xvi. 19, 23.

who made us, made us for himself, to show forth his praise; that the Christ who bought us, bought us for himself, that we should not henceforth live to ourselves, but should be a peculiar people to him, should live to him, and be to him for a name and a praise. So that the great end of our being and living is the glory of our Creator and Redeemer; and this end we should at least virtually and habitually aim at in all our ways.

And it is a great honour which the God of heaven has put upon our ways, that he is pleased to reckon himself glorified by them if they be good, and, if in them our light shine before men, glorified by the fruits of our ways.^u That not only such a favourable, but such an honourable, construction should be put upon any thing we can say or do, that it should be acceptable and serviceable to the great God of heaven and earth, who is infinitely exalted above all blessing and praise! That the worms of the earth should be capable of doing the work of angels! Man's honour, in being made Lord of the inferior creatures, is very great: the Psalmist, when he observes him to have dominion over the works of God's hands, reckons him, in that, crowned with glory and honour.^v But his honour in being made the mouth of the inferior creatures in praising God is much greater; that whereas they can only minister matter for praise, man is capable of offering up actual adorations and praises to the Creator; and he is pleased to say, that he who offers praise, glorifies him, and to take it among the titles of his honour, that he "inhabith the praises of Israel;" for this we have much more reason to say, *Lord, what is man, that thou magnifiest him, and makest such account of him?* In my eye, a man looks more truly great when he is in a right manner worshipping his Creator at the footstool of his throne, and giving glory to him, than when he is domineering over his fellow-creatures, and giving law to them, on the highest of the thrones of the kings of the earth.

Nor is it only in the solemn acts of religious worship that we are to glorify God, but even in our common actions, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we must do it to the glory of God;^w that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.^x The general scope and tendency of our conversations must be toward the pleasing and praising of God; his favour must be pursued as our chief good in all we do, and his honour aimed at as our highest end; that we may in all our actions express the honour we have for God, and may excite others to honour him. And when we do thus, to borrow a phrase that commonly passes from man to man, but much more properly from man to God, we do ourselves the greatest honour of subscribing ourselves his "admirers and humble servants."

But if, instead of directing our ways to this great end, we regard not whether we do so or no: nay, if we direct them to a contrary end, and instead of living to God and to his glory, we live to ourselves, we eat to ourselves, and drink to ourselves,^y as God complains concerning his people, to please ourselves, and gratify the appetites of sense, that we may enjoy bodily ease and pleasure; if, instead of seeking his honour, and the honour that comes from him, we seek our own honour, in the praise and applause of men; if self be the centre in which the lines of all our actions meet; we may then be said to despise our ways, and to disparage them, when we make them subservient to an end so mean and trifling, when they are capable of being made to serve an end so great and noble. Belshazzar is said to have lifted up himself against the Lord of heaven, whereas really he debased and diminished himself to the last degree, when he served his base and brutish lusts with the wealth and honour and power that God had given him, and praised the gods of wood and stone, which neither hear, nor see, nor know; and must stand mute to that high charge, *But the God in whose hand thy breath is, and in whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified?*^z

(2.) Not inquiring what will be the last end, in which our ways will terminate and have their period. That which makes our way considerable, that is, the course and tenor of our conversation well worthy our care,—is, that it is either the broad-way that leads down to death and destruction, or the narrow-way that leads up to life and glory. The path we walk in is either the path of life,^a or the path of the destroyer.^b It is not only either a right way that will bring us to the happiness we profess to be journeying toward, or a wrong way that will not; the difference is greater than that, it is a way that will end either in heaven or hell.

And does it not concern us then to put the question seriously to ourselves, Whither will the way that I walk in lead me? where will it lodge me? that if it be the good way that leads to heaven, I may press forward in it; if the bad way that leads to hell, I may hasten back out of it. Whither am I going? what will be in the end hereof? what shall I do in the day of visitation? If I should die to-night, as I am not sure to live till to-morrow morning, whither would death bring me? These are questions which all those who have a concern for their own way will ask themselves frequently; as the pilot who minds his business, often considers what port he is bound for, and then, by inspecting his compass, inquires whether the course he now steers will bring him to it.

But with the most of men this is the last thing in their thoughts; they have not the prudence to foresee the evil, and to hide themselves, but with the

^u Matt. v. 16. John xv. 8.
^w 1 Cor. x. 31.

^v Ps. viii. 5, 6.
^x 1 Pet. iv. 11.

^y Zech. vii. 6.
^z Ps. xvi. 11.

^a Dan. v. 23.
^b Ps. xvii. 4.

simple they pass on, and are punished.^c We earnestly wish, as God did of Israel, that they would be so wise as to consider their latter end; but at the same time, we have reason to complain, as God did of Jerusalem, that *because she remembered not her last end, therefore she came down wonderfully.*^d

Those despise their way who look not on it with that concern, which a serious prospect of the end of it would fill them with; and therefore it is, that they go on securely in that way of the ungodly which will perish; but they consider not the perdition that it will end in, and, therefore, are drawn into it, and drawn on in it, by the allurements of worldly profit and sensual pleasure. That simple unwary youth, whom Solomon speaks of, was made to yield, and in a manner forced, by the flatteries and fair speeches of the adulterous woman, because he considered not what would follow upon it, that it was the direct way to hell, and to the chambers of death; so that he went as an ox to the slaughter, and as a fool to the correction of the stocks; as a bird that hastens to the snare, and knows not that it is for his life. Men would not be brought, as they are, to believe a lie, by which they will all be damned, if they were not given up to strong delusions.

And are there any here who have lived thus many years in this world, and never yet bestowed one serious thought upon this grand question, What will become of them in the other world? who either never put the question to themselves, or, like Pilate, had not patience or courage to stay for an answer; who never yet judged it a matter worth being resolved in? Know then, that you are of those who despise their own ways: and can it be a thing of small account with you, whether you are going to heaven or hell? Is the difference between them so minute as to justify your indifference in this matter? O that at length you would bring this matter to a trial; and not only so, but bring it to an issue, with all the solicitude that a matter of such importance both deserves and requires. Make it to appear that you value your ways, by being inquisitive, as a careful traveller is, whether the way you are in will bring you to your journey's end if you proceed in it, or not, and proceed accordingly. If ye will inquire, inquire ye; and leave not a matter of such moment at uncertainty.

2. When we are indifferent about the rule of our ways, and the measures by which we govern ourselves in them, we despise our own ways. Men's practices will be guided and ruled by their principles, and those who are loose and unfixed in their principles can never be even and steady in their practices. Those certainly despise their way who walk at all adventures, and live at large when they should walk circumspectly, and live by rule.

(1.) We despise our way, if we set aside the rules which God has honoured us and our way with the prescribing of. God has bid us stand in the way and see. Consider what is the way appointed you to walk in, ask for the old paths, for God has not put us to seek for new rules to go by, such as were never heard of before, but such as were from the beginning, and he has said, *Walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls*, spiritual rest in your way, and eternal rest at the end of it. But they put contempt upon their way, which God had discovered such a concern for; for they said, *We will not walk therein.*^e

It is a great honour God has put upon our way, [1.] That he has given us the Scriptures to be the guide of our way; has in them showed us what is good, and what the Lord our God requires of us; has here told us what are the by-paths we should carefully avoid, what the stumbling-stones we should take heed of: his word is *a light to our feet, and a lamp to our paths*, not only a discovering but a directing light. Could a greater regard have been had to our actions by the God who made us, than to give us a divine revelation exactly suited to our case, and accommodated to all the steps that we have to take, on purpose to be our guide to heaven? What an honour did God put upon Israel in the wilderness, though an undeserving people, and upon their passage through it, in that he gave them a pillar of cloud and fire to go before them, and show the way in which they should go, and to direct all their removals and rests! Such a divine conduct are we under, who have the written word to be our guide and counsellor.

But we despise our way if we make not use of this rule, and conform not our hearts and lives to it; if it be an indifferent thing to us whether we be ruled by the word of God, or no; if we never consult that oracle, never try our ways by that touchstone, nor are in care to walk by the light of the law and the testimony. As presumptuous sinners trample upon the law, and do what they can to make it void, so careless sinners cast the law behind their backs, and keep it as much as they can out of their sight, as if it were not worth while to order their conversation according to it. Those who despise the commandment of the Lord,^f who despise the word, and fear not the commandment, they despise their own ways, and shall be destroyed:^g but as many as walk according to this rule, as they put a respect upon it, so they put a respect upon their own way, and peace shall be upon them, and mercy, as it is upon all the Israel of God,^h who are guided and governed by that rule.

Let young people cleanse their way, and make it pure and pleasant, acceptable to God, comfortable to themselves, and beautiful before men. Let them

^c Prov. xxiii. 3.

^d Lam. i. 9.

Jer. vi. 19.

^e 2 Sam. xii. 9.

^f Prov. xlii. 13.

^h Gal. vi. 16.

direct their way to the right end, and in the right paths, by taking heed thereto with a constant care and concern, according to the word,¹ which we must always have regard to. [See Mr. Nesbit's sermon to young people lately, on that text.]

[2.] That he has appointed conscience to be a monitor to us concerning our way, according to the Scriptures. As *the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light, so the spirit of a man likewise is the candle of the Lord.*^k Conscience, rightly informed, is an excellent guide in subordination to the Scriptures, and God has showed his care of our actions, by appointing us such a tutor and guardian, such an inspector of our manners, to be always with us, to check us when we do amiss, and to direct and encourage us to do well; to be a voice behind us, saying unto us, *This is the way, walk in it, when we are ready to turn aside.*^l God, by enduing us with a faculty of reflecting upon our actions, which the beasts have not, of accusing and excusing ourselves, has evidenced the concern he has about our ways, that they be straight and good.

But if we have no regard to the admonitions of conscience, and turn a deaf ear to them; if we say to that seer, *See not*; if we smite our hearts for smiting us, or threaten to do so, as the king of Judah did the prophet, *Forbear, why shouldst thou be smitten?*^m if it be all one to us whether our consciences be pleased or displeased, and no care is taken to keep them void of offence; then we despise our own way, as if it were not worth looking into, or looking after. But however conscience may for a time be slighted and silenced, brow-beaten and run down, first or last it will be heard.

O that young people would betimes manifest their concern for their own way, by paying a respect to their own consciences, getting them rightly informed concerning good and evil, sin and duty; hearkening to their dictates, though they be but whispered; keeping them tender and afraid of sin, and keeping up their dominion over appetite and passion, and all the lusts of the flesh and of the eye. Often call upon conscience to do its office, and not only give it leave to deal faithfully with you, but charge it to do so: maintain the honour of the government in your own souls, and the due course of law, and suffer it not to be insulted, obstructed, or made despicable. Thus order is kept up in the soul, and its peace secured; and it is the greatest honour you can do yourselves, to maintain a value and veneration for your consciences.

(2.) We despise our way if we set up and follow their rules of walking, in opposition to those which God has appointed us; and such rules as are not only pernicious, but unworthy to be regarded in the conduct of our way.

What mean thoughts have those of their own way, [1.] Who are guided and governed by appetite and passion, fancy and imagination, the sight of their own eyes; who will do just what they have a mind to do, whether right or wrong. *Quidquid libet licet—whatever pleases is right*, that is their principle; if it be grateful to sense, it shall be lawful; they will do what is right in their own eyes, and what pleases them, whether it be right in God's eyes, and please him, or no.—*We will certainly do whatsoever thing goes forth out of our own mouth,*ⁿ is the language of those who despise their own way. By this Solomon describes the folly of the young man, *That he walks in the way of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes.*^o

But are those fit to direct a way that leads to eternity? Must the powers that are brutal command a creature that is rational? Must human reason and divine revelation, and the oracles of both, give way to the desires of the flesh, and the more foolish inventions which man has found out since his departure from his God? Nothing is so unseemly as servants on horseback, and princes walking as servants upon the earth:^p nothing so insufferable as these servants when they reign, these fools when they are pampered.^q Can we think that man, who was made to be a subject to his Maker, should be allowed a boundless liberty, and sent out free with the wild ass? No; you mistake yourselves, if you think you may do as you please.

[2.] Those, also, who are guided and governed by the course and custom of this vain and foolish world, despise their own way, who think *that* a leader and director wise enough, and good enough, and safe enough for them. Those matter not much what they do, who resolve to do as the most do, and follow the multitude, though it be to do evil; nor whither they go, who resolve to go down the stream, without asking whither it will carry them. Christ says, *Follow me*, and it will be an honour to us and our conversation to have such a leader, and to follow him whithersoever he goes, who is wisdom itself. The world says, *Follow me*, and we cannot do ourselves a greater dishonour, than to put ourselves under the conduct of such a leader; yet, thus the children of disobedience do, they walk according to the course of this world.^r It is all one to them what they do, so they can but recommend themselves to the gay and the great, or to the worldly-wise, on whom that principle has a greater influence than all the principles of their religion, "*As good be out of the world as out of the fashion.*"

What contempt do those put upon their own ways, who are easily drawn aside from their duty into by-paths, by any one who will put up the finger, and flatter them, and speak a few fair words, and tell them every body else does so! It is with them as

ⁱ Ps. cxix. 9. ^k Prov. xx. 27. ^l Isa. xxx. 21.
^m 2 Chron. xxv. 16. ⁿ Jer. xlv. 47.

^o Eccl. xi. 9. ^p Eccl. x. 6, 7.
^q Prov. xxx. 22. ^r Eph. ii. 2.

the apostle says it was with the Gentiles, they were carried away even as they were led.* Those make no account of their way, whose hearts are thus weak, thus easy, thus yielding to the suggestions and solicitations of them who lie in wait to deceive, and make them their rule.

3. When we are wavering and unsettled in the course and tenor of our ways, then we despise them. Those who in the course of their lives are of no consistency with themselves, but halt between two, and are continually contradicting themselves, they make nothing of their way, nor bring any thing to pass in it; these are the double-minded men,¹ whose hearts are divided between God and the world, the Spirit and the flesh, as if they had the art of reconciling contraries; and they are accordingly unstable in all their ways, in a continual struggle between their convictions and their corruptions, and sometimes they yield to the one, and sometimes to the other; and thus they go on from time to time, fed with a fancy, as if it would justify the abundance of bad in them, that there is something in them that is good which does condemn it, and witness against it. But this is despising their way, as if it were not worth being entirely submitted to God, but it were enough to be in part so: but those who thus, like Reuben, are as unstable as water, like him shall never excel.²

(1.) It is certain that those have not the concern they ought to have for their own ways, who have not resolution enough to persist in good purposes, and to hold to them. You shall have them sometimes in a good mind under the convictions of the word, or the corrections of the rod; or when they are going out into the world, fresh from under the influence of a religious education; they will then promise very fair, *All that the Lord shall say unto us we will do, and be obedient*; and we have reason to think that they mean as they say, and intend no other; but the buds and blossoms are blasted, their good purposes prove to no purpose; and it is for want of resolution, it is because they have not a just value for their own way, otherwise they would stick to a good bargain for it when they have made it.

You who are young, I hope, are ready to engage yourselves to the Lord, to promise that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes; but will you adhere to it? will you abide by it? Having sworn, will you perform it? Will you with purpose of heart cleave to the Lord? This would indeed put a value upon your way; if you had indeed one heart and one way to fear God for ever. This was it that Joshua laboured to bring the people of Israel to, when he put it to their choice, whether they would serve other gods, or the true God only, and laid before them what there was in the service of God that

was discouraging: all was to bring them to this fixed resolution, and keep them to it, *Nay, but we will serve the Lord.*³

(2.) Those who have not constancy enough to proceed and persevere in the good practices wherein they have begun, have not the concern they ought to have for their own ways. Those who did run well, but something hindered them, and drove them off; who had a first love, but have left it, even the kindness of their youth, and the love of their espousals, as if they had found some iniquity in God or in his ways, which yet we challenge them to produce and prove any instance of: those despise their way, who having begun in the spirit, end in the flesh, whose goodness is as the morning cloud and the early dew, which passeth away.⁴

You who now in the days of your youth are mindful of your Creator, it is a good way in which you set out, make it to appear that you have a value for it, by persevering in it; and take heed lest, having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ, you should through carelessness of your way, be again entangled therein and overcome, and so fall from your own stedfastness.⁵ I beseech you, look to yourselves and your own way, and to every step you take in it, lest ye lose the things ye have wrought and gained, that you may receive a full reward.⁶ Notice is taken in the character of Jehoshaphat, that he walked in the first ways of his father David:⁷ it is a pity but those whose first ways are good ways, should not have such regard to them, as still to improve, that their last ways may be their best ways.

4. If we do not apply ourselves to God in our ways, and acknowledge him, we despise our own ways. This honour has God been pleased to put upon our ways, that he has undertaken to be our guide and guard in them, if we look up to him as we ought. If, therefore, we have not our eye up to him, if we make light of this privilege, as all those do who do not make use of it, we lose this honour.

(1.) God has promised those who seek him, that he will teach them the way in which they should go, that he will teach sinners in the way,⁸ will teach them his way, if they will but meekly attend his conduct; that he will teach them in the way that he shall choose, when otherwise they would be apt to turn aside into the way that a vain mind and a corrupt heart shall choose, c. 12. He has promised that he will find out some means or other to make their way plain before them, to guide them by his counsel, to guide them with his eye, by some little intimation of his mind, which they with whom his secret is do understand the meaning of; he knows how much depends upon the right ordering of their way, and how much it is his delight when it is a good

* 1 Cor. xii. 2. † James i. 8. ‡ Gen. xlix. 4.
 † Josh. xxiv. 21. ‡ Hos. vi. 4.

§ 2 Pet. ii. 20. ¶ 2 John 8.
 || 2 Chron. xvii. 3. ** Ps. xxxv. 8, 9.

way, and, therefore, the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,^b and we are instructed to pray, *Lord, order my steps in thy word.*^c

But now, if we do not think this divine conduct worth asking, if we think we do not need it, or can do well enough without it; if in the most difficult and doubtful cases we go on leaning to our own understanding, and ask not counsel at the mouth of the Lord, we despise our way, we put contempt upon it, and bring more contempt. Thus they did who took counsel, but not of God, and covered with a covering but not of his Spirit, Isa. xxx. 1. They who over-value their own wisdom under-value their own way.

(2.) God has promised them that seek him, to bear them up and strengthen them in their way, to fortify them against the temptations of their way, to furnish them for the duties and services of it, and to work all their good works in them and for them. What an honour has God hereby put upon our way and work, that he has promised us grace sufficient for us, that as our day is, so shall our strength be! to enlarge our hearts, that we may run the way of his commandments, and work in us both to will and to do! But if we slight this grace which he has offered us and encouraged us to ask, and instead of committing our way to the Lord, go on in it in our own strength, as if we had no need of the divine aids, we then despise our way, and it is just with God to leave us to ourselves; to leave the youths who are confident of their own abilities, to faint and be weary, and the young men utterly to fail,^d while by renewed strength from him, the lame man is made to leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing in the ways of the Lord.

5. When we are careless of our past ways, and take not the account we ought to take of them, we then despise our ways. It is our honour that we can look back; it is our concern to look back, because if we have done amiss, there is a way provided to undo it by repentance, and prevent the fatal consequences of it. If we neglect that, we despise our way.

(1.) If we are not willing that others should reprove us for what they see or hear is amiss in us, we have not the care we ought to have for our own way. So many things there are amiss, and so much is it our concern to have them mended, and yet withal so partial are we in favour of ourselves, that we have need of more eyes than our own to discover us to ourselves: and it is a great advantage to us in our way, to have faithful friends about us, to tell us of our faults and of our dangers; This is not well, the other is not safe; this is a blemish to you, and that will be a snare to you.

But there are those who take it as an affront to be

thus admonished, are ready to fly in the face of their reprovers, yea, though they be ministers, reprovers in the gate, reprovers by office; yea, though they be their own ministers, who ought to have some care particularly of their souls; though they be their parents and masters, who rebuke with authority; though they be those to whom they have given the right hand of fellowship, with a mutual obligation to watch over one another; yet they are ready to say to them who show them the false steps they have taken, "What is that to you? meddle with your own business, we know what we have to do better than you can teach us:" and it is well if they bear them not a grudge for it. Is not this an evidence that they despise their way, though it be a way that leads either to heaven or to hell? They would not thus despise their way from one part of the city to the other; for there they would thank any one who would show them where they have missed their way, or are in danger of missing it, and would direct them in the right way.

2. If we are not willing to examine ourselves, and to search and try our own ways, and to call ourselves to an account, and correct ourselves for what we have done amiss, we despise our own ways, and do not make that account of them which God does, and which he expects we should do. He looks upon men when they have sinned, to see what they will do next, whether they will make any sorrowful reflections upon it, and whether their spirits will be grieved for that, by which they have grieved his Spirit: and, if there be any who say, *I have sinned, and have perverted that which was right, and it profited me not,*^e he is pleased with it, and meets such returning souls more than half way with his comforts. But if, on the contrary, when he hearkens and hears they speak not aright;^f if none of them say, "What have I done? and it is all wrong;" still if they be not brought to that, he is disappointed, and is provoked to say, that his Spirit shall not any more strive with them.

Those despise their way, who never remember against themselves their former iniquities, nor inquire wherein they have erred; who never examine their consciences, nor review the records of them; lie down at night, and never ask what they have done amiss that day; enter upon a sabbath, and never look back upon their week's work; perhaps go to the Lord's table every month, and do not examine themselves how their conversation has been ordered since they were last renewing their covenants with God in that ordinance: and is not this a great contempt put upon their own way? They are willing to take it for granted all has been well, as Ephraim, though he had the balances of deceit in his hand, and loved to oppress, yet flattered himself

^b Ps. xxxvii. 23.

^c Ps. cxix. 133.

^d Isa. xl. 30.

^e Job xxxiii. 7.

^f Jer. viii. 6.

with a conceit that they should find no iniquity in him that were sin,^g nothing very bad, or at least nothing to be seen.

And while they thus neglect to inquire into their own ways, how can they tell what confession of sin to make, and what to pray particularly for the pardon of? and how can they tell what sin to covenant against, and to stand upon their guard against? You that are great dealers in the world, know of what consequence it is to you to keep your accounts even, and often to review them; and those who are shy of looking into their books, it is to be feared, it is because they are not willing to know the worst of their affairs; they suspect they are going behind-hand, and by this means are likely to go more and more so.

And will it not be of dangerous consequence to the prosperity of our souls, if we neglect to look over the books of conscience, that we may renew our repentance, and make our peace with God in Christ? He that is washed needs to wash his feet;^h the sooner the better, and in order to that to observe what filth he has contracted; if he do not, he despises his way. Consideration of our ways is the first step towards conversion from the errors of them, and, therefore, reckon not that you can safely go forward, till you have first seriously looked back.

6. When we are heedless and inconsiderate as to the way that is before us, and walk at all adventures, we despise our own way. If we think it is all one what we do, that God Almighty is neither pleased nor displeased with any of our thoughts or affections, words or actions, and, therefore, do as we please, and ask no question for conscience sake; if, in doubtful cases, we never consider what is our duty, but what is our inclination and secular interest; if we go on in our callings, and never consider how we may glorify God in the use of them, and keep a good conscience; if, like the men of Laish, we dwell carelessly, never look back with any regret, nor forward with any concern, we despise our way.

(1.) If we are in no care to avoid sin, which mars our path, and is a by-path, then we are careless of our way, as a fool upon the road, that never picks his way, but goes, as we say, through thick and thin. The chief, and indeed the only, thing we have to dread in our way is sin, for nothing but that can hurt or hinder us. The sin that most easily besets us, is the weight that must be laid aside; that is it that defiles our way, that disorders and perplexes it; that is the false way which we are to hate.

But those who are careless of their way, are not aware of their danger of sin, and their danger by sin, and therefore rush into it as the horse into the battle;ⁱ they consider not that they do evil,^k nor what a great deal of evil there is in what they do. They have, it may be, deceitful ways of trade, carry

it on by a course of lying and fraud, cheating their neighbours, cheating the government, and go on securely in it, not considering what an abomination to the Lord both the lying lips and the false weights and measures are. They keep up drunken clubs, and in them mispend their time, and unfit themselves for the service of God, not considering that drunkenness and revellings, and such like, are works of the flesh, of which we have been told again and again, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.^l

All the corruptions of our way arise from the corruptions of our hearts, and if we take no care to mortify and subdue them, and to suppress the first risings of them, to get the habits of sin weakened, and to shame ourselves and frighten ourselves out of those inclinations and dispositions which are so hurtful to us; if we do not thus strike at the root, it is a sign that we have not the concern we ought to have for our own way.

Our own corruptions are excited and drawn out by the temptations of Satan. We are told of our danger from that enemy, but are careless of our way if we do not put on the whole armour of God, and in dependence upon divine grace put on resolution to resist him, and repel all his assaults. He has devices and wiles wherewith to beguile the unwary, *latet anguis in herbâ,—there is many a snake under the green grass*, and therefore we have need to look where we tread: and that we may be kept from evil, are concerned to abstain from all the appearances of evil, and to take heed of approaches towards it; if we do not we are careless of our way.

(2.) If we are in no care to do our duty, to be found in the way of it, and to do it as it ought to be done, we are careless of our way. It is not enough to the making of our way good that we cease to do evil, but we must learn to do well, and must learn to do it well, which will not be done without consideration. We must see to it, that in all the duties of the Christian life we *walk circumspectly*, *ακριβως*, *accurately, exactly*; ^m must do it by rule, and therefore must do it with care.

What we do that is good, must be done from a right principle, for a right end, and in a right manner; and therefore it must be done carefully, because herein it is so easy a thing to miss it; and if we are carried on in a road of religious exercises only by custom, and not by conscience and a due concern, we do but mock God and deceive ourselves, and it will turn to no good account.

Many an opportunity we have of doing good to others, and getting good to our own souls, which, if we do but walk carefully, we might make a good improvement of; but we lose it and let it slip, and it is a sign we despise our way; for the husbandman

^g Hos. xii. 8.

^h John xiii. 10.
2 N 2

ⁱ Jer. viii. 6.

^k Eccl. v. 1.

^l Gal. v. 12.

^m Eph. v. 15.

that has a respect to his business, and a value for it, will not drop his proper time for sowing and reaping.

What is done in religion without care, is done accordingly. If we go about solemn exercises without solemn preparation, we commonly come off from them without advantage; and if the commandment be not duly observed, it will not be obeyed as it should be. It is charged upon Jchu, that *he took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart.*ⁿ And it is true of many, that they do not walk surely, are in no care to go upon sure grounds, and to take every step right, which is a sign they do not walk uprightly, nor have any true value for their own way.

II. I am next to show what a foolish and dangerous thing it is for us to despise our own ways, and what an absurdity they are guilty of who do so. Believe it, sirs, the ways we despise are not so despicable as we would make ourselves believe they are; but a great deal of stress ought to be laid upon what we say and do, yea, upon what we think too; and consequently a great deal of care and concern ought to be about it.

This will appear if we consider these five things:

1. That the God of heaven observes and takes particular notice of all our ways; even the ways of our hearts, even their thoughts and intents, are *naked and open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do,*^o *προς ον ημιν ο λογος*—*with whom there is for us an account running,* and to whom there must be shortly an account given up. God sees our ways, not only as he sees all things, but with a particular observation, as things that must be judged of, and by which judgment must be given justly.

It is a general truth laid down, and comes in as an argument against all secret sins, and those which are most artfully and industriously concealed; that *the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.*^p But we should each of us apply it to ourselves, and to our own goings. Job does so: *Doth not he see my ways and count all my steps?*^q David does so: *Thou compassest my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.*^r Now, shall we make a light matter of that which the God of heaven makes such a great matter of, or let that in us pass allowedly unobserved, which he so carefully observes? It is natural to us to have some regard to ourselves, that we observe a due decorum when we are in the presence of our betters, whose eye we observe to be fixed upon us. Therefore we should have a jealous eye upon ourselves, because God has an eye upon us wherever we are, and whatever we are doing.

Therefore we should be very careful and diligent to avoid sin, because all our evil ways are before God; they can none of them be hid from his pierc-

ing eye; he sees all the secret wanderings of our hearts from him, and all the secret risings of our hearts against him, and is much displeased with them. And shall our sins be no provocation to us, when they are such a provocation to him? Does he complain of his people's bent to backslide from him, and shall not they complain of it? Is he broken with their unfaithful heart, and shall they make light of it?

And therefore we should be very careful and diligent to do our duty, because God takes notice of all we think, or say, or do well, and is pleased with it, and it shall be owned in the great day, even a cup of cold water given to a disciple; which should engage us to wait all opportunities of doing good, because God observes all the good we do, especially if it be done in secret; for that shall with a particular regard be seen, and openly recompensed. *The Lord knows the way of the righteous,* and, therefore, they should themselves take cognizance of it, of every path, and every step.

2. That Satan is a subtle enemy, who seeks to pervert our ways, and to draw them into his service and interests. If we despise our ways, yet he does not, but labours with the utmost subtilty and sedulity to draw us aside out of the good and right way, and to seduce us into the paths that lead to ruin. He is represented, and his agents, by the foolish woman, who calls passengers who go right on their way, to come share in the stolen waters. Now if Satan be so watchful and busy to make us turn out of our way, or trifle in it, and lets slip no opportunity of doing us a mischief in our way, we are fools if we be unconcerned, and slip opportunities of doing ourselves a kindness. Our way is beset, and, therefore, we should be never off our guard.

Especially, because then our way is most endangered when it is most despised: when we least consider what we do, our spiritual enemies gain most advantage against us, and make an easy prey of us. Satan's design is more than half accomplished, when he has brought men to an indifference as to their own actions, and let things go just as they will without either forecast or review.

This is a good reason therefore why we should be sober and vigilant, and make conscience of what we say and do, because our adversary the devil is seeking to devour us. Therefore St. Paul is jealous over the Corinthians, and has a watchful eye upon all their ways, because there is danger, lest they should be beguiled as Eve was through the subtilty of the serpent; and of the Thessalonians, lest by any means the tempter have tempted them, and his labour should be in vain.^s And for the same reason we should have a jealousy of ourselves and our own way, lest if we sleep, and neglect our way, we lose

ⁿ 2 Kings x. 31

^o Heb. iv. 13.

^p Prov. v. 21.

^q Job xxxi. 4.

^r Ps. cxxxix. 3.

^s 1 Thes. iii. 5.

our spear and cruse of water, as Saul did when he slept; nay, and our heads and lives, as Sisera did, when he slept in the tent of one who pretended to be his friend.

3. That we have many eyes upon us, that are witnesses to our way. David prays, *Lord, lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies*;¹ because of them who observe me; so it is in the original. We have need to look about us, for there are many about us who look upon us, to take notice of what we say and do. Let us walk honestly, *εὐαγγημονως*—*decently*, and as becomes our character, (so the word signifies,) as in *the day*, when we may be seen, and when we are in the midst of those who will observe us.

Some have their eye upon our way, perhaps, to take pattern by it, and that they may learn to do as we do, and then I am sure we ought not to despise our way, because the example of it may have a great influence upon others; so that if we do amiss, others will do amiss too, and so we shall become accessory to their sin, and shall be to answer not only for our ways, but, as the Scripture speaks, *for the fruit of our doings*, as Jeroboam for his sin, wherewith he made Israel to sin. If it be a good reason why we should not make friendship, nor keep company, with an angry man, lest we learn his ways, much more is it a reason why an angry man should moderate his anger, and put on meekness, lest others should learn his ways, and get a snare to their souls,² lest by setting his own house on fire he burn down a whole street. We ought to be very careful what language we speak, whether that of Canaan or that of Ashdod,³ for those about us will learn our dialect, and be either the better or the worse for it.

Some, perhaps, have their eye upon our way to seek for matter of reproach; they watch for our halting, and if we say or do amiss, religion shall suffer by it, and be evil spoken of; and the enemies of the Lord will have their mouths opened to blasphemy, as in David's case.⁴ You who make a greater profession of religion, who attend preaching and catechising more than others, have need to be very strict and regular in your whole conversation; for otherwise, by reason of you the way of truth will be evil spoken of;⁵ religion will be struck at, and wounded through your sides. That which, in others, would be winked at as a small fault, will, in you, be magnified and made a great matter of. Take ye therefore good heed to yourselves, that you may cut off occasion from them who desire occasion,⁶ to reproach the good ways of the Lord, and prejudice people against them.

Some, perhaps, have their eye upon our way, that on the other hand would rejoice to see us do that which becomes us, would have no greater joy than to see us walk in the truth, our strictness and sted-

fastness would be their strength and song: *Now we live*, says the apostle, *if ye stand fast*. We have reason to think that the good angels rejoice, as in the conversion of sinners, so in the even and regular walking of the saints; and, therefore, we are charged to behave ourselves very reverently in the worship 'a branch of our way which is by no means to be despised) because of the angels. Now, if our way be compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,⁷ it concerns us to have an eye to it ourselves; and to run, and run well, the race that is set before us, especially looking unto Jesus.

4. That we must shortly give an account of all our ways. As there is now an account kept of them all in the book of God's omniscience, and of the sinner's own conscience, because we are here in a state of trial and probation; so there must shortly be an account given of them all, and they must all be reviewed, for God requireth that which is past,⁸ and will tell thee, *these things thou hast done*.

It is a folly for us to despise our own ways, and make a light matter of them, and to turn off the errors of them with a jest, when so great a matter will be made of them in the judgment; in the judgment at hand, which follows immediately upon death; in the judgment at last, the public judgment of the great day. Therefore, it concerns us to fear God and keep his commandments, and to see that our matters be right and good, for God shall bring every work into judgment, bring it into the account, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.⁹ This was known and pressed by an Old-Testament preacher, but is much more clearly revealed in the New Testament, which tells us, *We must all appear*, one as well as another, all without exception, *before the judgment-seat of Christ*, to give an account of *every thing done in the body*, and to receive according to it, *whether it be good or evil*. Brethren, these are the true sayings of God; all we are doing now will be called over again in the day of judgment; as sure as we see this day, we shall see that day, and it will be to us according as we are found.

O what a concern should this fill us with, to think that what we are now doing, every day, has a reference to that day; which methinks should make every day a great day, a judgment day, with us: for if we would daily judge ourselves concerning our own way, we should not be judged of the Lord.¹⁰ It would awaken us to consider our ways, if we would but consider how they will appear in that day, when we and they must appear undisguised, in true colours; and with what eye we ourselves shall look upon them, an eye of shame, or an eye of satisfaction, and thankfulness to God. This should especially give check to the looses and extravagances

¹ Ps. v. 8; xxvii. 11. ² Prov. xxii. 25. ³ Neh. xiii. 24.
⁴ 2 Sam. xii. 14. ⁵ 2 Pet. ii. 2.

⁶ 2 Cor. xi. 12. ⁷ 1 Cor. xi. 10. ⁸ Eccl. iii. 15.
⁹ Eccl. xii. 14. ¹⁰ 1 Cor. xi. 31.

of youth: Thou hast a mind, O young man, to lay the reins on the neck of thine appetites and passions, to indulge thyself in a sensual liberty, to walk in the way of thy heart, and in the sight of thy eyes, and this would be a brave way of living, if thou wast never to hear of it again; *but know thou, for all these things God will bring thee into judgment;*⁴ for all thy indulgence of thyself in carnal mirth and sensual pleasure, unbounded and uncontrolled; for all those merry days and merry nights of thine, from which every thing was banished that was serious, and when God was not in all, not in any, of thy thoughts. Let the thoughts of this take young people off from their inordinate pursuits of the pleasures of sense, and deaden their desires towards them, that they may acquaint themselves with the pleasures of religion, which are spiritual and divine, and as much exceed the other as the richest wine does puddle-water.

5. That according as our ways are now, it is likely to be well or ill with us to eternity. It is the greatest folly imaginable to despise our way in this world, for as our way is, so will our end be in that world which has no end. Those who go upon the water only for pleasure care not what course they steer; but they who go upon business must steer the right course, and secure their point.

Believe it, sirs, and I pray consider it, that you are here upon trial for another world, and it will be to you a world of happiness or misery, according as you pass your trials. As you spend your time, you are likely to spend your eternity. If the prevailing temper of your mind now be vain and carnal, selfish and sensual, earthly and worldly, and you go out of the world under the dominion of such a temper, you are utterly unfit for heaven, and so is heaven for you, it would be no heaven to you. If the general course of your conversation be contrary to the rules of Christianity; if, instead of being constant and devout worshippers of God, you slight and neglect religious exercises, and think meanly of them; if, instead of living by faith in Christ, and in a continual dependence upon him for righteousness and grace, you lay him aside, and overlook him in what you have to do with God; if, instead of living a life of self-denial and mortification, you indulge yourselves in all the gratifications of sense, and are in them as in your element; if, instead of bridling your passions, you indulge them upon every provocation, and are impatient of the least instance of contempt and contradiction, as if humility and meekness were no part of the law of Christ, or the livery of Christians; if, instead of loving all men, even your enemies, and forgiving injuries, you have a jealousy of all, an antipathy to some, and bear malice and ill-

will to all that you apprehend have been injurious to you, or stand in your light, or in your way; if, instead of being charitable and doing all the good you can to every body, you are selfish, and seek your own things only, and are oppressive and hard with those you have power over or advantage against; if, instead of setting your affections on things above, and having your conversation in heaven, you are wholly intent upon the world, and the things of it; if that be the subject of your most serious cares, and the object of your most vigorous pursuits, and you go on in such a course as this to the end of your way, you cannot inherit eternal life; if the word of God be true, and there be any weight in the reason of the thing itself, you cannot; you cannot but perish, eternally perish. And can it then be an indifferent thing to us what our way is? Can it be all one whether we live a godly or ungodly life, when our everlasting weal or woe does certainly depend upon it? O that we were wise and understood this, that we would consider our latter end! then we durst not despise, durst not but consider, our way.

And those who have good hope through grace that they are in the way that leads to life, are concerned to regard their particular paths, to look well to their goings, and every step they take, because they know not how much their vigorous advances in grace and holiness, and their careful improvement of all opportunities of doing good, may add to the degrees of their glory and joy in heaven; nor how much their remissness, and the unevenness of their walking, may take from them: but this I am sure we all ought to fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into that rest, and we having by faith laid hold on that promise, any of us should so much as seem to come short,⁵ should seem either to others or to ourselves, should in the nature of the thing be in danger of it, or should come short of any of that measure to which, if we had been more careful, we might have attained.

Nothing can be more proper to awaken us to put a value upon our own ways, than to lay this to heart, that our present time is seed-time, and as we sow now we shall be reaping to eternity. The husbandman sows his ground with care, because he knows, that when what he sows comes up again, it will appear whether it was sown wisely and well or no, Gal. vi. 7, 8. The matter is brought into a little compass, *If we sow to the flesh in a carnal, sensual life, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if we sow to the spirit, we shall of the spirit reap life everlasting:* and then I am sure it is folly for us to despise our own way.

⁴ Eccl. xi. 9.

⁵ Heb. iv. 1.

THE APPLICATION.

The application of this plain and practical discourse lies upon yourselves, brethren; the Lord help us all to apply it!

1. Let it be a caution to us not to be rigid and severe in our censures of other people's ways, for that is none of our business; (we are incompetent judges of our brethren, for we know not their hearts;) nor of their works, for we know not the principles they act from, or the ends they aim at, nor the one half of what is requisite to be known in order to the passing a right judgment upon them; we can judge at best but by the outward appearance, and, therefore, it is ten to one but we are deceived in our judgment. And as we have not ability, so we have not authority, to judge concerning them; we step into the throne of God if we do: *What have we to do to judge another man's servant? to his own master he stands or falls.* We are to hope charitably concerning our brethren, and to put the best construction upon their words and actions that they will bear; but as to their way, and the end of it, the Lord only knows that, and to him we must leave it.

And this is another good reason why we should not pretend to judge our brethren and their way, because we have enough to judge ourselves and our own way: and here it becomes us as much to be strict and severe, as in judging of our brethren it becomes us to be candid and charitable, and make the best of every thing.

2. Let it be a charge to us to look well to our own ways. Let others, if they be overtaken in a fault, be restored with a spirit of meekness; and let us not be curious in prying into the fault, and examining all the circumstances of it; nor sharp in upbraiding them with their carelessness; but let every man prove his own work, let him bring that to the touchstone, and be very critical in trying it, and earnest with God in prayer, to discover him to himself; and if he find his heart upright with God, then he shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.^f

O that I could prevail with you who are young, betimes to make conscience of what you say and do, and oblige yourselves to live by rule, and not, as most young people, to despise your own way. When you go out into the world, and begin to "be for yourselves," as you say, I beseech you, do well for yourselves. When you are gone from under the influence of your parents and masters, yet still continue under the influence of the good education they gave you, and think not, when you are set at liberty from them, you may live at large. With what grief have I sometimes heard that vain song put into the mouths of young people, which begins, "From grave

lessons and restraints." I cannot repeat it, nor desire to do it, but it is designed to teach them to triumph in having shaken off the shackles of virtue, and laid the reins on the neck of lust. It is time to warm, my brethren, and to show ourselves zealous for the honour of God and conscience, of virtue and serious piety, for that is it I here, in the name of my great Master, contend for, and not the petty private interests of any party: let them take their lot, despise their way and spare not; the kingdom of God is not meats and drinks, either the imposition or the opposition of those matters of doubtful dispute; but it is righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It is the great and fundamental law of Christianity, *repentance toward God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*; it is humility and meekness; it is sobriety and temperance; it is chastity and strict modesty; it is justice and equity; it is universal charity and beneficence; that I am pressing upon you: these are the ways that you must walk in, if ever you hope to find rest to your souls; these ways must be your ways, and in these you must persevere to the end, and in these and all the acts of devotion, and the instituted exercises of religion, you must live a life of communion with God. In urging these, I say again, it is time to be in earnest, when the enemies of serious godliness are not only so subtle as secretly to weaken its principles, and sap its foundations under ground, but so daring as openly to attack all its strong holds; when you are taught by a celebrated poet to say,

"Conscience and Heaven's fears, religion's rules,
Are but state-bells to toll in pious fools."

This is instructing you how to despise your own ways; but, *Cease my son to hear the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge;*^g and the Lord rebuke those who give such destructive instructions, even the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke them, and snatch those as brands out of the burning who incline their ear to such instruction.

That which I am persuading you all to, both young and old, is, to keep yourselves, and all your words and actions, under a strict discipline. Are you your own masters? Be faithful masters then to yourselves, and not careless ones. (1.) Be strict in your inquiries concerning your present way, and herein deal faithfully with yourselves, and do not despise a matter upon which your all depends. Are you in the broad way that leads to destruction, or in the narrow way that leads to life? among the many who walk in the way of their own hearts, or among the few who walk in the way of God's commandments? Christ is the way; are you in Christ? Holiness is the way; and is it the way of holiness that you are

^f Gal. vi. 1, 4.

^g Prov. xix. 27.

walking in? Be willing to find out the worst of your case, you need not be afraid to do so, while it may be amended, be it ever so bad: and be concerned to find it out; for if it be bad, and not amended in time, it will shortly be past recovery.

Take heed of deceiving yourselves in a matter of such vast moment as this is. The word of God has plainly told you once and again, *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man*, and he says I shall have peace, though I go on in it, *but the end thereof are the ways of death*; ^b and will you suffer yourselves to be cheated into your own ruin, when you have such fair warning given you? How bitter will the reflection upon it be hereafter, if you thus put a cheat upon your own souls! Self-deceivers will be self-destroyers, and, for that reason, to eternity self-tormentors.

For the Lord's sake, sirs, and for your own precious souls' sake, bring this matter to an issue quickly, by making your calling and your election sure, and so making your salvation sure. You are busy to make other things sure, that neither can be made sure, nor are worth making sure: O that you would make this sure, which may and must be made sure, and leave it no longer in suspense! You cannot but tremble every step you take, as long as your own consciences tell you, if you give them leave to be faithful, that it is a step forward in the way of sin and death; but if you have good ground to hope, that through grace you are walking in the way of good men, that leads to life and happiness, you may go on cheerfully; you may sing in that way. Believe this matter therefore worth settling.

(2.) Be strict and impartial in your reflections upon your past ways, and do not despise them because they are past, for they are not past and gone, not gone out of God's remembrance: *Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, consider your ways.*^c Set your hearts to your ways; so the word is; apply your minds seriously to think of them, and lay the concern of them near your hearts. Compare the temper of your minds, and the tenor of your lives, with the rule of God's word, which is right and strait, and therefore of use to show you the crooked ways into which you have turned aside; as far as you have varied and deviated from that, you have gone wrong. Find out the particular obliquities of your thoughts and affections, your words and actions, that you may know what to sorrow for, as the plague of your own heart, and what to get healed; for a disease that is known is half cured. Be particular in your reviews, that you may be so in your penitential acknowledgments; may be able to say not only, "I have done evil," but, "I have done this evil;" and not only so, but, "Thus and thus have I done;"

as Aaron, who on the day of atonement, (that day to afflict the soul,) was to confess over the scape-goat all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins,^d the sins themselves and all the aggravations of them. And usually the more particular we are in the confession of sin, the more comfort we have in the sense of the pardon, and the better fortified against temptations to relapse and return to folly: *Dolus veretur in generalibus—Deceit employs general confessions only.*

It is good to be making penitential reflections, every day, upon our sins of daily infirmity; and the more frequently this work is done, the more easy it will be. "Even reckonings make long friends:" if we daily audit accounts with our own consciences, and examine what we have done each day; if in the close of every week we do as God did, look upon the week's work, and behold all that we have done; if, before we attend on the Lord at his table, we be particular in censuring ourselves for what has been amiss, and renew our repentance, and fetch in fresh assurances of the divine favour in Christ, we shall show that we have indeed a value for our way, and the great day of account will be no terror to us.

3. Be very circumspect and considerate as to the particular paths that are before you. Do nothing rashly, but every thing with due care. Let David's resolution be yours, and stick to it, *I said I will take heed to my ways.*^e He who walks uprightly, walks surely, will see to it that he goes upon sure grounds, in opposition to walking at all adventures, and going on frowardly in the way of his heart. You put contempt upon your ways if you do not make conscience of them. Dread that wicked notion, that it is all alike what you do; though you be ever so poor and low in this world, and ever so inconsiderable among men, and your way ever so little taken notice of, yet God's eye is upon it, and, therefore, yours should be so. Do nothing rashly, for fear of doing amiss.

As those who value their own souls cannot but think themselves concerned to keep their hearts with ^g diligence, so those who value their own ways cannot but see themselves as much concerned to ponder the path of their feet; which direction follows the former, and is given in pursuance of it. Whatever you go about, consider diligently what is set before you; stand not gazing about you, and making your remarks upon other people's ways, but let your eyes look right on, and your eyelids look straight before you, for your concern is with your own ways; let not your eyes turn, lest your feet follow them to the right hand or to the left. Let heaven be the fixed end you walk towards, and the Scripture the fixed rule you walk by, and then you will walk steadily and with a holy security.

And as those who value their own souls cannot do

^b Prov. xiv. 12; xvi. 25.

^c Hag. i. 5, 7.

^d Lev. xvi. 21.

^e Ps. xxxix. 1.

better for them, than to commit the keeping of them to God, as to a faithful Creator, and to Jesus Christ, the Bishop of souls, who has taken the oversight of them, not of constraint, but willingly; so those who value their own way cannot do better concerning it, than to commit their way, to commit their works, unto the Lord. Having chosen his word for your rule, be led by his Spirit. *I know* (says the prophet) *that the way of man is not in himself, neither is it in man that walketh to direct his steps.*^m We ought, therefore, in all our ways to acknowledge God, and to depend upon the conduct and support of his grace which he has promised to those who seek him, and

refer it to him to choose out their way, and to sit chief; in dependence upon which, every good Christian may promise himself the same satisfaction that the Psalmist pleases himself with, *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.*

And, now, am I leaving you at parting under any serious, solicitous concern about your own way, resolving for the future to walk more circumspectly than you have done, in the strength of divine grace? And is this your resolution? The Lord keep it always in the imagination of the thought of your heart, and thereby establish your way before him.

^m Jer. x. 23.