

THE
JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD,
VINDICATED,

*As to all men's coming into the world with sinful depraved
natures from the womb.*

LECTURE XXXV.*

Psalm 51. 4. 5.

*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil
in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou
speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I
was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother
conceive me.*

HAVING discoursed to you at large from that Rom. 5. 12. concerning the fall of the first man, and the entrance of sin and death into the world, thereupon, I told you in the conclusion of the last discourse on that subject, my further intention was to say something for the clearing of the Divine Justice, in reference hereunto: and it is a debt, a right that we owe to the Supreme Ruler and Lord of all, not only to confess his righteousness, but, as occasion serves and requires, to vindicate it too. We cannot be just ourselves, if we do not, to our utmost, in all things, justify him.

My design is not, from this scripture, to speak absolutely of the corruption and depravedness of the human nature, which I did before, from that mentioned scripture. But to speak of it relatively and comparatively, in reference to the righteousness of God, or so far as that may appear any way concerned in the

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matter. And indeed, it might be thought, there lay before, a very unexceptionable state of the case between God and man, in that scripture that I last, and so long insisted on; which makes death only to have followed sin into the world. And what can be more natural than the connexion of sin and death, or the consecution of the latter upon the former, that death should only be said to have entered into the world, and to have passed over all, inasmuch as all have sinned.

But men's curiosity doth not rest here, while they will not pretend to deny the actual consecution of death upon sin; they make a great deal of difficulty to understand how sin should follow upon innocency. And here the difficulty is not so great neither, concerning the lapse of the first man, and the death following upon that as to him; as also the case hath no appearance of difficulty concerning the angels that fell, when (as the case was with the first man) every one offended in his own person, and so was in his own person to answer for the offence. But that that makes the difficulty is, that men should be generally involved in sin and ruin, upon the lapse and fall of one, (their common parent) when they could not help it that they were his children, or that they were born of such progenitors, that all should be undone by a fault which they could not prevent, and unto which they had no accession.

This difficulty hath cast divers men upon distressing thoughts. Some have thereupon denied the corruption and depravity of human nature; and they might as well deny that there are men upon earth. Some would have the souls of men (the only capable subjects of sin) to be propagated as the bodily part is, which would hazard the doctrine of their immortality. Others have had their other conjectures, which I shall not mention.

But, upon the whole, we ought not only to censure with indulgence, but to commend and praise the spirit and practice of such, in reference to this matter, as have, with sincere and unbiassed minds, set their understandings on work, how best to maintain high and honourable thoughts of God; that have been studious to find out, or apt to entertain any hypothesis that might be more suitable unto that. This (I say) is not only to be censured indulgently, but to be commended very highly, provided that men do not, herein, run counter to express Divine Revelation and unto uncontrolable experience. And that they be not so over-officious as to affix characters upon the blessed God, under the name of perfections belonging to his nature, which do not truly or really so belong, and which he never owned or claimed as such.

It is very plain, that this holy Psalmist had seen through this

difficulty, he saw with better eyes than the most; more sincere, less malicious; and had digested the matter in his thoughts, otherwise he would never have laid down these two things thus together as we find, "That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." He, at least, thought these things very agreeable with one another, if rather, he did not bring in the latter as a proof and demonstration of the former, which the demonstrative particle prefixed (Behold) would lead one to think.

But let us, first, view the words a little in themselves, and we shall discern the schesis and reference to one another, a little better thereby, afterwards. That which is here, in this place, rendered actively, is in the 3 chapter to the Romans, rendered passively, that thou mightest be justified in thy sayings and overcome when thou judgest;" there it is, "w wed thou art judged," as we read it, the septuagint being follo (as frequently it is) by the apostle. But I cannot apprehend of some do note) any need of a different reading in the letter either text, as some critics take notice, the Hebrew affix being set as there it is, may indifferently be read, either actively or passively. And so may the Greek word, as is most evident, and so we may render either place, either way; and all will come to one and the same sense; that God may appear just, that his justice may be triumphant and victorious, whether it be when he judgeth; or when men judge and censure him, and his proceedings.

And so the current of this discourse of the Psalmist will be plain and clear: "I acknowledge mine iniquity, and my sin is ever before me; against thee only have I sinned: that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest"—that is, referring to the 3 verse, "I acknowledge," (as here I do,) then the acknowledgment follows, "that thou mayest be justified." "I make my acknowledgments so and so, that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, or mayest overcome when thou judgest, or when men presume or take upon them to censure thy proceedings towards me; though thou shouldest proceed with all the severity that thou hast threatened by the prophet sent unto me: for not only have I done this particular evil against thee, and in thy sight, but I have been an impure creature, even from my own original: thou hast much against me, not only for this single instance, but as I came a sinful polluted creature into the world: I was shapen in iniquity, formed, turned therein; as soon as I grew warm in the womb, (as the word signifies) so soon sin did insinuate into my very *præ-mordia*, into the very *principles* of my being."

And to the same purpose is this passage quoted by the apostle, in that mentioned Romans 3. 4. for when he had been charging sin, before, upon all the world, on the Gentiles, in the 1 chapter, and on the Jews, in the 2. he only puts a question in the beginning of the 3 chapter, "What advantage then hath the Jew, if all be found equally under sin?" And he only admits them to have an advantage in order to their recovery, but none at all as to their degeneracy. In reference to their recovery they had a great advantage, inasmuch, as to them were committed the Oracles of God, the discovery of his counsel and way for the reconciling and saving lost sinners. But he considers nothing, in reference to what he had asserted of their part and share in the common depravation and apostasy; they were as bad as the best.

Then he immediately lays down what is quoted from the Psalmist, and makes that his scope and mark in all the rest of the chapter, that is, to justify God; that he might be justified, and overcome in all his pleadings and judgments: or when man should implead or take upon him to censure God, that still his justice might be victorious and triumphant. This is the mark, that he aims at manifestly, in all his following discourse; shewing at large, the universal depravation and corruption of human nature every where; having proved (as he saith at the 9th verse) concerning both Jews and Gentiles (which did then divide the world) that they were all under sin.

Indeed, the immediate subjoining of this unto the mention of the design in this psalm, seems to carry this aspect with it, that the Psalmist intended to speak or introduce the mention of this depravedness and corruption of human nature, (even as it was in himself) as a proof and evidence of the divine justice, as that which might tend to clear it so much the more. But at least, it must be collected from his subjoining the mention of the latter to the former, that he looked upon them as very consistent, and very reconcileable things, as things that carried no repugnancy in them to one another. And even this, will serve my present purpose and design. So that all which I shall observe from this context, and the connexion of these two, herein, shall be this,—

That it is very consistent with the justice of God, and very reconcileable to it, most reconcileable to it, that men, born of human parentage, do universally come into this world impure and polluted creatures, even from the womb.—

The Psalmist did not so much as imagine (you may see) an inconsistency between the corruption of nature in man, and the justice of God, in that he so lays them down by one ano-

ther. Surely (thinks he) these cannot quarrel, no man can reasonably think they will; they are to be looked upon, and ought to be looked upon, as sociable truths, that can agree well together, even these two, that man from the womb is an impure, sinful creature: and God is everlastingly and immutably a holy and righteous God.

Now, in speaking to this, I shall reduce all that I intend, unto a Four-fold Conclusion. And shall gather up all, under these four; As,

I. There can be no real opposition between truth and truth. And so, that whatsoever we are convinced of is truth, another truth that we are equally as certain of, cannot be opposite thereunto. If there be any such appearance, it is but a false appearance, it is only a seemingness of opposition and contrariety, but really there can be no such thing. And,

II. That we may be most certain, that many things are, when, how they are, or come to be as they are, is by us unexplicable and unaccountable. And,

III That it would be very unreasonable to oppose and object dubious and uncertain things, against what is sure and plain, and most certain. And,

IV. That it will be, especially, most unreasonable to oppose uncertain to certain things, when there are many considerations capable of being alleged that will break the force of such objections. But nothing can be alleged to shake the certainty and firmness of the foresaid truths. Then it will be most of all unreasonable.

Unto these *four conclusions*, I shall reduce what I intend, and what I think reasonable to be said to this matter.

I. That truth can never be opposite to truth: and that therefore, what things we are most certain of as true, they can lie in no opposition to one another. But whatsoever of such appearance there may be, must be a false appearance. I instance, here, in these two things, that we are concerned to reconcile,—the perfection of the Divine Nature (comprehending his justice) and—the sinful imperfection and pravity of the human nature. These are both most certain truths; and, therefore, it is impossible they can be really opposite to one another.

I. The absolute perfection of the Divine Nature, comprehending his justice, which must be one great perfection belonging thereunto. It is that indeed which, by the ducture of the text, we are principally concerned to vindicate, and so we are, indeed, any divine perfection against which the doctrine afterwards asserted may seem to militate. Every one will grant, that acknowledgeth a God, that justice must be a perfection

belonging to his nature. And we may, these two ways, be most absolutely ascertained hereof.

(1.) That whatsoever doth belong to God, belongs to him essentially: his nature can receive no additions nor diminutions, and consequently is immutably so; can no more cease to be so, than he can lie, or do any ill thing; nor this, more than he can cease to be; because all perfection (and that of justice among the rest) belongs unto him essentially. So that he can no more cease to be just, than cease to be God. And,

(2.) Of this we may be ascertained further, thus, that whereas, justice is a virtue inclining a person to give to every one his due, that which is owing to him, rightly belongs to him, God cannot be a debtor to his creature, otherwise than by voluntary obligation that he takes upon himself. No one can be a debtor to another but one of these two ways; either naturally, or by some other sort of contract. He is, indeed, naturally a debtor who is possessed of somewhat that doth belong to another, that was originally his, and to which he retains a right: a man is in this case naturally a debtor to such a one by the immediate law of nature, to give him his own, or a full equivalent that he shall be satisfied is so. But so it is altogether impossible that God can be a debtor to his creature, who, (as the apostle speaks, upon another account, 17 Acts,) hath given to all life and breath, and all things. They can be proprietors of nothing, in opposition to him or against him, that are not masters of themselves, or of their own being. They owe him their all; to them there can be owing nothing; that is, not from him, to whom they themselves owe their very all. It is a just challenge, therefore, that is given to all the world by the apostle; Rom. 11. 35. "Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" Produce me the man that can say, "God is a debtor, that he hath given him this or that, for which he is owing to him, let any man produce his claim, and it shall be recompensed to him again." So that, naturally, God cannot be a debtor to his creatures.

And then, if we speak of the second way of his being a debtor, God hath never obliged himself to keep sin out of the creation, so as that he should break with his creatures, and do them wrong, in not doing all that was possible to omnipotency to make them impenable. Shew the obligation, produce the bond, Where is it? If this were to be alleged, He broke with his reasonable creatures at first, in making them free, in infecting liberty into their natures: why he never laid himself under any obligation against this. And therefore, it is every way most evident, that God must be immutably and unalterably

just in all his dispensations; and particularly in this, in not hindering that sin should come into the world, and draw death after it, and spread itself through the world, (as we find it hath done,) still drawing on, and attracting death. And,

2. On the other hand, it is a most clear and certain truth, that as the nature of God is most absolutely and unalterably perfect, including all perfection, and that of justice unalterably among the rest; so, the nature of man is, in this present state, and from the very original of individual persons, sinfully imperfect; and they come into the world impure and polluted creatures from the womb. The justice of God is not to be solved that way, by denying that there is such a corruption and depravity of nature, transmitted even with the nature of man itself from age to age, as therein is comprehended both a negative part, a disinclination to all good; and a positive, an inclination to all evil. And that this also may be in our minds as a certain truth, I shall insist a little, and but a little, upon it. It not being my design (as I said) to do what hath been already done, to insist purposely upon the corruption of human nature absolutely, but only relatively and comparatively, according to what reference this matter may bear to the righteousness of God's dealings with men. And to evince this,

(1.) It is the most plain and express language of the Scripture. And what ought to determine in such a case? what could determine us but that? There is not another tolerable sense to be put on these words, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." It is most unreasonable and absurd, to pretend this to be only a particular acknowledgment of David concerning himself: as if he had the most unhappy procreation of all mankind; as if there were more corruption, or another way to convey corruption to him from his parents, than was with all the rest of men. It can carry no meaning, but that he doth involve his own in the common case, that it was only with him, in this respect, as it is with all others, that they are, (as the expression is in John 9. 34,) altogether born in sin, all unclean. And it was, therefore, impossible that any thing clean should come out of them. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." And you have the same thing more expressly asserted in general terms, in the 58 psalm; "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." And sure, every man is wicked till he is converted, till he be regenerate and turn to God. Therefore, it must be an affirmation concerning all mankind, that they are estranged from the very womb, averse and disaffected to every thing that is good; and pro-

pense to that which is evil, as the following words signify : they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies ; made up of falsehood, even from their original. And,

(2.) The Scripture doth, in multitudes of places, speak of the universal actual sinfulness of the world : and whence should that come ? In that 3 chapter of Romans, how often it is inculcated. I have proved (saith the apostle) Jews and Gentiles to be all under sin : and they were all the world. And all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ; (afterwards in the same chapter 19,) and, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. Now, this being plainly asserted in the word of truth, how should this actual sinfulness begin with every one, so as to be universal ? If it were only by imitation and example, it is strange that all should imitate the sin, but none follow the better examples, which, when renewing grace hath done its work, do come to be extant and appear in view, so as that many do carry it (through the grace of God) without visible scandalous enormities. But that which is so universally common, must have some common cause. The reason of the thing speaks itself : when there is not an instance to be found of any one that hath lived without sin, how should this be, but that it hath and must have sprung up with them ? must have come with their nature, their very nature itself ? for it is as common as their nature. And we may,

(3.) Argue from experience, that such a corruption and pravity as this, doth spring up with men and all human creatures, that come into this world, the ordinary way : that is, we cannot name the time when such are capable of acting electively or rationally, but they are of acting sinfully as soon. Doth not every one's experience tell him so ? That there are disinclinations to that which is good, and inclinations to that which is evil, appearing most early ; pcevishness, crossness, pride, strife, falsehood, a disposition to lie, to be revengeful and vindictive ; nothing is plainer ; so that to deny the pravity of nature, even from men's *primordia*, is all one, as to say there are not such natures in being. And then,

(4.) We may argue, too, from the manifest subjection and liableness of infants, even in their infancy, unto punitive strokes ; sickness, pains, and death itself. Wherein is this, that the infant age is not exempt, if it be innocent, if it hath nothing of impurity and pravity adhering to it ? If here it be said by way of reply to this, that " we find the inferior creatures, brute creatures are liable to the same thing ; sickness, and pain, and death, but that doth not prove them to be

sinful, or that they have any sinfulness adhering to them;” why the case is so manifestly different, that it is an easy matter for the objector, if he please, (whosoever he be,) to answer himself. It is plain, death was never a threatening to them: it is plain that the brute creatures, as they grow up, do not come to sin at last, they never sin, nor are ever capable of it. And if, therefore, it should be said, that such infirmities, ails, maladies and mortality itself, are afflictions only, and not penalties, I would fain know whether that do not equally reflect upon the divine justice, (of which such do seem to be so tender,) and a great deal more, to afflict a creature which is at the same time asserted to be innocent, every way innocent; doth not carry a worse face, a worse aspect with it, than to assert this creature to be nocent? And to say, these things are not punitive, but afflictive, is but a notional difference; and the notion doth neither do them good nor harm; neither makes the affliction less or more. But sure, it is more honourable for God to say, that, observing the impure and depraved state of human nature, even from its very original, he animadverts upon that impurity. As why should not the holy God express a displeasancy with every impurity wherever he finds it? And no man accuseth another of any injustice if he do destroy a creature as soon as it begins to live, that is known to be noxious, hurtful and mischievous; as the crushing of serpents in the very egg; when this is so apparent, that there are so noxious qualities, which there is nothing but want of opportunity and time that hinders their exertion in noxious and hurtful acts. To express a displeasancy towards the innate disposition, can be no way unworthy of God. But that we shall have occasion to speak of more hereafter.

In the mean time, this is the First Head proposed—that truth cannot be opposite to truth.—And therefore, we being ascertained of this twofold truth, that God is most perfectly and unalterably just, and that man is sinfully imperfect and impure, from his original, that is, the original of the individuals, these two cannot be opposite to one another: one truth cannot destroy another truth, or impart any repugnancy thereunto. And therefore, if there be any appearance of contrariety between these two, it must be but a false appearance. For of these things we are most certain; they are undoubted truths. Therefore, to solve the phœnomenon, we must look another way, and there will be opportunity for that, in speaking to the following conclusions. In the meantime, let these two things be inlaid deeply in our souls, that God is absolutely and every way perfect, so as that, that perfection of his must include the

most unalterable eternal righteousness and justice; but that we for our parts are, from our original, impure and polluted creatures, that there may be, accordingly, suitable dispositions in us to acknowledge and adore his righteousness: and to own and abhor our own impurities: to walk humbly in the sense of them as long as we live, and to have so much the more disposition to admire that grace, which hath its exercise towards such creatures as we, when in point of justice there was enough against us to have produced, for ever, all the exercises of such grace.

LECTURE XXXVI.*

II. Now I go on to the next *conclusion*, which is the second in order, namely—That we may be most certain that many things really are, when the manner how they are, or how they came to be, is not understood by the most, or may be of very difficult explication unto any—And to accommodate this to the present purpose I shall proceed by steps.

1. It is very plain that there is a cloud and darkness generally sitting upon, or a veil is generally drawn over the inceptions of things of whatsoever kind, as to how things of any sort, do take their first beginnings. It is observable that, usually, a veil is drawn over those things. Look into all the productions of nature, how things do take their first rise, it is generally very inexplicable, and very unconceivable, at least as to the generality. For such substantial beings as are most sensible to us, as we see with our eyes, or touch with our hands; so that there can be no place or room for any doubt, but that such things are; yet how they came to be, who can give an account? We can none of us be in doubt but there are really these heavens over our heads, which our eyes see from day to day; and this earth underneath us, which we may touch when we please. But if God had not given us a general account of the Genesis, of the beginning of the heavens and the earth, at what a loss would men have been every where? And at what a loss generally are they, how man himself began to be in this world, where they have not the ducture of Revelation in the case, to assist and help them? To think what ridiculous accounts, some of the wise and learned philosophers of this world have given of the very inception of man-

kind, it shews there is a veil, especially over the beginnings of things, when of the things themselves, there is the greatest certainty imaginable. As who can make any man doubt whether there be such heavens as we behold, or such an earth as we walk upon, though we should never have known, if God had not told us, how they began. And to go a little further,

2. We are most certain of many acts; and abilities and dispositions thereunto; which actions, how they are performed, very few can give an account; and where the dispositions thereunto did arise, they can as little tell. We know that we can see with our eyes, and that we can hear with our ears; and that such actions are performed by those very organs that are used for these purposes. But how few can tell how this act of vision is performed, or can give an account of the structure of that organ of the eye by which it is performed? And so, how the action of hearing is done, and of the aptitude of the organ of the ear thereunto? But we certainly know that we see, and that we hear; and that we see with our eyes, and not with our hands; and hear with our ears, and not with our feet.

And so, for acts of understanding; we know that we do know; we know, and are certain that we do exert acts of reason, that we use thoughts, but who can tell how a thought arises in a man's mind, and how men come to have the seeing, and hearing, and speaking, and reasoning power and faculty transmitted from age to age, and from generation to generation? That there should arise still from age to age such a sort of creatures as have these faculties and powers belonging to them, of that we can give as little account, as how grass, and herbs, and flowers do spring up of their proper seeds upon this earth, from year to year. But of the things themselves, we have the greatest certainty that may be. And to proceed further,

3. Concerning *sinful* acts and dispositions, we can be in as little doubt that such things there really are, though there be here a greater difficulty how they came to be. It is true, that this question vexed some of the wisest, and most learned, and most considering of mankind; before Christianity took place among them; since there was nothing but what was good at first, how should there come to be any such thing as evil in the world? And indeed, the counsel given, was wise and wholesome, rather to consider how sin may be got out of the world, than how it came into it. But there is a necessity upon us, to endeavour, to our utmost, the maintaining and keeping up high and honourable thoughts of God, as that upon which all religion

depends, and without which, men will have a pretence to let it vanish out of the world; yea, and endeavour to make it so to do.

But whatsoever difficulty we may suppose in this case, the matter of fact is plain and evident; that is, we do find that there is such a generation of creatures, that do spring up in the world, from age to age, that are together both reasonable and sinful, as they could not be the latter without being the former. This is plain matter of fact, that a sort of creatures, which do exercise reason, do also sin from age to age, and universally: and that this, their disposition to sin, and their actual sinning, must have a beginning: and it cannot have beginning, but from some common and universal cause, being itself universal; so as that there are no instances to be found where (if there be an opportunity) a disposition to sin, doth not betray itself; so as that men are not more inclined to act rationally, than they are to act irregularly. They act rationally in many instances, they act irregularly in greater instances, and more important, and that constantly, in all times, and all parts of the world. This is plain matter of fact; and men do, therefore, fill their own souls, and fill the world, with confusions and miseries.

This (I say) is all plain matter of fact. We cannot be more certain of any thing, than we are of this; that is, that men have so much reason still remaining, and belonging to their nature, as by which they are capable of knowing they were not self-made, not self-originate, that they came from another, that they owe their all to an infinitely perfect Being; that must have all perfection in itself, and all being originally in itself, and that their interests are somehow or other involved within one another. And they are, thereupon, capable of understanding their own obligation to love God above all; and to love one another as themselves. Very plain it is, if men did but act pursuantly to such apprehensions, whereof it is most apparent their nature is capable, they would pass their days, here in this world, in very great tranquillity and felicity, within themselves, and towards one another; and, that it is impossible that those miseries, and those evils and confusions which fill men's spirits, and fill the world, should arise from anything else but the inclination that is in them to do otherwise; not to love God with a supreme love, and not to love one another with co-ordinate love. So that this is as plain matter of fact, as that there is a world, or that there are reasonable creatures in it. This hath always been a difficulty, how (as to some particular persons especially) sin should have its beginning, when that it hath its

continual being in the world proves itself to every one's sad experience and observation, that doth but take notice of himself and the world. But yet,

4. Though, how sin is transmitted to particular and individual persons, from generation to generation, it cannot be so easily told, yet it may, most certainly, be determined how it is not (which most concerns us with reference to our present purpose, to vindicate the righteousness of God) that is, that it is man's creature, and not God's. It is not he that hath infused any thing of evil or malignity into the nature of man, which was originally pure and perfect as it sprang from him, the Author of all nature. This is out of question, that he made man upright, but they have sought and found many inventions. Eccl. 7. 29. This appears, by what that great man, Moses, saith to the people, over whom God had made him a leader and a head, when he was now shortly to take his leave of them; in that much celebrated song which he begins with this, as the design of publishing the name of the Lord, "Because I will publish the name of the Lord, ascribe ye greatness unto our God:" (that, we may take up and accommodate very fully to our own, that is to the common case.) "He is the rock (this is a part of that name of his which he designed to publish in that 32 Deut.) his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment, a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." But "they have corrupted themselves:" (as in the 4 and 5 verses of that chapter, and onward :) a self-corrupted generation of creatures they are. And concerning this, we may assure our hearts; and ought to do so.

When we are in this case to apologize for God, it is indeed an awful thing that is undertaken; but with the profoundest reverence, and with the greatest veneration, and with a deep resentment of the necessity that men should be so prone to arraign the Almighty: and he be (as it were) put to plead his cause at his own creatures' bar; as the apostle's reading of the words doth imply; and as the former part, even of that clause in the 4 verse of this psalm is understood to signify too: That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest; when thou speakest by way of apology for thyself. It ought to be done with a sincere design, and with a joyful confidence, that he will always overcome and triumph when he judgeth himself, and when men presume to judge him, and pass their censures upon his ways and methods towards the world.

But it is a thing must be done, because there is a proneness in men's minds to admit of, and to have thoughts arise and spring up in them which have a reflecting aspect and look, upon

the Most High, and Most Righteous God. As you see, the apostle, in the place where he quotes this text, (Romans 3. 4, 5.) objects this; "Is God unrighteous, who taketh vengeance?" when he was, in the foregoing and following chapters, proving Jew and Gentile to be all under sin. "Is God unrighteous, who taketh vengeance? I speak as a man," *humano more, after the manner of men*, which implies, so men are apt to speak; that is, to raise questions and doubts in their own minds, "How will this or that stand with the righteousness of God?" Therefore, the apostle thought himself concerned to vindicate God's righteousness; and he doth it largely, even there in that mentioned chapter, and afterwards in several others of that epistle; and it ought to be done with a pleasant confidence that there will be an universal applause to the righteousness of God at last, by all his intelligent creatures; that all shall agree and conspire together, in saying, "Holy and true art thou O Lord; just and righteous art thou Lord God Almighty, thou King of nations and of saints."

This I thought fit to say, by way of introduction to what I have further to say to this last mentioned head, that while we may be in some difficulty, how corrupt nature comes to be propagated from man to man, and from age to age, we are yet at a certainty how it is not done; that is, that sin is none of God's creature, and that he never infuses a sinning disposition into any creature whatsoever. The belief of this we ought to establish and settle in our own hearts, as that by which we shall but give God his due, and consult our own peace, and more flourishing and prosperous state of religion in our own souls; that it may have no damps there, or nothing that may tend to extinguish or deaden it in us. And therefore, this I shall evince to you, by some plain considerations; though one would think, indeed, the thing needed no eviction. As,

(1.) That the purity of God's nature cannot but abhor it: it is impossible that a thing so repugnant as sin is to the pure and holy nature of God, can spring from that pure and holy nature. Nothing but what is good can come from the first, the original, the essential, the most perfect Good. And,

(2.) That which he hath forbidden, it is impossible that he should cause or procure; that would be such a contradiction as we could never suspect an honest man of, that he should forbid and procure the same thing.

(3.) Much less is it possible that he should cause that which he punisheth, and punisheth with so terrible severity; the proper wages of sin being no less than eternal death. And,

(4.) It is impossible he should cause that which he hates;

“Do not the abominable thing which I hate, which my soul hateth.” Of that he can never be the Author and the Cause. And,

(5.) It can never be, that he should be the Cause or Author of that, which is so highly injurious to him, which doth him the greatest injury imaginable. For though, from the perfection of his own nature, it is impossible it should do him any real harm; yet it doth him the greatest wrong. What a disorder hath it introduced into the creation of God! how hath it spoiled his workmanship, in a great master-piece of his creation, the mind and soul of man made after his image! What deformity hath it introduced in the room of so much beauty and glory! How manifest an attempt is it against his throne, even in the very nature of it! What a violation of the sacred constitution of his government! It is sin that hath set his own creatures against him, disaffected it to him: that is, in itself, in its rooted aversion from God, and hatred of God. It is the most unconceivable thing in the world, that God should make his own nature hate himself, disaffect himself. It is sin that hath actually torn away so great and noble a part of his creation from him, and plucked it from his obedience and subjection; even all the generations of men from age to age, and so great a part of the heavenly host, and turned them all into rebels against their Maker and Rightful Lord. It cannot be that he should cause so mischievous a thing.

And it is too faint a vindication of God, in this case, to say, that therefore, he cannot cause, because it is a defect, and so not a causable thing, or capable of any other but a deficient cause. This is very true indeed, but very short, for that is no more than to say, God caused it not, than to say, another caused it not; as a thing that cannot be caused, cannot indeed admit of positive causation. That is very true, but we do not do God right if we do not assert also, that he could not bring it about, that it should be any agency of his; not in respect of the object as being an uncausable thing, but in respect of his own nature, as being repugnant to his holiness, and to his sovereignty, and to the sacredness of his government. And as that which he could not but abhor from, and hate, and hate with utmost detestation. And I add to all this,

(6.) To evince that this transmission of sin, cannot be by any direct hand that God hath in it, in that he hath provided so costly a remedy against it, that he should cause that which his own Son came down into our world, and died to destroy. That so wonderful a thing should be, as his descent into this world of ours, “who was the brightness of his Father’s glory, and

the express image of his person, and who upholds all things by the word of his power, and by whom he made the worlds;” if at he should come down and appear once before the end of time, (or upon the declining of time from its fulness,) to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; (Heb. 9. 25.) that he who sent his own Son to put away sin upon so very expensive terms, by the sacrifice of himself, to throw it out of the world, should have a hand in bringing it into the world, is the most inconceivable thing that can be.

And it is that which all agree in, that however sin came into the world, God was not the Author of it. Every one abhors that thought, men of all sorts, of all persuasions and religions: pagans themselves, in all the descriptions we find in their writings concerning original evil, all agree in this, that God is not the Original of it: all agree to discharge God in the case, though they are put (some of them) upon most absurd imaginations and devices to assoile the matter in themselves; and to avoid one difficulty, run themselves into as great or greater. Some talking, they know not what, of a certain ancient nature, from whence evil must come: some positively asserting two principles, as Manes and his manicheans did, an evil principle, and a good. But this, all have agreed in, by common consent, that God could not be the Author of the sinful evils that have, in so great measure, confounded the world, and spoiled and corrupted the nature of man.

And that being so far clear, we may reckon, that a good step is taken towards the mark that we are aiming at, the vindicating of God’s righteousness in reference to this thing. There is the greatest certainty imaginable of the thing itself, while we are uncertain of the manner how sin comes to be transmitted from age to age, or to take its beginning in particular persons in a continual succession. Though there be (I say) a difficulty as to that, there is no difficulty as to the thing; and there is no difficulty as to this, how it did not, though it remain still a difficulty, how it is. It is not from God, sin is none of his creature.

Then I should here subjoin, in the third place, that next conclusion which I design to speak to, namely,

III. That it is the most unreasonable thing that can be, to object uncertainty against certainty. It being certain, that God is immutably holy and righteous, and that his nature is absolutely perfect; it being certain that man’s nature is now become sinfully imperfect: and it being again plain, that we may be certain of very many things, when how they come to be, is doubtful, and perhaps, to many or the most inexplica-

ble : but as to this particular thing, we do not know how the corruption of particular persons began, but we know how it began not ; that is, that it is impossible to be any way imputable to God : we thence proceed to shew, how unreasonable a thing it is, to object the things about which we are uncertain, against the things that are most certain, that carry the greatest and plainest evidence with them. And of this we may give you instances enough.

If we should argue against the existence of this world, because we have not a particular, distinct account how it took its beginning, how absurd were it ? If we may be capable of being puzzled with such questions as these, the great God put to Job. (chapter 38. in several verses of it.) If he should bid us gird up our loins like men, and say he would demand of us, to answer, “ Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth ? declare, if you have understanding, Who hath laid the measures thereof, if ye know ? or who hath stretched out the line upon them ? ” If he should expostulate with us, touching our knowledge of the way, how the sea is shut up as within bars and doors ; or how ice, and snow, and rain are generated, and would put us upon giving an account of these things, would it not be the absurdest thing in all the world to deny their being, because we cannot give a distinct account of them ? If we cannot give a distinct account, (or it may be,) a satisfactory one to ourselves, how matter was moved yet in the unformed chaos, and when the measuring line was stretched forth of this world, and the foundations laid of this mighty work ; if we cannot give an account, how light and darkness were severed ; which was the parting place, the utmost boundary of light and darkness ; if we cannot give an account how the waters of the sea came to be collected and gathered into one place, and to be confined and shut up there, so as not to return and overflow the earth ; if we cannot give an account how the rain was generated by its father : “ Hath the rain a father ? (as it follows here :) how ice and snow came to be condensed into these several substances, wherein we find them ; therefore, to say that none of these things are ; to oppose the uncertainties about the production of these things, to the manifest undoubted certainty of their existence, is certainly such an absurdity as we could never prevail upon ourselves to be guilty of.

But (as hath been told you before) we cannot be more certain of any thing that we see with our eyes, or of any faculty or power that belongs to ourselves, than we are, that there is a continual transmission of sin in this world. We cannot be more certain that man is a seeing creature, that he is a hear-

ing creature, that he is a reasoning creature, than we can, that he is a living creature. And it would therefore, be the most absurd thing imaginable, to oppose and object that which is uncertain, against that which is so plainly and fully certain.

And I might tell you here, of a great many uncertainties, which they must suppose and take for granted to be very great certainties, who should form a disputation in this case, concerning the production of the corrupt and sinful nature in man. But that would be too large a theme to enter upon now. Yet, all will resolve into this in general, that as to what difficulty men do imagine in this case, it is only from their opposing philosophical uncertainty, to theological verity; and till philosophers be agreed, in other matters, we have very little reason to regard problems, doubtful problems, that may refer to this particular case; of which I may instance at another time, but shall not now. But (I say) let them come to a certainty in other matters first, before they expect to be much regarded in reference to determinate, theological truth, which we reckon, stands unshaken as the foundations of heaven and earth. When they have brought themselves and the world to a certainty about such things as the ebbing and flowing of the sea, the causes of the very centre of our world, the powers of the loadstone; whether it be the sun or the earth, and which it is of these that moves the other about; when they have brought such things as these, and a hundred more that might be mentioned, to a certainty, then, they may, with more pretence, expect to be listened to, as to their determinations which may more directly respect this case.

LECTURE XXXVII.*

Under the opening of the third conclusion, proposed to be spoken to, for the clearing of what I intended in the choice of the text we are upon, namely,—that it is most unreasonable and absurd, to oppose and object dark, and doubtful, and uncertain things, against that which is most evident and certain;—we shewed that there are many uncertainties, that men of philosophical minds, and geniuses, do commendably enough employ their thoughts about, while they do not attempt or offer at such a thing, as to oppose them to manifest, revealed truths. But if they will do so, it is, in all reason, to be expected that they should come to a more general certainty than they do, or are ever like to do, about philosophical matters in general. I in-

* Preached Nov. 6, 1694.

stanced in several, and told you, I would instance in four more which do more directly concern this case, about which, here lies the objected difficulty.

That the human soul cannot be propagated: to suppose it can, would be to expose the doctrine of its immortality, to manifest hazard. It must be supposed, that being immediately created by God himself, it comes pure and sinless out of his hands. The body itself, without the soul, cannot be the seat and subject of sin, as no irrational thing can, which is most evident. Therefore, many think there can be no such thing as propagation of sin from age to age; for how should it be? It cannot be at first found in the soul, which comes pure out of the hand of God. It cannot be seated or subjected in the body, which is not a subject capable of sin, or any mortality, abstractly considered. Here (I say) men do but oppose uncertainty to a certainty; a great many uncertainties to one plain and absolute certainty; that is, that sin doth really descend from age to age; and it is manifest, and in view with every one that observes, that men do not sooner begin to act rationally, than they do begin to act irregularly. But to oppose uncertainties to this plain and evident certainty, is a most unreasonable thing; equally unreasonable as that sophistical reasoning was of the philosopher that would undertake to prove, that there could be no such thing as a local motion: and another undertook to refute him by walking up and down before his eyes. There are too plain and sad proofs, in the walkings of men from age to age, that as soon as ever they begin to move or act as men, they do act sinfully; and so that corruption doth descend and is transmitted. This is certain and evident. But to make this a difficulty, there are a great many uncertainties supposed and taken for granted, about which it concerns ignorant creatures (as we all are) to pronounce nothing one way or other.

It is uncertain when or what time human souls were created, or were not created; whether all at once and at first, or whether at some distance of time, before they become to be united to human bodies. Not that the truth needs a determination of these matters, that way that would seem more favourable to it, as if it be not otherwise defended. But, in the mean time, we ought not to make difficulties greater than they really are, by supposing and taking for granted, that those things are certain, which really are not so.

It is, again, altogether uncertain, by what sort of Divine Agency a human soul comes to be united to a human body, or whether they come into that union electively, yea or no; or

whether by a certain sort of fatal necessity; these are uncertainties, and we are not to pronounce concerning them, as if they were certain.

We do not know; philosophy cannot, with certainty, determine the strict, precise limitative bounds, between the sensitive nature, and the rational. We can be at no certainty, what dispositions there may be in the sensitive nature unto sin, though there can be no such thing as formal sin in it, abstractly considered; so that whensoever a reasonable, intelligent spirit, shall come to be united therewith, it will thereupon certainly sin: if it act, it will not act more rationally, than disorderly and irregularly. As if never so skilful a hand do play upon an instrument out of tune, if it sound, it will sound amiss; if never so skilful a horseman ride a lame horse, if he move, he will halt. We are altogether uncertain what of sensitive nature may be propagated with such and such dispositions in it, before the supervention of the reasonable soul.

We are uncertain what orders there are of created spirits, so little do we know; and we ought not to pretend to know of the affairs of the invisible world, so that we ought, in justice, to profess ignorance of such things as these, whether there be any common spirit of nature endowed with a plastic power, that may be immediately concerned about the union of human bodies, and human souls with one another.

These are things, though contraries, whereunto for the most part, men take upon them to determine as certainties; and so make objections against the most certain and unquestionable truths. And the most of the difficulties in this matter do but arise from opposing, doubtful philosophical problems, to unquestionable theological verities. And whereas, there is a very great uncertainty in most parts of philosophy, in natural philosophy, more than in any other part, therefore, the presumptuous determinations of men, about these things, are very unfit to be brought into any competition with the most certain divine truths; that is, to oppose things that are doubtful, that can never be proved, one way or other, unto things that are either most evidently proved, or are in themselves so evident, as to need no proof. And this is the case as to the most of what appears difficult in this affair. But then,

IV. The last conclusion that I am to insist upon, is this, that it is most of all, unreasonable and absurd, to oppose such uncertainties to certainties, to object what is doubtful and dark, against what is plain and evident, when (as hath been evinced already) there is nothing can shake the asserted truth; but there are many considerations may be brought to break the

force of such objections, as are raised against it; then, it is most specially absurd. And under this head it was, that I designed to produce and lay before you, the many considerations which tend to break the force of any thing that can be objected against the consistency and agreeableness of the righteous and universal perfection of the Divine Nature, with the continual transmission of the sinful imperfections of the human nature.

The difficulty I need not remind you of, only, that it may lie the more distinctly in your thoughts, it is reducible to two heads; partly somewhat on the part of God, and partly somewhat on the part of man. On man's part first; because he is first to be considered in every thing that is evil, whether it be evil of sin, or evil of misery. And from what hath been said it appears difficult to be conceived, how man can be capable of propagating a sinful soul to another, when the soul, as such, is not propagated: and sin must reside there, inasmuch (as hath been said) as the body cannot be the seat or subject of sin, abstractly considered, and without the soul. On God's part, how it should stand with his righteousness and other perfections, continually to co-operate with second causes in the transmission of a sinful nature from age to age among men; so as thereby to make this world a seedplot of wickedness and misery, to all its inhabitants, from one generation to another; upon which, many have thought themselves necessitated to deny any such thing as the propagation of a corrupted nature, from generation to generation; and so to ascribe the whole business of the continuance of sin from age to age, in the world, only to imitation; one generation learning to be wicked, from another wicked generation, that did precede. But now, I say, as nothing can shake, the truths that have been asserted concerning God's righteousness; and man's unrighteousness continually descending, and transmitted from age to age, so there are many things to be alleged, to break the force of any such objections as these. And,

I shall offer this to consideration, that in reference to God's concern in this matter, (about whose name and honour all our souls ought to be most tenderly and deeply concerned,) there is nothing to be said or thought but this; it were easy for him to have prevented such a descent of sinfulness, from age to age, in this world, by which also misery is continually entailed upon the inhabitants of it. But now (I say) consider these things in reference hereunto.

I. Suppose that men should, hereupon ascribe the whole business of the continued sinfulness of the world, from age to

age, to imitation only, this would no more solve the difficulty, than what is ordinarily asserted; for, even that also, how easy were it for him, the great God, (as we may think,) to have prevented this; that is, to have prevented the descent of sin, from age to age, by imitation? How easily might he have annihilated this world, or annihilated his creature man, either by exerting his power to this purpose, or indeed, by only withholding it! for then all must drop. Or, how easy had it been to him, to have made all perfectly good, and that they should have continued such, from age to age? and then there would have been no bad example for any one's imitation. And we do not know, but that the Divine Agency (such as it may be for ought we can tell) may be as little concerned in transmitting human nature in its corruption, from age to age, as it would be, in sustaining sinful creatures that are corrupted, in co-operating in sinful actions. And without the co-operating influence of the First Cause, we are sure nothing can be done by a sufficient influence; that is, not done by an efficacious and necessitating one. And therefore, it is in vain to allege that, for the solving and expediting this difficulty, which doth itself carry as much of difficulty in it. And again,

2. This is next to be considered, that it is very unreasonable to have been expected from God, that he should annihilate an intelligent creature, upon the account of its having offended him, or upon the account of its being likely to transmit its likeness to those that shall proceed and spring from such a progenitor. It was a most unreasonable thing (I say) that God should, hereupon, annihilate or reduce to nothing such a piece of the work of his own hands; that, had neither been suitable to the wisdom of God, nor his goodness: not to his wisdom, for there had been a direct regression, that he should undo and destroy his own work: because such a creature, the subject and effect of his productive and creating influence, had transgressed the law and rule of its own creation; it was unreasonable that he should, thereupon, reduce it to nothing. And it had been (I say) very disagreeable to his wisdom, as if he were surprised by the fall and lapse of his creature; as if he had not foreseen, as if he had not sagacity enough to apprehend such and such consequences. It hath been always (as we find by the course God hath held) reckoned by him, most worthy of him, and most Godlike, to turn ill events to good; but not to go back. And we shall, in time, come to shew you, how he hath done it in this case, to his own most transcendent glory, and to the advantage of his creatures, such as do not, by their own faulty opposition, stand in the way of his kind and gracious method

towards them. But, that he should annihilate or bring a creature to nothing, that was capable of obeying and serving him, because he did disobey him, and because he is likely to transmit sinful inclinations to those that come of him, or come after him, this is never to be expected from the blessed God: it is a thing disagreeable to his wisdom, that he should do and undo. When he is said to have repented that he made man, as when he brought the flood upon the world; (Gen. 6.) that, as is plain in itself, and all do agree, is spoken *more humano*. And though he did (that he might give one proof of his just displeasancy at the apostasy of the world) bring on that deluge, yet you see he would not destroy the kind, but resolved to continue that, in subserviency to his further great and glorious designs.

And indeed, it could much less have consisted with his goodness, to destroy the capacity which was in that order of creatures, of so high and great things as he designed them to, which should spring up of the human race. That he should prevent himself of that wonderful exercise of his mercy, grace, and good will towards men, of which we shall have occasion to discourse in its proper place, and as the series of things shall lead on. Therefore, that, I would have to be considered, that it was a most unreasonable thing to expect that God should, upon the transgression of his reasonable creatures, and lest sin should be transmitted from age to age, annihilate the kind, and reduce all to nothing. And,

3. It was as little to be expected, that God should at first make all immutably good; that he should have made all his intelligent creatures immutably good at first, both angels in heaven, and men on earth; and so have provided and taken a course that sin should always be kept out of his creation; and that it should be impossible, where there is a nature propagated from age to age, there should be any thing of taint capable of falling into that nature; I say, that God should have done this, was as little to be expected from him.

We may judge of things safely by the event; for that is judging after God; that is judging that to be becoming of God, which he hath done; that course to be most suitable to him, most Godlike, which he hath chosen. And so far as we can discern the reasonableness of the course which he hath taken, we are to take notice of it, and avow it upon all occasions. Now, from the course he hath taken, it appears most suitable to the excellencies of the Divine Being, every way, that he should have made intelligent creatures at first, mutable; not to make them immutably good and happy.

which was to be their final state; but that there should be a preparatory, subservient state, introductive to that final state. This appears, upon all accounts, to have been most agreeable to the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness, that his creatures should not arrive to the highest perfection that they were capable of all at once, and at the very first; but that they should undergo a trial, and in that case, (if they must do so,) they must be left to their liberty at first, and being left so, there would be still a possibility that sin should be; and being once, that it should go on and be transmitted from age to age. And therefore, I add,

4. That God's omnipotency, or what his absolute power can do, is not the only measure (abstractly considered) according to which it can be said God can do this or that. It is not fit or proper to say, that he can do whatsoever omnipotency, abstractly considered and alone, could do; because he is not a Being of power alone: power alone gives us but an inadequate conception of God; it doth not give us an intire conception of him, as if he were nothing else but power; for he is wisdom, and goodness, and holiness, and righteousness, and truth, as well as power. And therefore, that only is, in a true sense, possible to God, which is suitable to all his glorious excellencies to do, conjunctly considered; and not what is suitable to his power alone, and separately considered from the rest. When it is said, God cannot lie, and God cannot deny himself, and the like, the meaning is not as if there were a want of mere power to do any such natural act, considered as a natural act; but it is impossible to the divine perfection, (consider him as a Being of universal perfection, wherein all perfections do meet,) to do things so unlike himself, so unworthy of himself.

Therefore, it was never to have been expected from divine power, or because he is omnipotent, that, therefore, he should do all things which that, abstractly considered, could do; as to have put an end to the generations of men lest they should sin on; or to have made all perfectly good at first, so as it should be an impossibility that any such thing as sin should be in the world, which only the possibility of its continuing in the world could, in an ordinary course, be prevented. This (I say) was never to be expected from the infinitely, absolutely, and universally perfect Being, who hath other perfections belonging to his nature besides that of power. But those things are only possible to him, which (all things considered) are most worthy of him, and most suitable to him. And again,

5. We are further to consider, that the course of nature

in the universe, it is most observably fixed and settled; so as (unless it be now and then in single instances) not to admit of change; that is, not to admit of change in an ordinary course. We may observe, that the course of nature is very rarely ever altered. But it were very unreasonable to expect, that it should be statedly or often altered. We find alterations in single instances; as in reference to that great order of day and night; when the sun stood still so long one time; and when it went back so many degrees at another time. And so when the sea did not hold its own course, or do agreeably to its property, as a fluid thing, to overflow all that came within the compass of it, but was bound up as to the Israelites that passed through it. And the fire, it acted not, according to its natural property, to consume and burn what is combustible, in the case of the three children, who were in the fiery furnace unharmed and unhurt.

But we are never to think that the course of nature should be ordinarily or often altered. And that it is not, even because it is not, we ought in great reverence and humility to apprehend there are mighty occult reasons for this. And it should lay an awe upon our spirits, to behold the Author of nature, the God of nature, acting it on, in so stated and unaltered a course, from age to age, through the succession of many ages. If we understood no reason why it should be so, yet our minds should be struck with great reverence when we find, that ordinarily it is so. But we may apprehend very great reason for it too, in reference to the stated course of natural causes, as to what doth concern ourselves. What confusion would it make in the world, if ordinarily, the sun should vary its course, that no man could tell when it would rise, or when it would set, or when to undertake such or such a business? If God's obstructing that course in a single instance or two, should have been often repeated, so as to hold men's minds in a continual suspense, the sad and dismal consequences that would have ensued to this world (though this be but a very minute, inconsiderable part of the universe, the whole creation of God) are obvious to every one's view that considers.

And as to the transmitting of the species of things, and the preserving of the species of all sorts of things, in the world, besides the decorum of it, and that admirable proof that there is of divine wisdom and providence therein, the usefulness thereof to ourselves, is most apparent to any one's notice and view, that through so many thousands of years there should be a preservation of the kinds of things. Go through the se-

veral orders of things: the ranks of things that come under our own notice, is an admirable discovery of God's wisdom and providence, and too little considered and reflected on; that the species of things should be unaltered, that what we find was the property of this or that herb, or plant, or tree, continues so. These things have still the same properties that they had. Look to the animals beneath us; we find the same properties the horse to be described by, so many ages ago, are in the same creature still. There is an admirable discovery of the power and wisdom of providence in this, which we ought to contemplate with great admiration, and great reverence, and have our spirits so much the more disposed to acknowledge and adore God the Maker of this world, and the great Author of universal nature. It would do more to preserve a religious impression upon our spirits Godward, than is commonly apprehended, if we did, now and then, allow our thoughts to fix in these contemplations, that whereas there is such a collision in this natural world, there are such antipathies, and contrarieties in the natures of things, that yet their natures are continued, preserved intire, from being confounded; though there is such a vast multiplicity, yet all preserved intire, through so many thousands of years. But then, consider further,

6. That it is most evident, that the course of nature is as settled and constant, in reference to the production of men from age to age, as of any other creature. This is obvious, to wit, that there do spring up, from age to age, creatures of this species, and of the same kind, as there do of any other creatures of any other kind or species. And that, hereupon, we must apprehend a fixedness in the course of nature, not to be altered for a continuance, though it may in single instances, here and there, in reference to this thing, as well as in reference to any thing else that falls under the regulation and measure of the law of nature. And,

7. It is a mighty confirmation of the natural descent of sin with the nature of man, in the ordinary way, that when God designed the incarnation of his own Son, to avoid that corruption of nature descending to him, he there steps out of the ordinary course; a consideration that hath that weight with it, that if any one allow himself to think, it must overbear his mind in that matter, that sure there is some secret, profound reason in the counsel of God, (whether obvious to our view, or not obvious,) that the descent of corrupt nature was in the ordinary way unavoidable: that when God had a design to incarnate his own Son, when it was intended God should

be manifested in the flesh, to avoid that contagion and corruption which, in the ordinary course, is transmitted, he doth in this single instance recede and go off from the ordinary natural course: and so the production is by the Holy Ghost, separating the very matter of the human body which itself, indeed, was not a capable subject of sin, as hath been said, and is plain in itself. But because the human nature had been corrupted, if it had descended in the ordinary way, (and that was inconsistent with the design on which a Redeemer was to come down from heaven into the world,) therefore, the ordinary course of procreation is declined and avoided: a most pregnant demonstration, that, in the ordinary course, sin is always naturally transmitted, in that this must be done on purpose to avoid that taint and contagion that otherwise would have been. But I add, in the next place, and shall go no further now,

8. That men do make the difficulty in this matter greater than they need, by not apprehending and considering aright, wherein the production of a human creature lies. It is plain it doth not lie, though a human creature be a creature of a compounded nature, that hath a terrestrial and celestial part, yet, I say, it doth not lie in the production of either of the parts, but only in the uniting of them substantially with one another. It neither lies in the production of the soul, nor doth it lie in the production of the matter of the body, for all matter is generally apprehended to be ingenerable and incorruptible. But it lies (as I said) in the bringing of these into a substantial union with one another. And do but consider to this purpose, "Wherein doth death lie? wherein doth the death of a man consist?" His death, you will easily apprehend, must stand in direct opposition to his procreation and production. But death doth not lie either in the destruction of the soul, or of the body; but as it is a matter of faith, that the one remains, so it is a matter of sense, that the other remains after death. The soul is gone, but not reduced to nothing; the body remains, and will continue a considerable time the same intire frame that it was, even when the soul is gone. Death, therefore, doth neither lie in the destruction of the soul, nor in the destruction of the body; but in their disunion. So the procreation doth not lie, either in the production of the soul, or in the production of the body; (otherwise than being so and so modified;) but in the union of those two parts, bringing it about, that they should be substantially united with one another.

And if that be duly considered, there is a great deal of room and scope left to apprehend how such a thing may be

very possible, (as we find it actual,) the continual descent of sin, and yet the holiness, and purity, and universal rectitude of the Divine Nature, not having any concern unbecoming itself, unsuitable to itself, herein.

There are many more considerations behind, that will not be without weight in this matter: only, now, let us consider and bethink ourselves (as our assembly dissolves) of this one thing; how much more considerable a theme and subject we have for our thoughts, in that which is common to all ages, than can occur to us in what is peculiar to our own time! We are so amused and taken up about the little affairs (in comparison) of our own time, that we do not allow ourselves to consider and look, as we should do, with just intention of mind, upon those things that are great, and of common concern to all time. And we wonder there should be any miscarriage in the conduct of human affairs, and that the perversity of men, here and there, breaks out in this or that instance, forgetting there is a corrupt, human nature still descending from age to age, and from generation to generation, which naturally makes this world a region of impurity, and consequent misery, and gloominess and darkness. And we do not enough reflect upon the intestine cause of all our evils. Every one would be a great deal more ready to fall to self-accusation, than to the accusing of other men. "I have a corrupt nature in myself, out of which nature spring all the confusions and disorders in the world; all the dismal, tragical things that are any where to be found and observed in it." It is very unreasonable to let our minds be confined to the present, when we have such a vast prospect before us, looking forward, looking backward, looking inward, looking on this and that hand; to bind our thoughts when we have so vast a compass of things to look into, this is neither suitable to the reason of a man, nor so suitable as it should be to the more large and concerned mind of a christian, about the great things wherein the Christian Interest is, itself, concerned.

LECTURE XXXVIII.*

Now we shall go on to add further considerations for shewing this *fourth conclusion*. And, thereupon, in the next place,

9. We may further consider, that it is never thought a ble-

* Preached Nov. 17, 1694.

blemish to the justice of any government whatsoever, that children should inherit the poverty and rags of their parents that were either poor or profligate, or that had squandered or forfeited all that they had. This was never thought to have been a blemish to the government under which such persons may live, that children are born poor, when their parents had nothing to leave them; and so they have rags and beggary for their patrimony. This doth not use to be, or can be, with any equity, imputed to the government under which such live, as if that were to be blamed. And much less is it imputable in this case; because human governors are debtors to the communities which they govern, and do owe to them their utmost care and providence for them. But God (as hath been formerly shewed you) can be no debtor to any of his creatures, whether considered singly, or in communities, any otherwise than as he hath by any promise made himself debtor. But he never promised, never obliged himself by any promise, to keep sin out of the world, from hurting creatures that can only hurt themselves by it; or from preventing it to descend, or presently to throw it out of the world; though that he will do fully in his own time, and in his own way. And again,

10. There can be no more obligation on the blessed God, to prevent moral defects among his creatures, than natural ones. If he be not obliged to prevent natural defects, he is as little obliged to prevent moral; because moral perfection must be founded in natural; as all morality hath its foundation in the nature of the creatures who are the capable subjects thereof. But plain it is, he can be under no obligation to prevent natural defects, or that his creatures should be naturally perfect: for in what sense will we suppose it requisite that he should make them so? Not with an absolute perfection, perfection in *omni genere*; for that is above the condition of a creature; no creature is capable of being *universally perfect*. That is the peculiar privilege and prerogative of the Original and Uncreated Being, to be absolutely and universally perfect. And therefore, to suppose him obliged to make all his creatures every way perfect, it were to suppose him obliged to have made them all gods; or we must suppose him not obliged to make any thing at all: because it is impossible that a made thing can be absolutely perfect. Or, should we suppose him under an obligation to have made things perfect in any kind above their own? That cannot be thought neither: for that must suppose, then, that there should have been no creatures of any inferior kind, or that all must have been of equal perfection, that every fly or worm must have been a cherubim

or seraphim. Indeed, it is a most accurate discourse that I have taken notice of to this purpose, in a pagan writer, (as it is more generally reckoned,) Plotinus, who saith, that “to find fault with the Author of nature because of such and such defects, in such and such sorts of creatures, or in particular creatures, it were to find fault that he hath made the world an harmonious thing; that there are such orders and gradations in it; that he hath made some inanimate things, and endowed some with a life of sense, and some below them with a life of vegetation, and some above them with a life of reason, and some above them with an angelical nature, and the like.” All these comely orders of things should not have been, but all must have been of one order and kind. “And, (as he saith,) it were the same thing as to blame a limner, that he hath not in every thing drawn light colours without any foil; or a comedian, (the author of a comedy,) that he hath not made every person that is to act a part, a king, or a hero; that there should be any that doth sustain the part of mean and inferior persons.”

It is plain, and out of doubt, that God is not obliged to make his creatures all, either absolutely perfect, or to give them higher perfections than do belong to their own kind: or (we may add) to give to every one of them those perfections that that kind is capable of. For we find that there are some of greater health, some of less; some of greater strength, some of less, in that order of creatures wherein they are. And we find that there are such things as hereditary diseases, that do descend, and generally are found every where through the human race. But (I say) God can no more be under obligation to prevent moral than natural defects, among his creatures. And again,

11. We are to consider further, that though the descent and transmission of a sinful pravity with the nature of man may appear to have a difficulty with it, yet it is not altogether unaccountable, if we do but consider things as they are, with that compass of thought which we ought. Nay, it is not ordinarily conceivable, how it should be otherwise, if we do but admit into our thoughts, what a concurrence there is of several things to this purpose. As,

(1.) The retirement of the Holy, Divine Spirit from man, having once sinned. And it is certain, that he did retire thereupon, that he hath retired, otherwise than as according to the Redeemer’s method he is returned. There was an antecedent retirement and withdrawing, and that, upon the sin of man, upon sin’s entering into the world: for do but observe

that Gal. 3. 14, 15. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for us; for cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree; that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles." (That, which was the blessing of Abraham upon that account, might now be a more diffused blessing, and reach the Gentiles too.) For what? That they might receive the promise of the Spirit (or the promised Spirit) through faith. Now consider what the blessing is, and measure the opposite curse by that: the blessing, you see, is the gift of the Spirit; what is the curse then, but the debasing of the Spirit? And certainly then, that was the curse of the law, the curse of the violated law. As soon as the law was broken, the Divine, Holy Spirit was cursed away from the nature of man; or, man was cursed, so as that thereby this Spirit should be withheld, should be kept off, otherwise than as upon the Redeemer's account, and according to his methods, it should be restored. And then,

(2.) Consider, hereupon, the nature and kind of that corruption that is conveyed and doth descend, and how the Scripture speaks of it, generally under the notion of carnality. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, John 3. 6. That is, now, where there is no divine birth, where nothing is born of the Spirit, or where the work of regeneration hath not taken place, the production is nothing else but flesh, the mere human nature; to wit, the denomination is taken from that which governs: though a man be not all flesh, the denomination is taken from that which prevails. What is the thing produced when a human creature is born? A piece of flesh: as that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, whenever that birth comes to obtain and take place with any soul. That which is born of the flesh is but flesh; not as if the nature of man were nothing but flesh, but because carnality is the prevailing thing in the lapsed state of man, that carries the name, and now he is called nothing but flesh. And,

(3.) This is to be considered, to facilitate our apprehension of this matter, that the sensitive nature, (which only is capable of being propagated,) though it cannot itself be the seat and subject of sin, yet it may be in very great disposition thereunto: or things may be there, in that inferior region, in that disposition, that there cannot but be sinfulness as soon as the intelligent mind and spirit supervene. All things will lie in the sensitive nature, as it is transmitted and conveyed in that state, that when the reasonable and intelligent spirit supervenes, though the sensitive nature (as such) is not capable of sin, yet supervening and coming into union, there cannot but a sinfulness ensue. And,

(4.) We have further to consider to this purpose, how manifest the power of imagination is, every where through the world. And so, how supposable it is, that the power of parental imagination may be great. And we find it is so, very frequently, to make an impression upon the grosser corporeal bulk. There are signatures upon the fœtus, as many unquestionable histories do inform us, that speak of parental imaginations. But much more may it be strong on the more fine sort of vehicles, in which, we have very little reason to doubt, the reasonable soul is lodged, and invested with, whenever it comes into union with a terrestrial body. And it cannot be difficult, to apprehend what signatures parental imagination may make there, when the soul comes to act in a body so and so formed. I do not merely, now, speak of this corporeal external bulk, but that finer indument, that is, that immediate inwrapping of the soul in the body; and which, in all likelihood, it carries away with it out of the body whensoever it leaves it. What signatures may be there easily made by parental imagination, it is not hard for us to apprehend, if we let our thoughts work upon that subject, especially considering what impressions have been made upon the grosser or more corporeal bulk itself. And then consider,

(5.) The natural activity of the intelligent mind and spirit, when it comes into union and supervenes, especially with respect to its cogitateness, its thinkingness, its power to think; which how soon it doth exert, and put forth its power into act, we do not know: but, to be sure, as soon as its organs are capable, and as soon as it becomes, in its own nature, a cogitative or a thinking thing, nothing is more essential to it than a power of thought; so that as soon as it can use thought, it must: especially the organs that it depends upon, and is to act by, being so and so disposed before, it cannot be but there will be thinking amiss. And according to this course, as the power of using thought grows riper, it will be more and more irregular.

And here are the first ebullitions of corrupt nature. The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are vanity. As soon as he thinks, he will think vainly; he will think vanity. Psalm 94. 11.—“And God saw that the imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil, and that continually,” in that corrupt state of the world. Genesis 6. 5. And, “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts.” Where there is a corrupt heart, the first ebullitions of it are in impure thoughts, vain thoughts, sinful thoughts; that is, that such things, such kind of phantasies are impressed, as do take their rise only from

a sensible world: towards an unknown God who is invisible, there are no signatures that can have any power, because they are buried and overwhelmed by such a supervening cloud of sensitive images or imaginations; thereupon, there must be aversion from God, disaffection to him, disinclination towards him, as an unknown, and an unsuitable, and an undesirable Object. And so, here is the very root of all evil. So that he may easily see how it comes to have place, even in the corrupt nature of lapsed man. And then, again,

(6.) We are further to consider, how industrious we must needs suppose the prince of the apostasy to be, for the continuation of that sin in the world, which he introduced into it. And that is a thing less considered in this matter than I think it should be, and doth claim to be. Plain it is, that the whole order of apostate men became apostate, by being accomplices with this great prince of the air. And so sinful men are more universally accomplices with hell, with the apostate prince of the darkness of this world. Nothing is plainer: and do but consider, hereupon, what the parentage of a sinner is, as a sinner; "Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye will do." John 8. 44. They are the words of him who is truth itself, and who, therefore, cannot deceive us. Now, in what respects do we think that the devil is called the father of sinners? Not in respect of their mere nature, not in respect of their naturals, the substance either of their souls, or of their bodies, but only in respect of their morals, the sinfulness, the corruption, the impurity of them. But is he a father in respect of this? Then, certainly, it must owe its beginnings, in individuals, to him too; as children do owe their beginning, wherein they are children, to their parents.

And let but that context be observed, 1 John 5. 18, 19. "He that is born of God, keepeth himself, that the wicked one toucheth him not." Therefore, this is a divine birth; there is a self-preserving principle conveyed with that divine nature which is new born, that the wicked one shall not touch him; that is, mortally to touch him; not touch him so as to kill him; but he hath touched mortally all the rest. And, therefore, the apostle adds in the very next words, "we are of God," to wit, new-born of God; an elliptical expression: the word *being born*, having been before used, it was enough to say, we are of God; born of God. But how is the case with the rest of the world? They "all lie in wickedness," we read it: in all likelihood, it should be read, "in that wicked one," spoken of before, in that foregoing word: that is, in the wicked one, who can only touch those that are born of God; but doth mortally touch the rest.

And thereupon, we find that the common course of the unregenerate and unconverted world, it is said to be after “the power of the prince of the air, that works in the children of disobedience.” Ephes. 2. 2. Whereupon, in the very next words, they are said to be children of wrath too, by nature. Observe how things lie connected; “and are by nature children of wrath.” By nature, how so? Inasmuch as there is a corrupt and depraved nature continually descending and transmitted; wherein we are not to suppose him to be without his advantage, or without his agency, who is “the prince of the darkness of this world,” and who is also called “the God of this world.” 2 Cor. 4. 4.

And it is not, therefore, strange, that men should be, as to all their concerns, so much subject to the diabolical power, because they have been accomplices with him from the beginning, even the first apostasy; when nobody can suppose (that considers matters equally) but that he must be continually intent to keep his ground in this world; and doth all that in him lies, to transmit impurity from age to age. And his advantage, in order hereunto, upon the sensitive nature, cannot but be great. Though he cannot immediately touch the mind and spirit itself, without its own consent, without its own betraying itself; yet, that power variously actuates the sensitive nature; and thereby, the inferior appetite, and whatsoever is in the lower region of the soul; (this is no unapprehensible thing;) to wit, to cherish sin, and to foment and cherish it the same way, by the mediation of sense by which he first introduced it. And, by sense, we are not to understand only the external sense, but we are to understand, under that notion, whatsoever lies within the compass of sensitive nature, imagination and appetite, as well as the external sense. And what signatures he may make upon it, is more easy for us to apprehend as possible, than to conclude as certain: but very likely it is, that his power may go very far; and we are not to doubt but his malice will go as far as his power. And then, I add upon all this,

12. That there being such a sinful pravity conveyed and descending down with our nature, from age to age, this must, in the beginning thereof, be matter of just displeasancy to the blessed God. It cannot be, but there must be aversion in his holy and pure nature, to a nature impure and unholy. And let us but consider this, that we are said to be, (as was taken notice of before,) “by nature, the children of wrath,” lying under the divine displeasure, under a *vindicta*, even by nature: Ephes. 2. 2, 3. And pray, let the reason of the thing be a

little discussed and looked into. Consider whether that various inclination and disposition, before actual sin, be not in itself a hateful thing. And that nothing which is asserted, among those that have inquired into, and do profess the truth in this matter, may appear harsh and hard, let us but consider how such matters used to be judged of by human measures, by men; sure, in things wherein they will not censure men, we may think God more uncensurable. If men will allow themselves the liberty of free thought, they cannot deny it. But whereas, there is such a thing as human justice, pray do but consider how it useth to have its exercise in matter of punishment, and upon what ground. And whereas, all men have some natural notions remaining with them of right and wrong, and they have aversion or propension, according to such notions, more or less, do but consider how these do work among men, considered as men. Let me but set your thoughts on work on the latter of these first: that is, take a virtuous person, one that goes under that common estimate, by all that know him, as a person of strict virtue. Will he not, as such, disaffect an ill man, a vicious and wicked man? And you will say, he instinctively doth so; that is, the wickedness he sees in him. But then, I would inquire, What is it that such a one disaffects, in such another? Is it, I say, any abstract act he doth? That can never be; for that, abstracted or pre-scinded from an evil inclination, is not the thing that he hates or can hate; that any man can reasonably hate; for an act, an external act, that falls under the notice of another, take it off from an evil inclination, it is but a casual thing; and it is morally neither good nor evil; and therefore, can be no object of a rational hatred. Therefore, whatsoever there is of just hatred in the vilest and most profligate person's course, What is the object of that just hatefulness? Not the external acts, abstractly considered, from a vicious inclination; but as they proceed thence, or as they are supposed to proceed thence. So that it is an ill habit of mind, of a vicious mind, that is the object of hatred, every where, with virtuous men.

And then, consider, what it is that human laws do punish, in the next place. Who do they punish? Do they punish the external action abstractly, from the evil inclination or intention? Never at all: for if it doth appear that there was an action done against the rule of the law, that doth not proceed from an ill inclination or intention, it is looked upon as a casual thing, and not punishable. Therefore, the thing that is punishable, is the ill intention and disposition, only

discovering itself by such and such external acts. This is plain in itself.

But now, whereas, we have no way to know the inclinations of men's minds, but by external *indicia*, the disposition and habitude of every one lie immediately open to the divine inspection: there is all the difference. If then, there be a just and reasonable ground to hate an ill disposition, an ill inclination, because it doth discover itself by external acts to us, why is there not the same reason that it should be hated, or that it should be matter of displeasure, whenever it appears, unto him by whom things are immediately seen in themselves, and as they lie without external discovery? And therefore, a sinful generation is called "a generation of vipers." You have poison, you have malignity in your natures. This he can see, that sees all things, and knows all things, before it doth, *se prodere*, before it discovers itself in sinful actions; before it appears to our view, before it can be discerned by us. And therefore, consider further,

13. Which will be a further proof of the former, and contribute further towards our common end, the clearing of difficulties in this matter, that it is plain, that infants, as soon as they come to partake of the human nature, they do need a Redeemer, as much as others: for I hope there is none among us that is such a *durus infantum pater*, so hard and harsh a father of infants, but to admit, that many infants may be saved, may become blessed creatures hereafter. Well, but how shall they come to be so without a Redeemer, without a Christ? Is not he said to be "the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world?" Whatsoever sins of the world that are taken away, they are taken away by him. But what? are infants no part of the world? They are said to compose the kingdom of God in this world; that is, concur to the composition. "Suffer little children to be brought unto me, for of such is the kingdom of God." Those that were brought in arms, that were carried, of them it is said, "of such is the kingdom of God;" that kingdom whereof our Lord Jesus Christ is the immediate King. He takes them into his kingdom. They come under the government of the Redeemer; then they did need a Redeemer, and to be dealt with in a way of grace, and not merely upon a natural point. They are a part of that body which he gave himself to purchase and sanctify. *Epes. 5. 25, 26.* And it is plain,

14. That they do need to be regenerated; they need regeneration as well as redemption; and which, indeed, hath its foundation in redemption: "for that which is born of the

flesh, is but flesh," and no more : but " that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," and that Spirit is the Spirit of Christ : and if we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are none of his. And therefore, I would subjoin to all these considerations, in the last place,

15. That whatsoever God thought fit not to do, by way of prevention of the coming of sin into the world, and of its being transmitted in it, he hath done with more unspeakably glorious advantage, by way of remedy. And the remedy for setting things right, where things were out of course, in the apostate world, it is two ways. The one whereof doth more directly respect us, and the other himself: that is, by redemption, and the penal judgment. These two things will set all things right. I cannot now enlarge as I would : but very true it is indeed, that it must mightily pose, nonplus all our understandings, if there were to be continual descent of our sinful generation one after another in this world eternally. If things were to run on thus to all eternity, it were the most unaccountable thing imaginable. But we find this is not to be ; there will be a period put to this course within awhile. This world, and the wickedness of it, must come to an end : and while sin is running on, from age to age, grace hath its exercise too, which runs a parallel, from age to age. And therefore, there is a far more glorious display of all the divine perfections in the appointed means of remedy, than there would have been in the prevention of those great disorders that have been in the world, by sin's once entering into it, and continuing a course in it so long.

LECTURE XXXIX.*

My design (as you have heard) in choosing the text I have been upon for some time, was not to speak of the corruption of human nature abstractly, and in itself, but to consider it here as it stands in connection with the acknowledged justice and righteousness of God ; and so to make that my business, to vindicate God's justice in reference to this case,—a continual transmission of a corrupt nature, in this world, from age to age, that draws death and misery after it, and which God permits to run on in such a course ; though (as hath been told you) if we did consider his omnipotency abstractly, and ab-

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solutely, it might be supposed easy for him to have hindered it. To this I have spoken at large, and will repeat nothing more, than only to take notice of so much, as the sum of all, that whatsoever is, with the most plausibleness, wont to be alleged against the righteousness of the divine procedure in this matter, doth lie, for the most part, in men's taking such and such things for granted, as if they were certainly so; which are most uncertain, and whereof (whereas all men do all they can) they must be, in a great measure, ignorant: if such had but the modesty to confess the ignorance which they cannot cure or remedy, the justice of God, in permitting all men to come into the world with sinful natures, would appear in glorious light and lustre before their eyes, darkened with no cloud; nor would these dash in the dark one against another, but be easily conceived in their minds, without the least appearance of repugnancy to one another. As we see lie in the Psalmist's, who, in almost the same breath, confesseth the triumphant justice and righteousness of God, and the corruption of that nature that did descend to him, and doth descend from man to man, and from age to age.

But now, it only remains to make *Use* of what hath been said upon this very important subject. And herein, considering one of the things considered and asserted, by itself, to wit, the corruption of the nature, which is conveyed and transmitted down from parents to children. The first use that I shall hereupon make will be this—To shew how greatly they are concerned, who are parents, or who may be so, to their uttermost to strive against this radical evil that is descending and running down, from age to age, in this world which we inhabit, and whereof we are the sinful inhabitants. This is a thing which, in the notion, we generally acknowledge, that there is such a descent of corruption and sinfulness, from age to age, in this world. But even where this truth is admitted, it is a truth hid and shut up in unrighteousness, while the hearts of very few are in any measure suitably affected and influenced to take that course, pursuant and agreeable to so plain and so confessed a truth as this is. It is that which, where it is understood and acknowledged, and were it understood and acknowledged all the world over, it ought universally to have the same effect, ought to startle the world, to awaken men every where, as if there were an universal plague spread over all towns, cities, countries, and kingdoms, at once. And if that were the case, that any poor creature could not tell whither to go, or where to set his foot, secure and free from the danger of meeting such a shaft or arrow that should in-

mediately pierce his very heart, in what a condition were this world, if thus it were with every one? But there is a thousand-fold worse mischief to be feared; and they that think of flying from it, carry it about them, and can no more fly from it than they can fly from themselves, or run away from their own nature. It is not considered, that they carry sin, and death, and hell, about them, even from their very original; things complicated with their natures. Who would pretend to believe so horrid a truth, a truth of so horrid and tremendous import, and not be filled with horror about it? Yet, every one goes on unconcerned, as if there were no fear, no danger, no harm, about them, or before them. But, I say,

First. All should understand, hence, that are, or may be, parents, of how unspeakable concernment it is to them, to counterstrive to the uttermost against this great mischief which they are, or are like to be, instruments of; transmitting sin in this world, and conveying it yet further down from this to another generation in it. And this I take to be a head, upon this occasion, fit to be enlarged upon: and therefore, I shall spend this hour upon it. And therein shall shew you—Wherein such as are, or may be, parents, should use their endeavour to counterwork this radical evil: and then—Upon what considerations they should be awakened and engaged effectually hereunto.

1. Wherein they should endeavour against it, who are, or may be, parents. Why,

(1.) By endeavouring, out of hand, to become seriously godly themselves, so that if ever God call them, or order things so in reference to themselves, and that they become parents, as a corrupt seed will more or less spring from them, they may be the means, also, of raising up a godly seed in this world. The thing which God hath designed even in the first founding of families upon this earth: that whereas, a corrupt nature, if ever they come to be parents, will descend from them, without their design, they may be also instruments, in the hand of God, of conveying his image, his light, his grace, with their own design, in subordination (as all instruments must be) to the Supreme Agent, that alone can make them capable of being effectual ones to such a blessed end.

That, I say, must be their first care in order hereunto; that is, out of hand, to endeavour to become godly themselves; to do what is possible for them to do in order thereunto: not content themselves that they have an empty, spiritless form of godliness about them, that is never likely to be ac-

tive to such a purpose : but that there be the life and power of godliness, which will be active to the uttermost it is capable of, in pursuance of so high and great a design. As, naturally, men are generally the devil's instruments, to promote his dark and impure kingdom in this world ; so if ever God call me to the state and condition of a parent, I will, through his grace, be his instrument, as much as in me, to promote that holy kingdom, which he hath formed, and is intent to promote and propagate in this world, as a counter-kingdom, against the power of that wicked kingdom.

In order hereunto, under that manifestation God is pleased to make of himself through Christ in the gospel, they ought to surrender and give up themselves to God in Christ : herein becoming godly, doth first begin when, under the convictive and operative light of influence and grace transmitted in the gospel, persons do make a surrender of themselves to God through Christ. "Yield yourselves unto God," as the expression is, Rom. 6. 13. It is but a practical answer to God's claim and challenge—"Yield yourselves to God." He demands his right ; he insists upon his interest in you, as you are his creatures, and the work of his hands. And what ! will you not yield, not yield him his own ? Will you withhold from him what is his ? what he hath so indisputably a title to, and interest in ? Or, can you ever have a design of helping to raise up a godly seed in this world, if you will never be godly yourself ? but remain a continual fighter against God, and a striver against him, under that gospel of peace and grace, wherein he is continually bespeaking you to be his ? And then,

(2.) Let such as may be parents of children, lay the more immediate foundation of such an endeavour, as I have been speaking of, in marrying after a godly sort : in marrying holily, whensoever any are called thereunto ; that is, with a design for God. He that is the Author, is to be the End of all things. And whereas, that same state is his institution and appointment, it is a most insolent absurdity, for any to take upon them, as if they were to please themselves, or to gratify an inclination, or serve an interest of their own, with neglect of God's great interest. They that enter, or think of entering, into that state, are required to do it in the Lord, as an only thing. 1 Cor. 7. 39. And it is a great deal of pity, that discourses about such matters, and relating to this affair, are so generally confined to a corner only, and that opportunity is not given of speaking to assemblies upon so important a matter as this is ; that any undertaking or design, in this kind, is to be

done in the Lord, and that as an only thing. Marry they may, only in the Lord. But when they neglect this, they leave out the only thing that can make a blessed marriage; which certainly must argue a very profane mind, when men and women dare venture, and rush upon a matter of so great importance as that, and leave out the very only thing that concerns them in it. This doing of such a thing in the Lord must import,

[1.] A doing it for him, with a design for him; to wit, as one's principal end. And let it be considered, how great an aberration here is from the proper scope, generally, in the world, and even in the Christian world, as to this thing: that the first thing commonly thought of, is some such mean matter as this, in comparison mean, I say in comparison; "I design to change my condition; well, let me think then, how I can please my fancy; let me contrive how I can best satisfy my sensual inclination; and how I can best serve my worldly interest and advantage; where to have a great fortune; and what may set me up into, and promote me in, the most advantageous way of trade, and the like."

What the evangelist says, in another case, of our Lord's animadversion upon the scribes and pharisees, that their religion stood in the tithing of mint, anise, and cummin, neglecting the weightier matters of the law,—judgment, mercy, faith, and the love of God; to wit, that those other things they might and ought to have done, but not to have left the other undone: the like may be said in this case. There is no blame in looking after one suitable, in respect of comeliness, or in respect of fortune, or the like. This may well enough be done; but not to leave the great and most weighty matter and importance: that is, Where shall I have a suitable help, to promote religion in the world, and to plant religion in a family, if it shall please God to make us the founders of a family? one that may help to bear a part with me, in maintaining and keeping up the interest of godliness, in opposition to the common corruption of human nature, which is still descending, from age to age, in this world? How little is thought of among us, so as hereby to design the business of marriage for this in the Lord as the principal thing? When that is not made the principal thing, the very act is idolatry. To be the end of all things is appropriate to Deity: and he must be your Supreme End, even in this thing, or you make yourselves so: and if so, you are an idol of jealousy, set up against God; as if this world were made for you, and you were made for yourself; and as if you might take upon yourself to do what

you please here, without reference to the Supreme Ruler and Lord of all. Therefore, it is without question, that he and his interest, in this affair, must be design'd in the first place.

[2.] That in subserviency to it, whosoever designs to enter into that state, they must give themselves up, by solemn covenant, to God in Christ first. That is to do this thing in the Lord, which we are told is the only thing in this matter. And that is a most unaccountable piece of presumption, that people will take upon them, to dispose of themselves, give themselves, to one another, before they have ever given themselves to God through Christ, which is the first and most fundamental relation. You all ought to know you are not your own, you have nothing to do with yourselves, you have not yourselves to dispose of otherwise, but from, and by, and under, God. And therefore, give to him your own persons; give yourself to the Lord, in the first place, before you think of giving yourself to another. You have not power over yourselves, nor can dispose of yourselves. None have so much power over themselves, as that they ought to think of giving him, or herself, away without God; but for God: and therefore, the gift must be made to himself first; and that union with him be made fundamental, to that other subsequent and inferior union, much inferior.

But here it may be said, What then, may only godly persons marry? or those only that are in covenant with God in Christ?

To that I will only say in short, and the business will then be clear enough. It is a question that will answer itself. You ought to give up yourselves to God through Christ, every one, the first thing you do, out of hand, without a moment's delay. For till this be done, you are in a state of rebellion against him; he lays his claim to us all upon a natural right, and upon the Redeemer's acquisition too, who died, and revived, and rose again, that he might be Lord, Owner, and Ruler, of the living and dead; to wit, of all most absolutely.

Therefore, this is a thing not to be deferred a moment. So as if the question be, Hath a man sinned then, if he hath married while he was yet ungodly? I say, his sin doth not lie in what he hath done, but it lies in what he hath not done. It doth not lie in this, that you have married; but it lies in this, that you have not taken God for your God, and given up yourselves to God through Christ, to be his: here lies the sin. Marrying, abstractly, and alone, is not a sin; nay, it is, in many cases, a duty: but then, there is a prior duty, a superior duty:

therefore, none sin by marrying, barely, but his sin lies in not giving up himself to God, which he is under continual, momentarily obligation to do. So that you are in a rebellion every moment you defer it : you keep from God his own right, his own treasure, that he hath made, and that he should be served by, as his own. And that is the case, which neither deserves, nor needs any further answer. But,

(3.) The design of religion to be, to our uttermost, kept up, from age to age, in this world, is to be served, as much as is possible, by those that have the prospect of being parents in their agreed resolution with themselves, whenever God shall give them posterity, to temper and qualify their complacency herein, with that grief, sorrow, and concern, and fear, which the case itself challengeth, lest there should be a transmitting of corrupt and sinful nature, without a due subsequent endeavour to remedy what they could not prevent. There ought to be, I say, a joint agreement and resolution between such, if ever God give them posterity, to qualify and temper the complacency commonly taken herein, with that just mixture of concern, grief, and fear ; that since there is a corrupt nature conveyed, lest it should go alone, or remain alone ; and a holy, divine nature not be communicated, too, through any neglect on their part, when God doth give them opportunity of treating and dealing with such, who shall have sprung from them, in order to this end. There ought to be a great and deep concern of mind and spirit to this purpose ; that, whereas, commonly, when a child is born, all that is considered in such a case, is, that now such a family is likely to be built up ; and they take great complacency in it, that there is an offspring arisen to them : but this complacency is without that mixture and qualification, which the state of the case, as it is in itself, doth challenge. For it ought to be considered, We have been the instruments of bringing into the world a sinful creature, an impure creature, a guilty creature ; one that is a child of wrath by nature. The complacency that is taken in having posterity, should not drown or swallow up such just considerations as these are, which, being entertained, may have their due effect, and proper influence, to excite to that subsequent duty which will be incumbent upon such parents. And,

(4.) Such parents ought to endeavour a most entire agreement in, and understanding of, a solemn and early dedication and devoting of such, their issue, to God. This ought to be done understandingly, solemnly, and early. And the parents ought to agree to give God his right in their child ; that as it

is by nature a child of wrath, it may be, by grace, an heir of mercy; they doing what in them is incumbent in order thereunto; they taking hold of God's covenant, which is not a nullity; and it is profane to think it so. And, indeed, nothing doth more betray the interest of God, and Christ, and Godliness, and Christianity, in the world, than the slight and trifling management of the important affairs of baptism; that it is so little understood; and that men play with it as they do; and as they do also, with that of marriage, as if it were matter of sport, when it is one of the things of the greatest importance in all the world. But it ought to be considered, here is a creature corrupt and impure, it is true, but in which God hath the first and proper right; it belongs to him, and he can make this impure creature a holy creature. And I offer it to him upon his own claim, and challenge, and the engagement of his word, in order thereunto, that he may do so. Herein parents should agree: "We dedicate to thee what thou hast given us, more thine than ours. We have had our contribution to the impurity of it: we can only hope to have it made a pure and holy creature by thy holy, gracious, and vital influences, in thine own way and time imparted, and communicated to it." And it is upon this account, that parents are sanctified to one another; though but one should be a believer, that what springs from them should be holy; that is, by a federal holiness, related to God, and capable of being devoted to him. 1 Cor. 7. 11. And then,

(5.) Pursuantly to such a devoting of their little ones to God, it ought to be a joint agreement between parents, that their first care should be taken about their minds. "Now, here is a little one to be brought up, to be educated:" this should be said, as a fundamental resolution, by agreement and consent of parents. "Our first care shall be about the mind of this little one, if it live to be a capable subject of our education and instruction; that is it we will first be chiefly concerned about. For this is an intelligent and immortal part; this is the seat of God's holy image, if ever it shall be produced; and it is itself his natural image: for as it is a mind, or hath a mind, so it is a spiritual and intelligent being, and is like God naturally, and his very offspring, upon this account, who is pleased to style himself, 'the Father of spirits, and the God of the spirits of all flesh;' of those spirits that dwell so meanly as in flesh. And therefore, that ought to be the agreed and resolved first care; that our principal concernment be about the minds of our little ones." The care that is commonly, most of all, taken, is about the outward man, and

the external concernments of our posterity : they love to see them fair, comely, beautiful, healthful, strong, vigorous; wish to see them have straight limbs, and the like; but do not care how crooked dispositions they have. This is unaccountable, and detestable, that it should be thus with a reasonable creature; those that are capable of understanding the differences of things; and of how much greater importance one thing is than another. But this, I say, ought to be the first care, and should be the agreement between parents, (with dependance upon the grace of God,) about the minds of our little ones. And,

(6.) In order hereunto, there ought to be a very diligent observation made of them, to see what their natural temper is, or is like to prove, which will discover itself to an observing eye, by early indications, one way or other : that is, whether my child is likely to prove dull or docile; whether it is likely to prove mild and meek, or froward and pcevish; whether it is likely to prove tractable or intractable; whether it is likely to prove mean and low spirited, or great and high spirited. These different dispositions will soon and early appear to observing eyes. Such notices should be taken by prudent parents, and must be by conscientious ones, who have a design for the good of their families, that they may know how to acquit themselves in aftertimes accordingly. Some children will discover more of a natural timorousness; others will discover more boldness and venturousness, and that very early. And careful observation should be made of the temper as it doth more early *prodere se, discover itself*, offer itself to view and observation, that there may be suitable measures taken, for prudent applications afterwards, as the case shall require. And then, again,

(7.) Resolution ought to be taken between parents, and especially the mothers, (whose part will be more about the child in its more tender years,) to watch against any sinful inclinations, one way or other, as they shall discover themselves. If there be any appearance of falsehood, of wrathfulness, of envy, or revengefulness; of pride, or haughtiness in children, to animadvert upon these betimes. And especially of immoderate desires after any thing; only it ought to be distinguished, whether it be the desire of that which is necessary for it; or a desire only of that which curiosity may prompt to desire. That which is necessary for it must be had; but not upon its first signification of a desire; that it may be made to understand betimes, dependance and subjection. And that the less it hath of understanding of its own, the more it is to be managed by the parent's understanding; and the having, even of necessary

things, is not to be the reward of demanding them, or asking for them.

But for unlawful inclinations, they are to be checked, with all the care and industry imaginable, very early; any such as I have instanced in, or whatsoever besides can be instanced in; repress the beginnings of these things, as you would the beginnings of a disease that may prove mortal to your child. And it is this neglect, (especially in mothers,) that ripens such evils as these, thus radicated in the very natures of children, till they are incurable; till they be past cure. And that makes so many bills, as in a desperate case, to be sent in to us. It is a far easier thing to send in a bill to a minister, when a child is spoiled and ruined in its tender years, than it is constantly to watch over them, and repress their ill inclinations betimes, and make them understand government, and subjection, and dependance, in their early days. But where the will of the child is the law of the family, and must govern all, no wonder if plagues and mischiefs, of this kind, are introduced and brought into families by this means.

Divine wisdom hath taught us in such cases how to understand the matter aright. "He that spares the rod hates his son:" fond parents think it love; but divine wisdom calls it hatred. And therefore, is the advice, in that same book, Proverbs 19. 18. "Let not thy soul spare for his crying." What! because he cries will you throw him into hell, will you abandon him to destruction? Not that there needs much of frequent severity, where there is a due prudence used in reference to such cases. I have known children brought up to men and women's estate, that never had a blow in their lives; nor was it needful. It would not be needful, if there were a steady awfulness in the deportment of parents towards them, so that they might, upon any thing that were really a miscarriage, understand a frown, a rebuke, a strange look. If there were that prudence used, that might be used, there would be little need of harshness and severity, unless upon very ill temper indeed; and they must be dealt with accordingly.

But where all the care is to indulge a humour, and please the child; and where there is a disposition in parents, many times, to be proud of the ill dispositions of their children, as they appear in them, how many ill tempers are made worse? And how many good tempers are spoiled by this means? And the guilt and future miseries of the children will cry against their parents, not only in this world, but, perhaps, in the other too. And the truth is, parents would shew a great deal more mercy in that which is commonly reckoned harsh-

ness and severity: nay, I say, they would not be reckoned so cruel in breaking their childrens' limbs, in tearing their flesh, in pulling out their eyes, as they commonly are, in indulging their vicious, sinful dispositions and inclinations, in them, without a timely endeavour of cure, wherein the seed of those miseries are sown, and spring up so in this world, and in the other too. Again,

(8.) They ought, in pursuance of the mentioned end, to instill the principles of religion betimes. Teach them betimes who made them, that great Supreme Being who is the Maker and Author of all things; teach them reverence and subjection to him: speak awfully before them, so as never to take that great name in vain; so as that your fear, your own fear, of the great God, whose name you bear, may be exemplary to them: as Jacob swore by the fear of his father, Isaac, when the important solemnity of the occasion called for an oath. Jacob had observed what Isaac's reverence of God was, and so called him "my father's fear." O teach your children to know God as their parents' fear. And so the other great principles of religion besides, which they are capable of understanding (if there be a due and diligent application) earlier than is thought; earlier than is commonly thought, at least: but the sooner the better: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Labour to season him betimes: so the wickedness of a corrupt nature is to be counterwrought. And then,

(9.) Pray much for them. You that are, or may be, parents, as you are so, or upon that prospect, let this be a matter of great concern between God and you. Pour out your souls in your closets, upon this account; especially such of you to whom God hath given children. And be sure,

(10.) To set up and keep up family worship, family religion. Let this be an agreed thing between you; that as holy, good Joshua resolved, "I and my house will serve the Lord, whatever others do, we will serve the Lord." As a corrupt nature comes by birth, and wickedness springs up so, so it is nourished and cherished, in great part, by the ungodliness of parents. In families were there is no calling on the name of the Lord, O how doth it thrive! That wickedness that is natural, how doth it grow and improve in an irreligious family, a profane family! So doth the wickedness of this world grow, the wickedness of England, the wickedness of London. And the misery thereof is growing *pari passu*, with an equal pace. And if dreadful calamities are coming upon us, coming upon the land, coming upon this city, we have reason to

apprehend here is the very source of all the mischief, even family profaneness. God is banished out of the families of the most: and what will this come to?

I desire to bless God for it, that the ministers of this city, such as are united, and are wont to meet weekly, about the common concerns of their congregations, are awakened into a sense of this great and growing evil; and they have resolved to use their utmost endeavours to awaken the people of their several charges and congregations, about this very thing. And (God willing) you will have more of it ere it be long; that I believe there will be such a joint, agreed, common cry in London, against the wicked neglect of the worship of God in families, as hath not been for many an age past. I hope there will. And know, it is an agreed thing, that there shall, at some one time and, as near as may be, all about the same time. And so will, I hope, the faithful servants of Christ (at least) deliver their own souls. Yea, I hope God will bless this to be a means of great reformation in this city.

For the evil as is feared (at least it is said to be matter of observation with some, for my part, I know it not, but it is matter of fear with many) is, that a great many professors of religion make no conscience at all of any such thing, as family duty; but prodigally throw away that time otherwise, which should be spent in the solemn worship of God in their families, with those of whom he hath committed the care and charge to them. And if what is designed happen, and do not produce a thorough and general reformation among us, it will produce a vindication of that justice, of that severity, which we are to expect. For God will not be dallied with always; and I doubt, not much longer. That which hath been a seat of religion eminently in the world, in the eye of the past times, that religion should languish and dwindle in it, as it doth by the neglect of family government, even by persons professing godliness, and who would be counted a godly sort of people, is a very sad consideration.

LECTURE XL.*

Secondly. I would now add some considerations to enforce what I have been pleading with you about. And,

* Preached Dec. 8, 1694.

1. That which is obvious in the text—"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Parents, they have transmitted a corrupt nature to their children. Into what agonies of spirit should it put us, to think with ourselves, "I have been an instrument in producing an heir of wrath, and of a divine curse. O! shall I use no endeavour to draw it under a blessing, and make it the subject of blessedness, now that we live under that gospel, in which we are called to blessedness?" But that call must be pursued; and God expects it should be so, in apt and suitable methods and applications, by such as he makes use of as instruments, one way or another, whether in private or more public stations, in order thereunto. And,

2. Consider God's original, supreme, and sovereign interest in families, as he is the Founder of them, and as they are his plantation. "He sets the solitary in families." Psalm 68. 6. Consider this, together with the design of his forming of them; to wit, that he might have a godly seed still arising, from age to age, as you may see in that Malachi 2. 15. It was the very end and design of that fundamental relation in families, and unto families, the conjugal relation: "Wherefore did he make but one, when he had the residue of the Spirit? Why, that he might seek a godly seed." As if it had been said, These plantations are mine. This, the constitution of families, (in which the conjugal relation, is the fundamental relation,) speaks, upon the first design of settling such a constitution as this. There lay open (as we must but be sure) to the foresight of the divine eye, what a general apostasy and defection there would be; and that a corrupt nature would be transmitted, from age to age, from generation to generation. But God did determine with himself, not, therefore, to abandon all to one common ruin: as if he should have said, "I will have an interest in this world, notwithstanding." And therefore, as this was the original design of the constitution of families, that he might have a godly seed, though the apostasy hath intervened, he will not quit his design: for his interest is still the same in its own nature. And therefore, this we must understand him continually to insist upon, as a sacred right to himself; that he will have this design pursued by all that will be subject to him, that will return into their state of subjection, and be willing to serve him in the several stations that he hath set them. He will have all endeavours used for transmitting of religion, as well as corrupt and sinful nature is transmitted, from age to age; though the one is done by a natural, the other is done by instituted means, followed

with a blessing, and by influence from above: he will have this latter design carried on by the mutual and joint endeavours of parents, under the influence of his grace; as well as the former course is carried on unavoidably. But when no care or concern is had about this, the foundations of families are laid in a curse. And then,

3. Consider, that it cannot but concern parents, such as are such, or may be so, to express a natural affection, and to endeavour to have that improved, by having it spiritualized, and improved to a spiritual purpose, as well as they are the means by which a natural corruption is conveyed, and transmitted to their posterity. “They have natural corruption from me; (they ought to think :) and shall there be nothing of natural affection? And shall I not labour to have that natural affection sublimated, and spiritualized, and improved, so as to aim at their spiritual and supernatural good? Shall they have nothing from me, but sin and death? or nothing besides the human nature which they have from me; nothing but what shall corrupt and spoil, make it the subject and seed-plot of sin, against God, and misery to themselves?” If there be any thing of natural affection working downward with the descent of natural corruption, that natural affection should aim at the true good of them whom nature hath so much endeared; and should, upon that account, take in the *auxilia*, draw in the aids and helps from heaven, by which that natural affection will become spiritualized; and so the more sincerely and entirely aim at, and the more fervently pursue, a design for the spiritual and eternal good of those who descended and sprung from us. And,

4. It is to be considered, what an honour this doth derive upon the persons themselves, that shall be instrumental in this design. A glorious thing it is, to be a servant to God in so great a work as this; to recover out of the state of apostasy, those that come into that state by our means; to be an instrument, in the hand of God, to promote his kingdom in this world, in opposition to the dark kingdom of the infernal powers. How glorious a thing is it, to carry on a designed opposition against the work of the devil in this world! that when we know the aim and purpose of the great God, is to have, in all successions of time, a people for his name, I should be instrumental in promoting it! It is an honourable thing, a thing that draws a glory upon the persons, and upon the families, where religion doth thus come to take place, to take root, and is planted, and doth flourish. And again,

5. It speaks an agreement and sameness, in a great mea-

sure, of mind and design, with the Redeemer. For he is to have his seed in this world, from which his word and Spirit are never to depart; Isaiah 59, latter end. And the matter is settled, by everlasting covenant, as you find it there: "This is my covenant, (saith the Lord,) My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, from henceforth and for ever." And so we know it hath been an agreed thing, as the matter is stated, (Isaiah 53. 11,) between the Father and him, that he shall see his seed, and the travail of his soul, and be satisfied therein: and that, as a recompense for his having undertaken the work of redemption, and accomplishing it, upon terms so painful, so expensive, so dolorous, so ignominious to himself. As if the Father had said to him, "Thou shalt have all this, this reward; thou shalt see thy seed, and the travail of thy soul, and be satisfied therein." Upon this, our Lord Jesus Christ cannot but be most intent to see a continual seed spring up to him, out of a seed of evil doers; out of an apostate race of men. Now, if we be intent upon this thing, it bespeaks a sameness of mind and design, between the Redeemer and us: which, how pleasant, how delightful, how comfortable, should it be to our reflecting thoughts! And again,

6. It is further to be considered, that if there be no such design to promote godliness in families, that that may be transmitted from age to age, (though in a distinct and diverse way,) as the corrupt and sinful nature is transmitted, then, we cannot but be doing our part to the promoting of ungodliness in the world ourselves. We shall do that, and nothing besides, nothing in opposition thereunto. For do but consider, as the case stands between God and man, there can be no medium between being for godliness, and being for ungodliness; we cannot be in an indifferency. If we are not, according to the uttermost of our power and capacity, for transmitting, and continuing of godliness in the world, we must be for the continuing of ungodliness. A horrid and fearful thought, if any would but allow it to take place! They can only be in an indifferency, in reference to any case whatsoever, that have no real concern therein, one way or other. But here, every one is concerned; and he must take a part: he must be for the promoting of godliness, or promoting its contrary. And therefore,

7. According to this state of things in the world, they that do aim to contribute nothing to the transmitting of religion

and godliness in the world, in opposition to the corruption of nature, which is so generally spreading through it, they are continually providing that there may be a war and rebellion continued and kept on foot, against heaven, from age to age, and from generation to generation. "He that is not with me is against me," saith the Lord. If you will not take God's side in this matter, you are fighting against him, and labour to do all that you can, that the rebellion against him, may not cease; but that there may be still a succession of new rebels, new enemies, from one age to another. And,

8. You will herein, too, be constant accomplices and confederates with the prince of the apostasy; he that first fell from God, and that made it his design to involve all the world in the transgression, and in the consequent ruin; you will be continual accomplices with him. And this is, indeed, the state of every one's case, in these matters. Whoever will but consider with himself, if he be come to the use of his understanding, and hath some prospect, (though uncertain,) of a life's time to be run out in this world, he will find the world divided between two great lords, two great masters, two great fathers: that is, the true and Rightful Lord of all, he that made all; and to whom all belong; and that usurping prince of darkness, who is called, "the god of this world," and whose children and seed wicked men (as such) are said to be. Why, every man upon the prospect of entering upon the scene, the stage of this world, is to think with himself, "I must, in this case, either be with God, or against God. If I be not with God, if I be against him, I am with that horrid, usurped power, that is set up in opposition to him, with this world: and I fall in with that common destroyer, against the common Maker and Preserver of all things." This will be the state of your case, if you be not intent upon a design of counterworking this common corruption, which is descending in this world; you will be looked upon under no other notion but as an accomplice of hell against heaven. And,

9. You will herein, falsify with God, after you have solemnly vowed and covenanted by your Christian parents. You have ordinarily been devoted and dedicated to God in baptism. To deal falsely and treacherously with a man, against the tenor of a covenant, is a horrid thing: but to break faith with God, is much more horrid!

But you will say, You made no such vow; and what your parents did for you, how should that bind you? Why,

(1.) It is very great ignorance to think, that parents cannot bind their children to any thing. Those that have the nearest

natural interest in you, and whose understandings and wills are to be employed for you, when you have no understanding and will to use of your own, do you think they, from whom you sprang, have not a natural interest in you? How unreasonable and absurd a thought is that! In reference to all other concerns besides, have parents no disposal of their children? And may they dispose of them, or do for, or with them otherwise, and may they not dispose of them for their spiritual good? And again,

(2.) It is every where counted a very horrid and barbarous thing, to endeavour to rescind the lawful act of a parent, if it were in my power, if I could do it. If I could alienate, or alter, what he hath so and so disposed; and if he have righteously disposed of it for me, to come after and labour to rescind and undo all that he hath done—this is barbarous and infamous, in common estimate, among men. And,

(3.) It must needs be much more so as to God, or if he be concerned in the matter. As now for instance, Suppose a pious person, with an honest mind and design, hath dedicated such a part or portion of his estate to a pious use; suppose it be not mere charity, but a pious charity, that is, not designed for a superstitious use, but for a use truly pious, and to serve the interest of God and religion in the world; and a son comes after, and he labours to undo all this: you that would think it horrid, to alienate a piece of earth, dedicated to God by your parents, ought you not to think it horrid, to alienate a soul from God, which hath, as much as in them was, been dedicated to God by them too? I would not alienate a piece of earth, dedicated to God; but I would alienate myself, my soul, my body, dedicated to him. This no man should (if he had power) alienate. What was dedicated and sacred to a use truly pious, may not be alienated; and if not a portion of his estate, much less himself so dedicated, and given to God. But yet, further,

(4.) It is to be said, that as this was not to be done, if it were in his power, so he cannot have such a thing in his power, to wit, in his rightful power: for every one was a debtor of his whole life and being, his soul and body, and his all, to God, antecedently to any such dedication. And therefore, when such a tender is made to God, it was but to tender and devote to him, what was his own by a more early title. "All souls are mine;" so he lays his claim universally to all the souls of men; and therein to the whole of them; for what are they besides a soul? what that is valuable or considerable besides? "All souls are mine, as well as the soul of the father, as the

soul of the son." Ezekiel 18. 4. He hath a nearer interest in them than a parent could have, before any such dedication: for a parent was not the parent of their spirit. They are the fathers of our flesh; but he himself is the Father of spirits; the principal and most considerable thing that we have about us, or that belongs to our being. And therefore, when such a dedication was made, there was only a tender made to God, of what was his before; of what he claims an interest in originally. He is the Father of them, and they are his offspring. And again, further,

(5.) This, in answer to that, is to be considered, that though inclination to good do not descend, yet, obligation to it doth descend, from fathers to children, and from the predecessors in a family, unto their successors. Not only obligations of justice and common right, but obligations of kindness and friendship. As, how ordinary is it for friendships and amities to descend from father to son, in families. And it is looked upon as a rude kind of thing, to be uncivil to my father's friend. And on which side, between families, among whom hath been a friendship, it first begins to fail, it always lies as an imputation upon that side. Great amity there was between such and such families; but now it is at an end, since such and such successors are sprung up there. On whose side the failure is, there commonly lies a very ill character. And it is a thing contrary to the dictates of common wisdom,—yea, and of the divine wisdom. "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not." Prov. 27. 10. But how much less then, thy God, and thy father's God? If it be an indecency, and uncomeliness, and a very unfit thing, that is, contrary to the precept of studying whatsoever is lovely, and thinking of those things, to forsake my friend, and my father's friend, how much more horrid must it be to forsake my God, and my father's God? "My father's God shall not be my God!"

And therefore, it is not so light a matter, as is commonly thought, to have the weight of that early dedication, lying upon one's score as a violated thing; as having dealt falsely in that covenant of God. Indeed, it is not only an evidence, but a cause of the languishment of religion in our days, that this is a thing so little thought of among christians: "I was devoted to God early, given up to him with great solemnity; having these venerable names,—the name of the Father, the name of the Son, and the name of the Holy Ghost, named upon me, at my setting forth into the world." It speaks an apprehension of that thing itself, as if it were trivially done at first, if we make a trifle of it all our days afterwards:

as if such a solemn transaction between the great Lord of heaven and earth, and his own dust, his own creatures, the works of his hands, were to be so lightly made of. 'Therefore, take we the weight of this upon our spirits.' If we do not do, in our several stations and capacities, our uttermost to counterwork this descending evil in the world, we do falsify the sacred covenant of God, in which we were early and preventingly bound to him, by the vow of parents concerning us. And then,

10. It is the way, certainly, for us to lose all the comfort of domestical relations, when we are not driving on this design in our several stations: we lose by it, all the comforts of family relations. For what comfort can I take in having such and such relations, in a family, when, in the mean time, there is a contrariety, and a war, maintained and kept up between God and me? So that I can never eat or drink in peace, or converse in peace, or rise up, or lay down in peace; but still I have wrath from heaven upon me? This will infuse gall and gravel into all my enjoyments whatsoever. I am not serving God's design, for the promoting of godliness, in opposition to this growing and descending wickedness in the world: I do nothing towards it. This very reflection is enough to embitter all my comforts. And what are such and such relations to me, but confederates against God? They agree to sin together, and to carry on an interest against God together. For there can be no neutrality in such cases, as was said before. And then,

11. This is but an ill provision for a day of accounting, which will come, whether we sleep, or whether we wake; whether we forget all such considerations, or whether we consider them. "Judgment lingereth not; and destruction slumbereth not." If I eat on, and drink on, and sleep on, judgment comes on with never a whit the slower foot. O! the seriousness of that interwoven counsel, in the discourse of the apostle, even with reference to this business of the matrimonial state. 1 Cor. 7. 29, 30. "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as if they had none; and they that weep, as if they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as if they possessed not; and those that use this world as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."

The time is short. That may have reference to families, and the world: families that were spoken of before and after; and the world, in the whole, which is spoken of there in express terms. The fundamental relation in families, it is measured by a short time; by a very short time. Where there hath been such a

union lately contracted, it will shortly be broken; time measures it; and that time will have run to its period very speedily. The time is short: it remains, therefore, that they that have wives be as if they had none; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not. They rejoice in having newly contracted such a relation: it is reasonable to understand it so, considering it the subject of the apostle's foregoing discourse; that joy will be as if it had not been, in respect of the grounds: and it ought to be so, in the mean time, in respect of the degree. That rejoicing, in having entered into such a relation, will soon be turned into weeping, as having lost it, or it having lost you, which comes all to one. And it is but a short time that measures all this.

And do you think it strange, that that time would be counted short, which measures the time of a family, as it is made up of such and such persons now coexistent; or that measures the relation of two such conjugal relatives? Do you think it strange, that that should be spoken of, and counted a short time, when it is but a short time that measures the whole, and measures the duration of the whole—the fashion of the world passing away? As persons vanish, and families vanish, so is the world vanishing, all will be gone ere long. As the apostle John speaks in the like place, 1 John, 2. 17. “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Now while it is time, and but a short time, that measures all our affairs, and all our enjoyments, and all our designs, under the sun; time that will be soon done, and which will end in a general dissolution of all this world; a day, a time, “when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat; and the earth, and all things therein, be burnt up and destroyed.” I say, sure if this is certain to be the last catastrophe and end of all things, of what concernment is it to us, to consider how we may make a comfortable account when time expires, and when it is to be received, and with it, what I have been, and what I have done, in such or such a state and relation, in which I was placed in this world! There ought to be an account made daily: How can I lie down in peace at night, and not be capable of giving some good account that I have been doing somewhat for God, and for the interest of God, and religion, and godliness, in my station that day? But how shall I lie down in the grave, when a life time is wasted, and spent, and thrown away, and nothing done for God? I have rather served the interest of ungodliness, than religion, all my time in this world: and

how shall I think of appearing before the tribunal of the Supreme Judge, when the end of all things cometh; and when I am beset with all the terrors of that day,—the heavens rolling up, and all the powers of them shaken; the earth all on fire, the elements all flaming round about me? And I have a life's time to review and look back upon, spent away in sin and vanity, with no design for God, and for the Redeemer; though I know that he had his design set on foot here in this world, with which I co-operated not, to which I was not subservient—nay, to which I have lived opposite in a stated course.

Let all these things be weighed and put together; and sure we have a great deal to enforce this first instruction; that since corrupt nature is to lie certainly and constantly descending in this world, we would, as we ought, in our several stations and capacities, do our uttermost to counterwork that descending evil.

LECTURE XLI.*

But now I shall carry the matter a little further; and as I have been hitherto shewing what those that are, or shortly may be, parents, ought to do themselves, in reference to their next descendants, that is, those that shall more immediately spring from themselves; so, I will shew you, too, what may and should be done, in order to a further descent, by those that may have the authority to dispose of their children in the conjugal state, with the expectation of a continual descent of human nature by them further and further,—that so, that corruption and pravity which cannot be prevented, to descend with it, may be, as much as is possible, corrected, and redressed in such an after descent.

This that I am now to speak to, will especially concern such as have children to dispose of in the conjugal relation, who are judged meet for that state. And, indeed, it will equally concern such as are loco-parents, that have the parental trust devolved upon them, by the prudence of others, and their own undertaking.

And as to such, I must still insist, that they are to observe the same measures that have been given in reference to persons who are, themselves, now entering the conjugal state, with the prospect of an offspring, to which human nature, when it

* Preached Dec. 15, 1694.

descends, will go accompanied with a sinful pravity. And here, indeed, as to the case I am now to speak to, there are on each side two parties ordinarily to concur, or two persons in each party. There are the persons to be disposed of; and there are the persons that dispose of them. And I shall speak to the part of these that are to be the disposers, parents or loco-parents, guardians, trustees, who are to take care of settling such in the world in the conjugal state. In reference whereto, the things designed, in general, usually are, that mankind may be continued upon the face of the earth; and more especially, more particularly, that such and such families therein, or those that they are concerned or intrusted for, may be built and preserved: and (as the Psalmist speaks) “their houses may endure for ever; and their lands (if possible) still called after their own names;” as in that psalm 49, 11. And this is a thing that may prudently and justly be designed, in its due subordination. If it be substituted in the room of the true and great design of heaven, or carried on without reference to God, and religion, and the transmission of a godly seed here, upon earth, then you see the censure of the Holy Ghost, upon this design, in the same context: “This their way is their folly, though their posterity approve their sayings.” Sayings are doings here: the sayings of their minds and designs, together with acting conformably and correspondently thereunto. This their way is their folly; yet one age approves the former herein, and they that come after, run the same course.

Here I must, in reference to this, insist, that their measures ought to be with consideration, that, with human nature, a sinful pravity will descend, and that this may be (as much as is possible) repressed: and so, as that God’s design may be carried on concurrently, which he had from the beginning, in settling the conjugal state, and in planting families here on earth; that is, that he might seek a godly seed. Wherefore one, when he might have made many, having the residue of the Spirit, but that he might seek a godly seed? Mal. 2. 15. And this design he hath no more quitted, than he hath disclaimed his interest in this whole lower world, or, saith, “It ceaseth to be a part of my creation, or I cease to be the Lord and Owner of it. But inasmuch as there lies under our present consideration, the duty of such as have children to dispose of, with a prospect that they will have children, and that so a care ought to be extended as far as lies ordinarily within the compass of human endeavour; there ought, indeed, a care extending so far as the desire reacheth, and the main intention of the mind, a great deal further. But so much as I speak to, comes com-

monly within the compass of actual endeavour. It is ordinary for parents to survive unto the disposal of their children into the conjugal state, with expectation of children from them; and therefore, it is the duty of such that I am now generally to speak to.

And I will tell you, in general, what it is; to wit, that as much as in them is, to endeavour that religion be transmitted and descend, and go down in their families, and in the families for which they are concerned and intrusted. It is true, it cannot descend the same way as human nature, and the sinful pravity doth; that is, not by propagation: but it is to descend by pious education, as the means that God must be supplicated to co-operate with, and bless, for the implantation of a better principle, than could be propagated by nature. This sinful pravity, it comes by nature: this superadded principle must come by grace. But then, there are means of grace in order to the obtaining of that grace: and this is the first and the readiest means; to wit, a pious education. And therefore, it ought to be the care of such as have children to be disposed of in the conjugal state. To speak a little more particularly,

1. To endeavour, as much as is possible, that they may see them godly before they be married. As much, I say, as is possible to endeavour that. It can be very little satisfaction to the heart of a parent, (if it be so tender as the grace of God in it should make it,) to dispose of a child into such a relation, to a human creature, when, as yet, there is no appearance that it is come into a relation to God. "My child hath now a husband, or hath a wife, gotten for it; but hath not a God, not a Christ. This is a sad thought! I have taken care that it might have what is so unspeakably less necessary: but of that which is most necessary, I have taken no care; that is, to see that my child, my son, or daughter, was married to Christ: to see, that before the conjugal covenant, there was the evangelical covenant settled and established between God in Christ, and this poor child of mine." And,

2. Their further care hereon ought to be, finding that there are some good appearances of pious inclinations, they do choose out such for them as will fall in with them, in the design of transmitting piety to their posterity: that I may have one for my son, or my daughter, that I believe, in my conscience, will make it their study and business, to educate their children in the knowledge and fear of God; that religion may run on in the family, and that corrupt nature may not descend alone.

It is a very sad case when this is the very last part of the concern in such a matter as this: when the first thing thought

of is, "Where shall I get a great fortune for my son; or how shall I marry my daughter into a great estate?" When this is the first care, is it like that precept of our Lord Christ—"Seek first the kingdom of God?" Matt. 6. 33. This is looked upon as the *unam necessarium*, the one thing necessary; a great fortune, an ample estate, a plentiful income: and as for religion and sobriety, if that be considered, it is considered on the by, collaterally, as if it were but a trifle in comparison. And so, accordingly, are bargains driven on, as formal contracts, as for beasts in Smithfield; even for the very souls of young persons that have not judgment to choose for themselves, and that, (it may be,) have a great deal of reverence for those that are their guides, and have the disposal of them. They think they must trust their care and judgment, and do so. And they concern themselves only, how they may do well in the world, without considering, at all, what shall become of their souls; or how they may be exposed and given up for a prey; or what shall become of those that shall descend from them.

This is so intolerable an evil under the sun, that we have reason to wonder at the divine patience, that it hath not, by vindictive flames, animadverted on such wickedness long ago. But we are to expect it will. And as it is the wickedness of the world, which that final conflagration must animadvert upon, and will, it can be upon no one thing more than this: this way and means by which wickedness hath been propagated in the world, from age to age, without any care or concern, by those that should have driven on a counter-design, in duty to the great Lord and Maker of this world; as if he had given it up to men only to sin in, and to indulge their sinful lusts in, for a short life's time; and then go down into the dust and die. This is a thing so contrary to the reason of mankind, (if that were attended to, and if men would commune with themselves,) that we cannot but wonder that vengeance hath suffered men to live so long upon the face of this earth, at such a rate: and we have no reason to wonder that such a determination is set, that this world shall end, as we are told it shall, by vindictive flames, consuming the inhabitants of this earth from off it.

But I shall here, first, answer a question which may arise about this matter I have been speaking to; and then proceed to enforce that charge or duty which, I have said, doth belong to such whose case and concern I have been speaking of. The question is this: "Why, suppose I that am a parent, or a guardian, do not discern in my child. (son or daughter,) how

grown up, and of whom I have some thoughts of disposing into the conjugal state; suppose I do not see in them any thing of a pious inclination; am I to endeavour to settle them, in that relation, with such a one that is judged sincerely pious. And to this I must say,

1. That none ought to be rash and hasty in their judgments concerning others, who are pious, and who are not; at least, there ought to be a very careful abstaining from a positive judgment concerning any, that they are ungodly. What judgment we do pass, it is better, and safer, to err on the most favourable side. But we have a most express rule from our Lord himself not to judge; which is not to be understood, neither, in a simple, but comparative sense. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." We must not judge hastily, not judge rashly, not judge positively, and concludingly, without very clear and full evidence, that such a one is an ungodly man. But we are told afterwards, in the same chapter, Matt. 7. 16. that men are known by their fruits; so that, as we are to be slow and sparing in our judgment concerning others, especially on the severer part, that they are ungodly; so we ought to have, when we do judge, that which may be very clearly evidential: and then (as we do judge that there may be such evidence, as upon which we cannot but conclude so) it is out of question; otherwise, we should not know how to carry it towards such as are put under that mark, according as we are obliged to make distinction; and distinction even between them that have the form of godliness, but appear not to have the power of it, that we may turn away from them. And if there are many other things, mentioned in that context, that are inconsistent with the power of godliness, but do very well agree only with the form, the external form, we are to take our measures from thence, and thereby to endeavour to guide ourselves, as to our carriage and deportment, towards such: "Turn away from them," as the apostle there directeth. And therefore, I say, if matters do evidently appear, such and such do discover, by an habitual stated course and practice, that there is not only no serious godliness, but there is an enmity, a contrariety, an opposition, to it, they cannot comply with rules and ordinary duties that do belong to it; then, upon that, upon that supposition, I say,

2. That they, with whom any such are concerned in such a treaty, will (as they ought to have) have such a design as you ought to have, and therefore will decline you. They will not have such a one for their son, or for their daughter: (if they be such as make conscience of what they do:) and so

your question is answered. They will answer for you: “No, I will not have such a one come into my family, or for my son, or daughter, that appears an enemy to godliness, a rebel against Christ; that hath a fixed, habitual aversion to all serious religion. But,

3. If they should not do so, not make that choice, for those whom they are concerned for, which they ought to make, you, for your parts, ought to do as you would be done unto; according to that general rule of our Lord, which carries so much of equity, so visibly in the face of it, that even some pagans have been fond of it: and one of the pagan emperors would have had Christ owned for a God, purposely upon that account, for that rule: *Quod tibi non vis fieri, alter ne facias what you would not that another should do to you, that do not to him.* Carefully observe that rule in this case; “I would be loath my family, being a godly family, to admit an enemy to God and Christ into it; why then should I endeavour to thrust such a one deceitfully, and when the danger appears not to them, as it doth to me, into a godly family?”

It is true, that if such were married to one another, in that case, this were not a thing that immediately concerns that relation, it not lying against the essential *vinculum*; as the apostle hath determined between christians and avowed infidels: the nuptial bond holds, if it have been entered; but if it be to be made, it ought not to be made: for those that enter into that relation, are to enter it with a design of being “fellow-partakers of the grace of Christ, and helpers of one another heaven-ward;” and such as can comfortably join in prayer, and who are to carry matters so, as that their prayers may not be hindered, and the like. And if I am not to eat with a person visibly ungodly, much less an: I to fall into so near a union, and converse with them: that is out of all doubt. And therefore, as I cannot in duty and in prudence, for the good of such as I am concerned for, suffer myself to be imposed upon, in such a case; so I am not to impose upon another. I would be loath to be so imposed upon, to have an enemy to God and godliness brought into my family, or united with my child: and I ought not to obtrude such a mischief as that upon another person, and another family. But when any thing in that kind is done, there must be so much the more serious, subsequent endeavours for redress; there must be the more earnest praying; and so much the more pressing advice given; and so much the more solicitude and care used, that such a one may be plucked out of the snare which, by too much unwariness, they have been betrayed into.

And thus, having answered that question, I will lay before you some considerations that may be given to enforce all this. And pray consider,

1. How little is to be alleged against it, against the carrying on this professed and avowed design, in the disposal of those I am concerned for, whether one's own children, or others that are intrusted to our care; I say, to avow this, as our design, to promote and transmit religion, and the interest of godliness in the world, consider how little is to be said against it. All that can be pretended against it is, that the custom and usage of the world is to look after a suitable match in point of estate, in the first place. It is very true, it is so. And so it is the custom of this world to forget God, and to carry it towards him, as if he were not the Lord of this world; and to cast his fear behind men's back; and to trample upon his interest; and to count religion, (which is the main concern of all men,) instead of their interest, their reproach and dishonour. This is the custom of this world. But let such things as these be put in the balance; and so the other considerations, which I intended, will fall in. As this, in the next place,

2. That God doth manifestly insist upon this design still, of propagating religion in the world. You find that he doth provide that such a design should go on through all the successions of time. Our Lord Jesus Christ hath undertaken to be with them that shall be engaged in carrying on this design, to the end of the world. He hath set up an office on purpose; and therefore, the design is not laid aside, nor ever will be laid aside, of transmitting religion in the world. And how dutiful a thing, and how glorious a thing is it, to offer one's self as an instrument, within the compass of one's own sphere, to serve such a design as this!

For let but conscience be appealed to in the case, Do we not find, that God hath a design to keep religion in the world, from age to age? What doth he continue this world for? Is it only that it may continue in a rebellion against him, from generation to generation, when it is impossible it should subsist an age, or a moment, without his sustaining influence, when we have so much assurance given us, that it is upon the account of Christ's interest, that this world is kept from dissolution all this while? It is by him that all things do subsist, and consist. Therefore, undoubtedly, God hath this design still. What serves that gospel for, that we live under, and the ministry and ordinances of it? And when we know that God hath such a design, shall not that which is his design, be our

principal design? or shall we presume to disagree with him about our principal end?

Indeed, it is very true, if he had made a declaration from heaven—"I will have no more to do with this world; I will save no more souls in it; I will leave all to follow the inclination of their own hearts, and to walk and live in that darkness which they love, and will have no more concern with them:" if there had been, I say, such a declaration, then all thoughts and care of this kind, that I am speaking of, would have been superseded. For it is impossible for any to act rationally, with despair. Where there is no hope, there can be no design. But when we know that that is none of the case, but God hath a design to continue religion and godliness in this world, from age to age, I am a wretch, if I will not make his design my principal design; or if any thing shall be greater in mine eyes than that. And again, consider,

3. That if I do not do my utmost, within my sphere and capacity, for the serving this design of God, I do certainly make myself a party against him: for if there be a continual descent of human nature, without a prospect of any means to cultivate it, and correct the exorbitancies of it, in its further descent, this is a continuation of the rebellion against God; when there is only a provision made, that a rebellious nature may descend, and no more; nothing with it, no corrective with it.

But what a monstrous thing is this! when such care is taken to correct the exorbitancies of nature in inferior kinds; vegetative nature, sensitive nature. Men take care of their gardens, of their flowers, of their trees: and (as the divine poet, Herbert, saith) let weeds choke their sun. How monstrous is this! Into what a wilderness doth uncultivated and uncorrected nature grow! You find it in inferior kinds. If nature be not regulated, rectified, even vegetative nature, it will all be over-run with weeds, and better plants grow wild. The protusions of nature, if no way regulated, they become very ungrateful and uncomely. And when we find how the case is, as to rational nature, what cultivation that needs, that it may be susceptible of the implantation of such a better principle that shall be governing, man becoming, without it, "as a wild ass's colt," as the Scriptures speak. O! who can endure the thought, that so it should be with what descends from me; that what descends, shall have descending with it seeds of enmity, and rebellion, against the Majesty of heaven only; but nothing concomitant towards the cure and the remedy of so horrid an evil.

To have a nature poisoned with enmity, an envenomed na-

ture, even against heaven, running on, if I do not use my utmost care and concern, that as there shall be a continual descent of human nature, so that the correctives may accompany it, and go along with it, I do make myself a party against God and godliness. For I am sure that the uncultivated, and impure corrupt nature will be continually carrying on that war, and tumultuating in fresh rebellions, against heaven. And so that makes me, by neglect, a party: I betray the interests of God in that matter. And,

4. Let it be considered too, what horrid cruelty this is towards our own bowels, or such as I have otherwise undertaken the care of, visibly to throw away their souls; to seem not to care what becomes of them; whether they shall have any helps Godward, or heaven-ward, yea or no. No concern that whatever they shall bring forth, in all probability, and according to visible appearance, is only brought forth for the destroyer; all children of perdition only in view. And it is, in the last place, to be added,

5. That if any such persons would allow themselves to consider, that have such a concern upon them, or who are so intrusted with the disposal of young ones, either their own, or others committed to them, that will finally be found most of all cruel to their own souls. For how shall such, at last, lie down in peace, when they come to make up their accounts with God. "Such and such opportunities I had to serve the God of my life in this world, which I have lost; and I have thrown away such, whose souls I was concerned for, to have taken care of, even as my own." For we are to love our neighbours as ourselves: and much more those that are nearly related. O! the wounds and gall, and the terrors of spirit, wherewith (if the matter be reflected on) such must lie down at last. And the case is worse if it be not reflected on.

But then, there is somewhat to be said, too, to the other sort of persons that are concerned in this same case; and that is, the persons to be disposed of. All that I have said hitherto, refers to the disposers. But for them that are disposed of, it is not fit they should come into such a relation as that, till they can use some thoughts of their own, and so be capable of understanding what their duty is in such a case. And,

1. It is manifestly their duty to be very flexible towards parents and guardians, when they see they have a visible design of their spiritual and eternal welfare, in the first place; and that which they are chiefly concerned for. And,

2. It is their duty to be inflexible, if they find that such as are concerned for them, have a design to throw them away;

that they do not care as to what concerns their souls, and their spiritual estate, so as they may marry into an opulent condition in this world. In that case, I say, they ought to be inflexible: but dutifully and submissively, still. They ought to carry it with decorum, and not to be insolent in their refusal of those offers that are made them by parental authority, or in opposition thereunto; but with modesty and humility, still to dissent, still to disagree: “I will not so venture my soul upon an ungodly person; or where there is no hope I shall have help Godward, or heavenward.”

LECTURE XLII.*

Thirdly.† It may be of use to us, to let us see how reasonable and righteous it is, that the conceptions and births of human creatures should be ordinarily attended, from age to age, with such dolours as we find they are. It is not to be repined at, that when such conceptions and births are in sin and iniquity, they should be also accompanied with terrors, with such pangs and agonies, as are commonly experienced. For it ought to be considered, what the productions are. What are the productions when a human creature is brought forth into this world? Why, a thing shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin. And abstractly considered, and antecedently to supervening grace, it is a monstrous production. Any such production, it is a monstrous thing. A reasonable, intelligent creature produced into being, with a radical enmity against the infinite and supreme Good, the Fountain of all excellency and perfection. Consider it, I say, antecedently to supervening grace, and every human product is a monstrous one. As reason is yet but radical and seminal, so is corruption, so is malignity against God. “Estranged from the very womb,” as that expression is, psalm 58. 3.

Therefore, this lot is to be submitted to, with so much the more equal mind, remembering that this was part of the first sentence, when sin did first spring in the world, that conception and production should be in sorrow. That such sickness, such pangs, such agonies, should so constantly attend human conception and birth; we are not to repine at it, as if it were an unreasonable, an unrighteous thing: but we are to consi-

* Preached Dec. 22, 1694.

† *Secondly*, Should have been inserted at Lec. XLI. p. 532.

der the reason of this and that; God will have a continual memorandum kept on for the putting us in mind, from age to age, what the nature is, that is descending and running down in this world, from age to age.

And that this should be the harder lot of that sex upon which it falls, the apostle gives this account—that that was the first deceived sex, first in the transgression, 1 Tim. 2. latter end. And the indulgence that is superadded, ought to be so much the more gratefully acknowledged; to wit, that there is so particular discovery of grace with reference to that sex: “She shall be saved in child-bearing, if she continue in faith, in holiness, in purity, in sobriety,” and in love, the immediate product of that faith; a heart united with God, by that “faith which works by love.” We read it, “charity,” which commonly is understood to carry a reference especially unto a fellow creature. But there is no reason for that restriction in the native signification of the word itself. If she continue in faith, and love, with holiness and sobriety, she is in a safe state, notwithstanding all the pangs and dolour, and agonies, which, according to the original unreversed sentence, must be expected to be in the way. But again,

Fourthly. We may further learn, hence, by way of use, with what patience, and meekness, and wisdom; and with what considering minds, parents should observe and bear the sickness and death (when that case comes) of their children in their younger and more tender age. It requires much grace, much wisdom, a very serious and considering mind, to carry it equally and aright, in reference to such cases when they fall out: that a poor child that hath lately peeped into this world, is presently struck with some distemper or another, as soon as it breathes, it languishes, and, it may be, dies; which is, you know, a very common case: the far greater part being hardly thought to outlive infancy, who are born into this world. These languishings end in death more commonly, than in recovery and consistency in health. What is the reason of all this?

Why humanly, indeed, they are apt to think it very strange, who are short-sighted creatures, and measure all things by the short line of time, and confine all those thoughts and apprehensions of things to this present world. But we are to consider, that when such a creature appears first upon the stage, it appears a creature tainted with sin; so it brings death with it, even from its very birth, into this world. “Death passeth over all men, inasmuch as all have sinned:” and sure, infants must be included in that all; and so they must be un-

derstood to be sinful creatures; to wit, that this radical evil hath tainted their natures, as soon as they have the human nature.

This is a case, therefore, about which we are not to contend, but which we ought to set ourselves to improve, and turn to gain. Is such a creature, as soon as it is born, a sinful, impure creature? Why, we must consider, that sin refers to eternity. I pray mind, that every thing of sin against God, it implies a reference to eternity, and to another world. Sin never reacheth its end and term here in this world. They that sin in this world, they are to give an account in the other: and that obey, and do comply, and fall in with the terms of the gospel, (the only prescription and relief in the case of having sinned,) they are to have their reward in another world. Sin, if it lie upon the sinner, turns to a miserable eternity in another world. Sin done away by expiation and by satisfaction, turns to a blessed eternity in another world. Do not think, therefore, that such creatures were finally made for this world. It would be an accountable riddle, that infants should but look into this world, and presently fall sick, and (as commonly it doth) that sickness end in death, if human nature were made for this world only. But this is to be considered, when such a creature comes into being, here is a production never to cease; a thing lately come into being, never to go out of being more: and that this world is only a *vestibulum*, an introduction into another world, which never dissolves, and wherein, whether our state be good or bad, they never change.

It ought hereupon to be considered, further, (that so such a case as this may be improved unto advantage,) it is improved to great advantage, if we consider what such a creature was made for; and considering it as a fallen creature, or sinner, what this sin it hath about it, hath reference to. It hath reference to eternity. All sin hath that reference.

But it will be of further improvement, if it be also considered by parents, in such cases, as to what tendency they usually have towards their children, when they are sick, and with what solicitude and fear they used to be vexing and disquieting their minds, lest they should die: yet they ought to be instructed, hence, to have a tenderness in reference to their spiritual maladies, and a like concern and dread of their dying eternally. Here would be a great improvement. "O! what a tenderness have I for my child when it is sick. Why, this distemper doth but attack the flesh, frail, mortal flesh, that was formed out of the dust so newly; and

must, sooner or later, return to it again: but my child hath an immortal spirit in it too; and that is tainted with sin: it hath its worst and most dangerous distemper within. O! what cries, what supplications, should I send up to the Father of spirits, and Father of mercies, that he would cure these spiritual maladies?" And whereas, you are afraid that your child will die; you are to be more afraid lest it should die eternally.

And labour to consider aright, the grounds you have of reasonable hope, in reference to this case. It is a case that parents ought not to consider with despair. Those that are themselves in covenant with God through Christ, the promise is to them, and to their seed: and they have a great deal more reason to hope, than they have to despair. And for ought I see, as great reason to hope concerning their children dying in infancy as they have to hope concerning themselves. The covenant of God in Christ doth not signify nothing. And whereas, that age is incapable of covenanting for itself, if such a one, growing to maturity, do not disclaim, but stand to the covenant of his or her parents, it holds firm and unalterable. And, in the mean time, while there is no capacity, or possibility of disclaimer, we have no reason to think there can be any failure on the other part, but, according to the tenour and constitution of God's covenant, the infant, during its infant state, is considered as a branch in the root; and before it be capable of treating and transacting for itself with God, it is treated for acceptably and successfully by a holy and believing parent. And therefore, such a case, when it falls out unto godly parents to have their children languishing, even in their infancy, many times even unto death, they should consider what an admirable, strange thing it is: "This creature, as it came from me, came into this world an impure thing, a polluted thing, a child of wrath by nature; now, how is it numbered among the children of the Most High, and adjoined to the general assembly, (when it is gone from hence,) to the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect! What a change is this! So impure a creature as it came from me, is become now, all of a sudden, so glorious a creature!"

And it is further to that purpose, to be considered, What did God make such a creature for? Why, what do you think he made it on purpose to please me? If I be the parent, the pleasure I take in it, is but a collateral and secondary thing. But do we yet need to be taught that God made all things for himself? And that it may be good indeed, when such strokes do befall families, children lopt off, one branch after another,

(it may be the single one,) to consider whatsoever a providence may specially animadvert upon, and if there be any thing evident in view, it ought to be considered; it ought to be well considered and taken to heart. Yet, it is possible there may be a vulgar error incurred in this matter too: that is, in thinking that the principal design of any such dispensation was, or must be, the affliction and punishment of the holy parent. That ought to be considered, where there is no notorious delinquency to be reflected upon. I say, it ought to be considered as some end, but not as that principal end, of such a dispensation: for as the principal end of God's making such a creature was not to please me; so the principal end of his taking such a creature out of this world, was not to displease me; but to glorify himself: and that end cannot be in this world, for which he hath made such a creature.

And it ought to be considered, that his right in it, is more than mine, infinitely. If any of you should put a child to nurse, and it grows up under the nurse's care, and she is pleased with it, takes complacency in it; and because she doth do so, when you call for your child home, she will not part with it, because it pleaseth her; surely, you would think that your right and interest in the child are superior to her's: and her's (whatever it is) is not to be considered in competition with your's; and, your's is far less to be considered in competition with God's; your's is far more inferior. And therefore, there ought to be a grateful resentment, not without sense, not with stupidity; but with serious and apprehensive minds, and having the state of the ease lying in view before you as it is. And therefore, I add,

Fifthly. That the miseries of this world ought not to amaze us. We are not to think it a strange thing, that this lower region should be a region of so much wretchedness and carnality, as it is found to be, from age to age: for is not every one that is born into it, born a sinner? And whereas, none can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, who can hope to bring a quiet thing out of an unclean? Purity and peace, pollution and disturbance go together. Every one brings into this world, not only that which is troublesome to himself, but that which is troublesome to others, too, with whom he hath to do. They bring that with them into this world, which must make it an unquiet, stormy region to them. Our greatest troubles (with every one) are born with us. And this is the common case, and cannot be otherwise, when we consider that sin, which every one brings with him into this world, doth dissolve the

union between God and the soul, and breaks it off from God. A sinner, as such, is loose from God. And therefore, this would bring, from age to age, in a state of apostasy and separation from God, that which we see to be the consequent thereof, a universal confusion of our very nature within itself, and of all men (as they fall into any kind of conversation with one another) towards one another too. This cannot but be, hereupon, a heap of confusion, a mere chaos.

How can it be otherwise with creatures fallen from God? If man that is born of a woman be an unclean thing, (as Job 14. 4.) then, (as the 14 chapter begins,) it is not at all strange, that man that is born of a woman should be of few days, and full of trouble. So many such creatures as are produced, and brought forth into being in this world, so many fountains of misery and wretchedness are produced. Think of the vast numbers of the inhabitants of this earth, and every one, even from his very infancy, is a fountain both of impurity and misery. And therefore, it is not strange that so many fountains should deluge this world, from age to age, both with wickedness, so as that it may well be said to lie therein, and (as that which is most connatural thereunto) with misery also.

And it is, hereupon, to be the result of our thoughts, when we consider with ourselves, what a miserable region this world is: this ought, I say, to be the result of our thoughts: it is all natural, it is all most genuine; if we see early discords in families, when a family is planted, young plants springing up in it; if there are quarrellings, janglings, fallings out, perpetual animosities, even among those nearer relatives in families; as the poet observed long ago—*Fratrum concordia rara*, seldom is there any agreement among brethren; those that are branches of the same root. If we look further into larger societies, cities, kingdoms, or nations, they are all continually full of confusion, from age to age; and it is from hence, that the wretchedness of this world, which springs up from as many fountains as there are men and women upon earth, and these fountains, from their very infancy, are “like the troubled sea, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt,” as the prophet speaks: “There is no peace saith my God to the wicked.” That wickedness which overflows the world, cannot but make it an unquiet and gloomy region. And therefore, again,

Sixthly. We may further learn, how unreasonable and unaccountable a thing it is, that men should be in love with this present world. It is indeed, stupendous to think, that our minds should so cleave to so horrid a thing as this world is; should be

set upon it, that they will not run from it; that here we think of taking up our rest! O! think, what we ourselves were, and what the rest of mankind is; “a generation of vipers,” poisonous creatures, of an envenomed, malignant nature. If we find that we have a design, any desire, any hope or prospect of a better state, methinks, we should not affect to live among such creatures, and continue ourselves when a cure is to be hoped for; when we understand the design of grace, that it will make such as comply with its methods, pure, and holy, and glorious creatures ere it be long: but not here, but incoherently and imperfectly only. When I consider this, methinks we should be quite out of love with this world, and say with ourselves, “This cannot be our rest, for it is polluted,” as in that Micah 2. 10. O! let us be up and begone as soon as we can have a fair exit; and make it our business while we must stay here, as much as is possible for us, to keep from the corruptions that are in this world, and to get, as much as in us lies, this impure fountain of sin dried up; and to be waiting with earnest, and most desirous expectation, for a translation into that place where there shall be no more sin, but perfect purity: nothing to interrupt and hinder the closest union, and sweetest pleasures, and most delightful intercourse, between God and us. “He that hath this hope purifieth himself as God is pure:” the hope of being like God, and seeing him as he is, 1 John 3. 3. referred to the immediately foregoing verse. Which being made like God, and seeing him as he is, we know this present state admits not of.

Seventhly. We may further learn, hence, to admire the divine patience towards this wretched world, that he hath spared it so long, is so indulgent to it; while wickedness is so continually propagating an enmity, rebellion, and war, against himself, from one generation to another. We ought to consider the divine patience in this, both as great and as wise. As great, to look upon it abstractly, it is wonderful patience, that God should bear with such a world, that is transmitting continual wickedness and enmity against himself from age to age, when he hath it so perfectly in his power to put a stop and period to all this, at his own pleasure. It is great patience. It is a very great thing.

But we ought also to consider it, too, that it is the patience of a God; and then it must be wise as well as great. Wise with reference to somewhat else, as well as great in itself. It cannot be, but that the reference of this patience must be to somewhat else, to some God-like design; otherwise, would he sus-

tain a sinful world, and let sinners beget sinners, and propagate a rebellion and war against himself, from age to age, if he had not some great meaning in all this? Why, there will be glorious results out of it, which, by how much the less our understandings are capable of comprehending it, with so much the more patience, and resignation, we should wait for it. It will be found at last a thing worthy of God, to have borne, with so much patience, the wickedness of this world so long. But then,

Eighthly. We are from hence to reckon, too, that this state of things must not last always, when this is the constant course and common case that, from age to age, impure creatures are begotten of impure creatures, conceived in sin, shapen in iniquity, we may conclude upon it, that this course will have an end. And we are not to think it strange, if it should have such an end as the Scriptures of truth, tell us, it will have; that is, that a day will come, “when the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll, and the elements melt with fervent heat; and all things therein shall be consumed and burnt up, as it is in that 2 Peter, 3. at large. We are not to think this strange or unworthy of God, that he should design such a way, to put a period, at last, to the generations of men on earth, when they are so continually, so long as they last, handing down and transmitting wickedness and war against heaven, from generation to generation. It is never to be thought, that this can last always. Therefore, how much the more wicked we observe the world to be, with so much the more awe, trembling, and dread we should consider what is coming—that day of the perdition, and of the destruction of ungodly men; this world being reserved unto fire against that day. But again,

Ninthly. We are farther to learn, how admirable a thing it is, that in the mean time, God should be raising up to himself a divine offspring, out of an impure race of creatures; (Be they as they are, and as they, from age to age, are born in sin, and brought forth in iniquity, yet, saith God, “I will have my part and share among them;”) that he should have assigned to a Redeemer his seed, (“He shall see his seed,” Isaiah 53. 10.) even out of this corrupt seed, this seed of evil doers. And whereas, according to the natural state of the case, (as it is stated before,) man in his first apostasy being an accomplice with the devil, this world is entirely become the devil’s family: “You are of your father the devil.” John 8. 44. So men, morally considered, are. In respect of their naturals, (it

is true,) God is the Father of their spirits; but in respect of their morals, lapsed, corrupted man, is the devil's seed, and so, antecedently to grace, this world was become the devil's family: but now, that God should raise up to himself a family out of this family; that there should be a diverse and contrary seed springing up, even amidst the other, and out of it, opposite to the other, and having its particular and distinct character, this is admirable! As the apostle tells us, "Herein the children of God, and the children of the devil are manifest." There is a manifest, discernible difference between them. There is no doubt, they must needs differ, beyond all that can be thought, who are of so vastly different parents.

But here is the wonder,—that God should design to raise up to himself such a seed, out of such a world, out of such a race! that he did not rather choose to abandon this (one) when he was gone off from him: and when he could, by a word, have raised up another pure, holy, innocent creature throughout. No: but his design was to defeat the device and contrivance of the devil; he thought to have this seed, all this race of creatures entirely off from God: No, this shall not be; he was resolved he would herein deceive the deceiver; and (as to this design of his) destroy the destroyer;—destroy him that had the power of death, and make a fool of him.

This, (as I noted in the opening of the text to You) was a course most eligible to the Supreme Wisdom, not to make a direct regression of any of his works, by meeting with opposition and a design driven on against him. But he resolves to proceed in the natural course that was laid out at first, and to counterwork that arch-enemy, the first, the grand apostate; and to carry on his own design, against his design; and to turn all to honour and glory at last: even into matter of the highest triumph over the defeated and disappointed destroyer of souls. And this is that which we should consider, with wonder and reverence, that God should have such a design as this in hand, and continually kept on foot, to raise to himself a pure, and holy, and divine seed, (which shall at length be perfectly so,) out of such an apostate degenerate race. And,

Tenthly. This lets us see the necessity of regeneration. Is man such an impure creature, even from his very original, from his conception and birth? Then he must be new made. If any thing shall be made of him to good purpose, he must be made over again. This shews us of how absolute necessity it is, that there should be not only in discourse, but in fact, that great mystery of regeneration, belonging to our religion. Is man

now, from the beginning, such an impure thing? (the great God beholding this,) there is nothing to be made of this creature, unless he be new made. Is he born such a thing? he must be new-born. Born he is, of earthly parentage: but "he must be born from above," as that word admits to be rendered, John 3. 5. But yet,

Eleventhly. It also shews the kindness, as well as the necessity, of this regenerating work; by how much the more necessary, by so much the more kind. How admirable grace is there in it; that when the exigency of the case required that this creature should be made and born over again; I say, when the case required such a thing, God should so graciously vouchsafe it? This is admirable grace! "We were sometimes foolish, disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures;" slaves in our birth; born slaves. "But when the kindness and love of God appeared, not by works of righteousness which we had done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed upon us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Tit. 3. 4, 5. Consider the grace of regeneration, how gracious a work it is, that God, who had no need of such creatures, creatures that could add nothing to him, should condescend to such a thing, to let that holy and pure Spirit of his, come, amidst all their impurities, with his own holy light and influence, upon creatures that he might have abhorred to touch with: that the holy and pure Spirit should shed his light and influences, (so pure things amidst so much impurity,) there to regenerate, there to renew, there to form, there to reform—O what grace is this! And, lastly,

Twelfthly. We may further collect, hence, how glorious a work regeneration or renovation must be, when that shall take effect. "Behold, I make all things new." Rev. 21. 5. Who would expect that such a state of things as this, should come out of such a state as this world was degenerated into, when every particular creature that inhabits it, was a fountain of impurity and misery to itself, and to the rest? That there should be such a thing laid in the divine counsel—"Well, I will now make this world; there shall be such a thing as new heavens, and a new earth, wherein righteousness shall dwell:" With what wonder and transport should we think of this, that God will have so glorious a world, out of a world so lost and sunk in impurity and death, as this world is!

But thus far, we have been considering the state of the apostate children of men—THE FALL OF THE FIRST MAN—

THE FALLEN STATE OF MEN, and—THE EQUITY AND RIGHTNESS OF THE DIVINE PROCEDURE IN ALL THIS. It remains, in the next place, to come now to that which I last observed, by way of use, will lead us more directly to consider; and that is, WHAT HATH BEEN DESIGNED, AND WHAT IS DONE, AND IS DOING, IN ORDER TO THE RECOVERY OF THIS IMPURE, THIS LOST, AND LAPSED CREATURE.*

End of the Seventh Volume.

*To be continued in a Supplementary Volume.

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