

S E R M O N I.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 2.

Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

THESE words, joined with what goes before, run thus: "therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not: but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience." The import of this text and context is exceeding plain. The Apostle gives an account in them of his way in managing that work of the ministry, wherein he was engaged; that is, that his way of managing thereof was suitable to his end; his method to the design he drove at: he gives in the whole verse a double account of his way in managing his ministerial work—A negative account, and a positive.

1. A negative one, we have nothing to do in it, (as if he had said,) with the things of dishonesty or shame. Those things we have renounced; those hidden things that are wont to be accompanied with the pungent stings of shame and disgrace, (if they should not be hid.) That is, we have nothing to do with any thing whereof we have cause to be ashamed. Let them hide themselves, and their designs, and work in the dark; let them wear masks and vizards, and transact their affairs under ground, and with all possible privacy, who drive designs that they have rea-

* Preached January 11, 1690.

son to be ashamed of; whose business is either to trifle, or to do hurt; whose designs are either too low or little for wise men, or too base for good men. We, for our parts, design nothing but the service of God, the honour of Christ, and (as that which is subservient to these) the welfare of men. This is all that we aim at, that we may serve God, honour Christ, and bring in as many souls as we can unto him. We intend no worse to the world and the inhabitants of it, than to our utmost to make them good and happy christians in this world, and glorious creatures in another world.

And, therefore, all we have to do may very well be transacted above ground, and upon the square; we have no occasion to walk in craftiness, to use fraudulent arts or tricks; our business requires it not; nor do we need to handle the word of God deceitfully: we do not falsify (so the word signifies) it, disguise it, clothe it with other colours; for as it naturally looks with its own, it serves our purpose best of all, if we give it no other appearance or representation, than that which is still genuine and most proper to itself. We do none of these things that are mentioned in the former part of the verse. And then comes,

2. The positive account in the latter part of the verse. "By manifestation of the truth," we make it our business to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Where the last of these words do sufficiently express that sense which I design to insist upon in some following discourses. And herein, we see there is a principle in man, (here called conscience,) that renders him, in some measure, capable of judging what is proposed to him in the name of God, or under the notion of divine,—whether as such it ought to be received, or refused as not such. And here we have it signified to us, that there is in the great things of God, contained in the gospel, or which the gospel revelation doth suppose, a self-recommending evidence, by which such things do (as it were) approve themselves to that principle: and he lets us see that the faithful preachers of this gospel have the whole business directly and immediately lying with the consciences of men; or that they are to apply themselves to that principle in man called conscience. And further, that this treaty with the consciences of men is to be managed under divine inspection, under the eye of God.

And this being the import of the words considered in themselves; if also you consider them in their relation to

what goes before; so the import of the context, and of them, as they fall into it, will be most plain. In the close of the foregoing chapter, the Apostle having spoken above of the gospel ministration, as contra-distinguished to that of the law, and most highly excelling it in point of light, and in point of efficacy; both of them glorious things, and in respect whereof, he calls it the ministration of glory; so that, though that of mount Sinai was very glorious, yet this did so much excel it in glory, that the very glory of that was no glory, in comparison of the glory of this; for that by it, we, as in a glass (he so concludes the chapter) beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. That *as* is not *similitudinis* but *identitatis*; it doth not signify likeness, but sameness: that is, there is so transforming a work wrought by the glory of the Lord shining through the glass, as doth speak its author to be the Spirit; such a work is done as none but the Divine Spirit could do; so that any one might see there was such a transformation wrought, as by the Spirit of the Lord is wont to be wrought; the Spirit doth like itself, as itself, it works as a Divine Almighty Spirit might be expected to do in this case. This is the account which he gives of the ministry, wherein he was engaged.

Now, in the beginning of this next chapter, it runs thus; —having received such a ministry as this, (so apt and so animated to serve its proper end and purpose,) “as we have received mercy, we faint not;” he resolves the vigour, and fortitude, and undauntedness of his heart in this great work, that was put into his hands, into the nature and kind of this ministry wherewith he was intrusted; considered in its own aptitude to serve its end, as it was managed and replenished with power and efficacy from the Divine Spirit. Having such a ministry, we faint not, we go on with all vigour and resolvedness imaginable in our work. And, thereupon, renounce all the hidden things of dishonesty, we go on with open face, as being well assured we shall be owned in our work one way or another; and make it our business hereupon, to apply ourselves immediately and directly to the consciences of men in the sight of God. And these several things, upon the whole, may be observed and taken up for our instruction and use from this portion of scripture.

1. That the great things of the gospel, or of religion in

general, do carry with them a self-recommending evidence to the consciences of men.

2. That the business of the faithful ministers of this gospel lies, first and most immediately, in a transaction with men's consciences about these things.

3. That this transaction with men's consciences about such things, is to be managed in the sight of God, under the inspection of the Divine Mind. And,

4. That thereupon, such as are engaged with uprightness and fidelity in this work, have the most vigorous and unfainting resolution and fortitude in it.

I begin with the first.

1st. Doctrine. That the great things of the gospel, or of religion, do carry with them a self-recommending evidence to the consciences of men. Here,

1. It will be requisite to say somewhat concerning the principle of conscience. And,

2. Then to evince the truth of the assertion, that the great things of the gospel, or religion, do carry with them a self-recommending evidence to men's consciences.

1. It is requisite to be said concerning conscience, thus much briefly; to wit, that it is a principle which is to be appealed to about such matters; and this doth, in the general notion of it, import an ability to judge, a certain dijudicative power. And it must be looked upon according to a double reference which it bears;—1st. To the matter which it is to judge about. And, 2ndly. To the Supreme Ruler under whom it is to judge, such things being to be judged of in the sight of God; for the latter of these references we shall come to speak to it under another observation: but for the former, we are to consider of it now.

Conscience, it doth import a power of judging, or an ability to judge about such and such matters; but what those matters are, we are more particularly to consider. In the general, it is matter of duty about which conscience is to judge; or such things in reference whereunto we are one way or other under obligation to do, or not to do. And so it is the actions of men, that conscience is to judge about; as they are measurable by laws and rules to which they are properly and truly obliged. And so our actions may be considered two ways—either as to be done, or as done. And they come under the judgment and cognizance of conscience, both ways—either as to be done, or as done; and so the judgment of conscience is two-fold, either con-

cerning things, or concerning ourselves; for conscience hath both its prospect and its retrospect:—its prospect, that is, as it is to see our way before us, and to judge for us, Am I to do this, or am I to do that, or am I to let it alone; and decline doing such and such things? Here is the prospect of conscience; it is to discern and make a judgment aforehand, concerning the way that we are to take, to see our way for us. And then it hath its retrospect; when we come to make a stand, and look back upon our former course in general, or upon this or that particular action, Have I done well, or have I done ill? have I held a strict and regular course? or have I made a wrong or false step?

Now for conscience under this latter notion; that is, for the retrospect of conscience, I have had occasion to speak to it at large, in the hearing of many of you, from another scripture, that of 2 Cor. i. 12. This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience;—here is the exercise of conscience in reference to what is past, in reference to a course transacted already. So that you may plainly see our present subject doth not lead us to consider conscience under that notion at all; but only to consider it according to its prospect, as it doth *prospicere*. As it looks forward to discern and make a judgment;—Is such a course to be taken? or are such and such things directed to be complied with, yea or no?

And so the matter of which conscience is to judge is of this kind; to wit, what we are to do, or our actions as they are future, or to be done, must be taken with a latitude; so as not barely or chiefly to concern our external actions, the actions of the outward man; no, nor merely or only to concern those actions of the inward man, that proceed immediately from the will, and from the affections, and from the executive power in the first rise of it; but also so as to comprehend, and take in too, the actions of the mind and understanding;—all this is within the compass of this matter, about which, conscience is to be exercised. We are not to consider what is to be done by the reflective faculty, but what is to be done by the directive faculty, the mind and understanding itself; that is, whether such and such things propounded to us, be to be assented to, yea or no. This is as much matter of conscience as any thing else; that is, the assenting or not assenting of our minds and understandings to such and such things; supposing they are things in reference whereunto we come under obliga-

tion; suppose that they are not such things wherein we are left at liberty to judge and think as we please, as we are in multitudes of theological speculations, wherein we are not laid under a law, as a main duty, to know, and understand, and observe, and mind such things. But this refers to such things wherein our giving our assent so and so, it is made matter of duty; or in reference whereunto, we are laid under an obligation. All that doth come as much within the compass of that matter, wherein conscience is to judge as any thing else: that is, these acts of our minds, which are to be exerted and put forth immediately there, as they are part of our duty, about which we are accountable at last; so they are matters of conscience, and in reference whereunto conscience must, and ought to have too, a present exercise before hand. Am I so or so to assent, or am I not? Thus, by manifestation of the truth, we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

And so much is all that we need to say concerning the former of these heads, the principle that is to be applied unto, and to which the things of religion do, by a self-recommending evidence, approve themselves.

2. The second thing we have to do, is to evince and clear this to you, that there is such a self-recommending evidence in the things of religion, by which they become approved, or do approve themselves to the very consciences of men. And here, that you may understand this aright, what it is that I am to prove and make out to you,—you are not to take it thus, as though every thing that lies within the compass of truth, and which we are accordingly to embrace and close with, were self-evident; so as at first sight it must necessarily beget a conviction in a man's judgment and conscience, that it ought to be entertained and closed with; that is not the meaning; every thing in religion that hath competent evidence with it, hath not that primary evidence as immediately, as soon, as it is heard and proposed, to command the mind to close in with it. But the meaning is this, that whereas there are some things of that kind that carry their own light so apparently in them as to captivate the mind into a present consent; there are many other things that are capable of being clothed with that light, or having that evidence added to them, by which they also may be enabled to recommend themselves. Every truth, is not a first truth; but there is nothing which God hath made it necessary to the salvation of our souls

to give entertainment unto; but that, if it be not evident in itself, it is capable of being so evidenced, as that it may, by that evidence (at least) that shall be added thereto, come to recommend itself to men's consciences, unless they be men so under the power of a vitious prejudice, and abandoned by God for their indulgence thereunto, that (as it follows in the next words) the gospel is only hid to them, because they are lost. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." And it is hid to them for having rebelled and sinned against the light of it so long; and this being the point, we come now to make it out to you, that the great things of religion, which we are to give entertainment to, as necessary to our final welfare and blessedness, they are things that carry with them such a self-recommending evidence to the consciences of men; they carry it with them, either as being primary self-evident truths, or as being capable of being evidenced by such things as are so; that is, either by their own light, or by such a light as may be imparted to them, and wherewith they may fairly admit to be clothed.

And the way of proving this, will be fittest and most proper, by giving instances; by instancing to you in divers of the most important things which we are required to give entertainment to, in order to our final salvation and blessedness;—and so to submit the matter to your own judgment, whether these things do not recommend themselves to conscience, yea or no; which is the best and most effectual way of proving any thing, when the inward sense of our mind is immediately directed to; we appeal to that immediately, so that you have the judgment in your own breast or bosom, concerning this or that thing. Is it not clear, doth it not speak itself in my own conscience?

And the instances I shall give, will be especially under these four heads;—to wit, 1st. Of Truths.—2ndly. Of Precepts.—3rdly. Of Prohibitions; and 4thly. Of Judgments.

1. Of Truths, you must understand that I am only going to give instances under each of these heads; otherwise, you must suppose that the whole body of theology would be the subject of our present discourse, as every thing would come in here that belongs to the substance of a theological treatise. And that (as I was saying) I may instance, first, in truths propounded to us, they will be of two sorts,—Positive and Argumentative;—Positive, those that we simply lay down; or Argumentative, those that in the way of argumentation may be annexed to the former,

either, first, as reasons to prove them; or, secondly, as inferences and deductions proved by them. And this order and reference, which one truth may have to another, we are not to understand it so, as if there must be constantly that methodical relation, or a relation in that method; for the relation may be transposed, according as this or that particular discourse may be. But I shall give you instances of these together, or as now they may be represented to relate to one another; and so shall briefly instance to you;—1st. In those truths that do concern the original of all things.—2ndly. That do concern the apostacy and fall of man.—3rdly. Some that do concern the redemption by the Son of God; and 4thly. Some that do concern the final issue of all things.

1. For those that do concern the original of all things, take these,

(1.) That this world, (look upon it as one system, one complexion,) it is all a made thing.

This whole universe, it is all a made thing; why sure, either this hath such light with it, that any conscience of a considering man must presently say, it is true, in my conscience it is true; or it will easily be made evident. It is one of the great things (as being of natural revelation) that is mightily insisted upon by philosophers, as fundamental to all things else. You find that so the Deity was proved by the apostle in that text we so lately insisted on, Rom. i. 20. "The invisible things of God, even his eternal power and godhead, are clearly seen by the things that are made;" by this whole entire scheme and frame of made things. "By faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." Heb. xi. 2. Thus largely too doth the apostle discourse the efficiency of the Creator, Acts xvii. in a very great part of that chapter. And so the account is given in the very beginning of that revelation of the mind of God to man contained in the Bible. Gen. i. 1. It begins with the beginning of all things. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." And so too doth that gospel, John i. 1.2. wrote by the Evangelist John: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God: by him were all things made that were made." Now this is a matter that will let its light appear, if you will but revolve it a little in your minds, and think of it; for you manifestly see that all this world is full of changes; but there can be no change of a necessary Being; of a self-existing Being;

what exists necessarily, and of itself, must be always as it is; whence that goes for a maxim with all that have set themselves to consider, *Eternum non patitur novum*: That which is eternal, admits of no innovation, nothing of new in it. And the matter would yet carry more convictive and clearer evidence to those that are less apt or less used to the exercise of thoughts, if they would but bring it to their own case; that is, suppose it be told you in particular, you are a creature, you are a made thing; let this be said to any body that hath the use of the ordinary understanding of a man with him, and it presently strikes the conscience; it is very true, I, in my own conscience, judge it true, I am a made thing. If any should hesitate at it, do but take a turn or two in thinking, and the matter would strike you with fresh light again and again. Why, what? Do not ye know that you have been in being but a little while? It is but so many years ago, and you were not; no such one as you was heard of in the world. Whatsoever began to be, must be a made thing. You did but lately begin to be, it is plain then you have been made; for nothing could of itself begin to be, or arise out of nothing of itself. That strikes every man's conscience that considers. Do not you, in your consciences, think and judge, that if nothing were in being, nothing could ever be in being? It is impossible that any thing should arise up of itself out of nothing. Therefore, if you begin to be, you are a made thing. And then,

2ndly. There are truths that will belong to this, by way of revelation and deduction. As then,

(1.) You have a Maker; every made thing must have a maker; do not your consciences tell you that this is true? In my conscience this is true, if I be a made thing, then I must have a maker. And then, again,

(2.) You may collect what kind of maker that must be; what kind of thing am I? I said, (among other things belonging to me,) there is a power of thought belonging to me; I have then a spiritual intellectual nature belonging to me; and therefore, certainly, such excellencies as I have in me, and as I find the rest of the creation hath in it, must be in the Maker of them all, much more eminently, and much more transcendently. And, therefore, as the apostle speaks, when he had said from a pagan,—“In him we live and move, and have our being; and we are all his offspring;” he immediately subjoins. Acts xvii. 28, 29.

“ For as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto silver and gold, or stone graven by the art of man.” If there be such and such things that are the effects of an invisible divine power of the Godhead ; that is, if there be intellectual and spiritual beings, then he must be such an one : and then we are no longer (saith the apostle) to amuse and mislead ourselves with the foolish misconceit of a golden deity, or of a wooden and stone deity. The deity must be such a being as hath such excellencies belonging to it, as we find are in his offspring. We find he hath an offspring of an intelligent and spiritual nature, and therefore, sure, such must he be. And again,

(3.) It will be further recollected, that if I am a made thing, a creature, and thereupon, have a maker, I have also an owner too, as well as a maker ; he that made me, must be my owner and proprietor ; and to him I must belong, and in his power I am ; and I must be at his disposal ; and he may do with me what he will, and I am to do with myself only what he will have me do. Doth this not also strike conscience ? Doth not this approve itself to every conscience of man ? Am I a made thing ? Then he that made me, owns, and he is to use me as his own. And again,

(4.) Am I a made thing, and do therefore appear to have a maker, and to have an owner ? Then I have a ruler too ; one that is to prescribe to me, and give me laws ; to tell me what I am to do, and what not, through the whole of my course. This speaks to every conscience of man ; every man that will use conscience in the case, must needs say, In my conscience, this is true ; it cannot but be true. And again,

(5.) If I have such a maker, one that is the author and original of my life and being to me ; he that is the author, must be the end of it ; he that is the first to me, must be the last also. I am a creature, and a made thing ; I did not come of myself into the world ; and what could not be by itself, must not be for itself. Will not any man’s conscience say this is true ? Is not conscience smitten with light in this case ? Methinks this doth recommend itself to my very conscience. I, that could never have come by myself into this world ; I must not live in it for myself ; it is inconsistent with the state of a creature to be its own end. Thus, in this kind, you may find there are things that

concern the original of all things, that do by their own light recommend themselves to the consciences of men. And then,

2. Concerning the apostacy of man. To instance briefly therein man is a fallen creature; he is not in the state that was original to him or primitive, or wherein he was made. This, (one would think,) in the first speaking or hearing, should strike conscience with its own light; but if it should not with any that are more stupid and less considerate, let men but refer themselves to their own original state and nature, consider their nature abstract, and then compare themselves with what they may easily discern and find of their present state and case.

The most general consideration that you can have of, or concerning your own nature is, I am a sort of creature, that can think, that can use thoughts well; do but look to your present state, the common state of men according to that representation and description that is given us of it; “all the imaginations of the thoughts of man’s heart are only evil, and that continually.” Gen. vi. 5. What? can any man imagine that God did make a thinking creature; endowed a creature with a power of thought, originally from the beginning, to think nothing but what was evil, and continually evil? And let but men see whether this be not a true account of themselves, that the scripture gave so long ago. If they would but inspect and look into themselves, would they not be inforced to say, Have I not thoughts full of vanity, full of earthliness, full of impurity, from day to day? And, unless they be imposed and thrust in upon me, am I not a stranger to serious thoughts, to divine thoughts, to heavenly thoughts? Therefore the matter will again strike conscience with its own light. I am not only a creature, but a fallen creature; sure God never made me such a creature as I am become, as I have made myself; a creature, endowed with so noble intellectual powers, to debase myself; to make so sublime a thing, as an intelligent immortal mind, perpetually to grovel in the dust, and enslave itself to sensual and brutal lusts, and to mean and base designs that time measureth; and to leave myself to sink and perish eternally at length; so that to this very soul and spirit, for want of being employed about a good suitable to itself, and means and methods of compassing that, nothing but misery can be its portion. The thing speaks itself; I am a fallen creature, and as long as this continues my posture, and the state and temper of my mind and spirit, I may see the

matter will issue ill at last. I am a degenerate creature, especially if it be considered how the stream and current of my thoughts and affections run out towards other things, as they stand in competition with the eternal, ever-blessed God; for can any man think God made a creature to despise himself? To neglect himself, and to prefer the most despicable vanities before himself, when he hath made him capable of knowing, minding, adoring, and serving him? Thence also it would be collected, I may hence judge, whether also my present state is a safe state, or a bad state. It is a lamentable thing to be a fallen creature, fallen from its pristine excellency; and it may easily be collected hence, it is an unsafe state; for if I am fallen low already, I am still liable to fall lower; and I cannot tell whether I may fall, how low I may sink, and what finally will become of me; for I am falling lower and lower all the while I am a stranger to God, and a vassal to sensual inclinations. And I here again appeal, doth not all this speak to conscience? And doth not every one find in himself somewhat to which all this doth approve itself, and commend itself; so that he must needs say, In my very conscience this is true? I cannot now run through what I have to say hereupon. Pause hereupon a little, and consider what this is like to come to at last. If a man do, in a stated continual course from day to day, and from year to year, run counter to the judgment of his own conscience; if he lives continually a rebel against conscience, (for that is to be a rebel against God too,) what will it come to? Oh! might that be but seriously considered of, sure it would be of use to us, to bring us to a suitable disposition to hear of other things that will be of the greatest following concernment to us, in order to our future and eternal welfare.

SERMON II.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 2.

Commending ourselves to every man's conscience.

THAT which we have in hand of the several things observed to you from the text and context, is, That the great things of religion do carry with them a self-

* Preached January 18, 1690.

recommending evidence to the consciences of men. And we have shewn, first, what that principle is, here called conscience. And, secondly, have touched upon the proof of the assertion.

The principle itself which is to be applied and appealed to, was considered as to its prospect and retrospect. As to the former, it is the business of conscience to see before us, to discern the way we are to go. If a man do not, with good conscience, proceed in his way; if he go wavering, and with a suspenseful mind, and in continual doubt, shall I, in so doing, do right or wrong? Such an one can never steer his course acceptably to God, or comfortably to himself; and, according to its retrospect, conscience is to make a stand, look back upon the way that a man hath taken, and thereupon make its judgment; whether he hath done aright, or wrong, in either respect, conscience is to judge; to judge of practice both as to what is done, and what is to be done; and it is principally conscience, in reference to its prospect, that we have to do with it here; though it is one and the same principle that doth both; and the turn is quick and easy, from looking forward to what we are to do, to looking backward to see what we have done; and to see what may belong to us by way of reward, or by way of penalty hereupon.

And so we proceed to prove the assertion; and here again you were told, that both such things as are within the discovery of natural light, and which relate to religion; and such things too, as are super-naturally revealed one way or other, come to have this self-recommending evidence to the consciences of men; and this we proposed to prove to you, by some instances, upon which such an appeal is to be made to conscience itself, which is the clearest and most convictive way of proving any thing in the world; when we therein speak to the very inward sense of a man's own mind. And we propounded to give instances, under these four heads; to wit, of truths, of precepts, of prohibitions, and of judgments, or Divine determinations concerning what is due unto a person, as he is found complying, or not complying, with the divine preceptive will, in point of penalty or reward.

We did propose to give instances of truths which concern—1st. The beginning of all things.—2ndly. The apostacy of man.—3rdly. His redemption by Christ;—and 4thly. The final issue of all things. And as to the two

first of these, you had instances the last day. Now to go on,

3. To instance somewhat concerning the redemption of man by Christ; as that man, being in so lost and forlorn a condition, God did send his own Son down into this world to be a Redeemer and Saviour to him. This is a thing, not evident at first sight; it was not upon the first proposal discovered; it is not as soon as we hear it evident to any of us; but it may admit to be clothed with that evidence wherewith it must recommend itself to the consciences of such as shall consider. There is enough to make it plain, both who he was that came under the notion of a Redeemer into this world, and what he came for; that doing the part of a Redeemer, was really the design and end of his coming.

1. Who he was. That he was what he gave himself out to be, the Son of God; that he came down as a God, to dwell awhile in this world among men, having made himself like us, and become one of us. Though this, I say, was not evident at first view, there was enough to make it evident; that is, that he who was spoken of, under the name of the Son of God, a thousand years before he came, accordingly came about such a time which was foretold: any man that should consider it, must needs say, In my conscience this is so; this is the Son of God. Psalm ii. 6. "I will declare the decree, thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee." This was said one thousand years before he came: and whereas, it was so plainly said, he should come about such a time as he did, within the time of the second temple: and that he did appear under such a character as could agree to none but this very person; when he came, his glory immediately shone as "the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." John i. 14. It sparkled round about wherever he came, in whatsoever he spake, in whatsoever he did. We beheld his glory, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father: this could be no other but the Son of God; this could not but speak itself; and this still cannot but speak itself in the consciences of those that do consider; and that he afterwards was testified unto, by a voice from heaven, from the excellent glory, again and again, in the hearing of a competent number, and at some other time, of very numerous witnesses;—This is my Son, my beloved Son, hear him; I recommend him to you, I set him over you, I make him arbiter of all your affairs; attend him, submit to him,

(hearing him imports so much.) This must speak in every conscience of considering men: this is very true, that he must be the Son of God! He that wrought such wonders in the world; restoring (upon all occasions as they occurred to him) hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, soundness to the maimed, and life to the dead, even by a word speaking: all these things being purposely recorded, that we might know that this Jesus was Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing, we might have life through his name. John xx. 31. He certainly was the Son of God. Here is sufficient evidence that doth speak the thing to any man's conscience that doth consider;—yea, he that did display such beams of His Majesty and Glory, living in flesh, that even the devils themselves were constrained to do him homage, under that notion, “the Christ, the Son of the living God;” surely this must tell any man's conscience, this cannot but be so, it must be so; he, whose death in the circumstances of it, (the sun darkened, the earth shaken, the graves opened,) extorted an acknowledgment from that Pagan Captain; “Verily, this is the Son of God:” He that afterwards was declared to be the Son of God, with power, by the spirit of holiness that raised him from the dead; upon all this, the matter speaks itself to the consciences of considering men;—this cannot but be the Son of God. And then,

2. That this great Person, this glorious Person, should die (as we know he did) upon a cross; that certainly speaks the end of his coming into the world, as a Redeemer; it could not be that one who was so plainly demonstrated to be the Son of God, should die for his own fault, or otherwise, than by his own consent, when it had been the easiest thing in the world to him to have avoided that fate, of dying like a malefactor on a cross. He had legions of angels at his command, and ways enough to have warded off the blow: it was neither by his default, nor without his consent, that he did die; this speaks itself evidently to every conscience of man. Then what was it for? It could be upon no other account than to redeem and save lost sinners; so that the design is thus generally evident; that is, is capable of being evidenced, made evident to any conscience of man that doth consider; and more especially, that he died to procure the pardon of sin for poor sinners; died that they might be exempted and saved from the necessity of dying, that is, eternally: and that he died to recover men from under the power of sin, nothing is in

itself more evident, if you consider this in the place wherein it stands, and which belongs to it in the series of gospel doctrine: that is, it can never be, that so great, so wise, so holy a person as the Son of God was, should die to procure pardon for men, and yet leave them slaves to lust and sin. It is evident to every conscience of man, that if he died to save sinners, he died to sanctify, as well as pardon them, and that he was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins both together. Acts v. 31. That his dying could not but have that design; that "he bare our sins in his body on the tree; that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness." 1 Peter ii. 24. Being healed, by his stripes, of the wounds, and distempers, and diseases, that infested our spirits; and this all carried so much evidence with it, that (as the apostle saith to the Galatians) they must be bewitched, that do not see and look into the inmost verity that lies in such truth; the very inwards of that truth. There is a centre of truth, a centering of truth, and if you do not refer the beams of that truth to the centre they proceed from, truly they are insignificant little things, and as little capable of subsisting apart, as the beams of the sun would be, cut off from the sun. You must make a rational design of this whole business, suitable to the wisdom of a Deity, and suitable to the vast comprehension of a Divine mind, or you do nothing. Then, I say, look upon these things as they do refer to one centre and juncture of Divine truth; and all runs into this, That Christ died upon this account, and with this design, that he might pardon and transform men together; that he might pardon them and renew them; pardon them and make them new creatures; pardon them, and divest them of the old man, and put on them the new man; for can any considering conscience of man admit the thought, that he died for sinners to procure them pardon, leaving them enemies to God as they were; leaving them with blind minds as they were; leaving them with natures poisoned with enmity and malignity against the Author of their beings as they were, and yet design these persons to blessedness? That were, to design an impossible thing; to design that man, or that sort of men, to a blessed state in heaven, that have at the same time, an hell within them. One that hath not an holy nature, hath hell within him. This speaks itself to any conscience of man that doth but consider;—do but think, and you must say, In my conscience it must be so; so that, if any do not subject their

souls to the design of that gospel that hath revealed this to them; it may be said to them, Oh! foolish creatures, that you should not believe this truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you; (Gal. iii. 1.) that have had such a representation of a crucified Christ, and never made it your business to know for what,—what was the design of it. I pray what did it finally aim at, but to Christianize the world, so far as his design should extend and have its effect? That is, to turn them into the image of that Christ, that was crucified for them; to make them pure, and holy, and heavenly creatures, and devoted to God as he was. And as the apostle adds here,—“If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:” if so plain a gospel as this, that carries such evidence with it to the consciences of men, cannot yet be understood, it shews what a dreadful character these souls lie under; these must be struck with a penal blindness, and with a diabolical blindness withal, which is equivalent with this phrase of being bewitched; “in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not,” as the next words are in the 4th verse of this chapter.

And so much, therefore, concerning the design of redemption by the Son of God, who came down into this world upon this account, may be represented with that evidence, as to command any conscience of man that considers, into an assent: This cannot but be so, in my conscience this is so. And then,

4. Concerning the final issue of all: there is such truth shining, as must needs strike conscience, if it be attended to; it is clothed with that evidence, or easily admits to be, as must overpower the consciences of men into an assent. As,

1. Concerning the final issue of things; that this present state of things shall have an end. Any body that considers, cannot but say, in my very conscience it cannot but be so, it must be so: things are not to run on always sure as they now do. This state and posture of things certainly is not to be eternal; for is it a likely thing, that God will perpetuate his own dishonour, that he will have the generations of men in a continual succession to rise up one after another, full of alienation and estrangement from the Author of their being, and always to live upon the earth, while they live, to no other purpose than to express their contempt of him that gave them breath? Will not this have an end? Sure any conscience of man must need say, This

state of things will have an end. 1 Peter iv. 7. So that when this truth is spoken to us ; "The end of all things is at hand," is approaching ; (to that fore-seeing Spirit, that spake those words, and whose breath they were, the end of all things is at hand, just at hand ;) there is no conscience of man that allows itself to think, but must think so it will be, and this state of things cannot last always : though we are taught that while things do continue thus, it is with design, and it is from patience ; and that design shall be accomplished, and that patience must have its limits and bounds. We are told it is not from negligence, but from patience ; it is not that God doth neglect or disregard the state of things ; it is not from supine ossitancy, but divine patience. Why, in my very conscience, this is true, must every one say that considers ; He that hath made such a world as this, and been the immediate Author of such a sort of intelligent creatures in it, who are to have immediate presidence and dominion here in this present lower world ; it is not to be imagined that he doth neglect the creatures that he hath made, and made after his own image ; stamped with his own likeness ; it is not likely he should be indifferent how they live, what they do, and what their posture and dispositions towards him are : any man that thinks, must needs say this is very true, it is God's patience, not his negligence, that such a sort of creatures are so long, from age to age, suffered to inhabit this world, and breathe upon this earth. Therefore, when it is told us from the divineword, "The Lord is not slack concerning the promise of his coming, as some men count slackness ; but is patient and long suffering towards sinners, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance ;" (2 Peter iii. 9.) such truth, when it is laid before us, is so con-natural, so agreeable to the very conscience of man, that he must say, This sure is true, it falls within my mind ; my mind gives it, it cannot be from negligence, or unconcernedness ; but from wise designing patience, that things run on in this course so long. And then, again,

2. This cannot but be evident concerning the end of all things, to those that consider, that sure their end will be glorious, suitable to their glorious beginning and glorious Author ; that God will, in putting an end to things so like himself, and so, as it is worthy of God, there is no doubt but he will : any conscience of man must needs say so. God will do at length like himself ; men have done all

this while like themselves; they, like men, have transgressed, and perpetuated, to their utmost, their rebellions in this world against their rightful Lord; thus they have been in all things while doing like men; and God will at length do like God, no doubt but he will. There can be in him no variableness, nor shadow of turning; His nature alters not; He is the I Am, and is what he is; and, therefore, there will be an issue of all things, that will demonstrate, to all apprehensive creatures, the glory of the great Lord of heaven and earth; even to the highest, and in ways most suitable to himself; that is, it shall go well with all that have been sincere lovers of him—devoted to him, studious to please him; that valued his favour, and despised it not as the most do; but for the rest, this world, the stage of their wickedness, where they have been sinning from age to age, is reserved on purpose for the perdition of ungodly men; and reserved unto fire for that end and purpose. 2 Peter iii. 7. That things will end thus, as to all those that knew not God, and were in conspiracy against him and his Messiah; saying, “Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” Psalm ii. 3. And that never turned, never made their peace; that the day that comes for them, it must be to consume them in the common ruin, 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 consumed and burnt up; for this world is reserved unto fire, for the perdition of ungodly men, as we see the expressions are. 2 Peter iii. 7. And thus are they to have their perdition in those flames, that is, that the fire of the Almighty, which will at last catch hold of this world, whereby the heavens shall be shrivelled up as a scroll, and pass away with great noise; then it will be seen, that both ways God hath done like himself; he hath done suitably to an excellent, great, and glorious majesty, long despised by the work of his own hands.

Now, when these things come to be represented, they do carry in them that evident appearance of verity and truth, that more than very similitude, that every conscience of man must say, These things are very agreeable to truth, cannot but be true. There is a con-naturalness between the soul of man and truth, between the mind of man, the conscience of man that is to judge of truth, so that any must say that consider, It cannot but be thus; in my very conscience it will be so. Then to go on,

2. To the next head, that of precepts; wherein, as in reference to the former, it was the business of conscience to discern of truth and falsehood; so in reference to this, it will be the business of conscience to discern of right and wrong; but here we shall only mention those two great comprehensive precepts,—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might, and with all thy mind, and shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Deut. vi. 5. Matt. xxii. 37. Precepts (as our Herbert said of them) as dark as day; having no more of darkness in them, than is in the brightest day, or the clearest light. What? do not these approve themselves to every conscience of man? that He who is most good, and contains in himself all excellency, all perfection, all glory, all blessedness; and which he is ready to communicate to receptive capable subjects, should be loved by me with all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my might, and with all my mind; for in my heart and conscience, it ought to be so, any conscientious man will say.

And then, that he whom God hath set in a certain order and rank as a fellow creature; a creature of the same order, having the same nature that I have, and the same natural capacities, both as to knowledge and enjoyment, should be loved by me as myself: Do not my fellow creatures of the same order deserve as much love as I do deserve? And, therefore, can it be a reasonable thing that I should cut off myself from the community to which I do belong? That order of creatures in which I am and live, only within a private course of my own, apart from the rest of mankind? It cannot be, I must love my neighbour as myself; whatsoever there can be in my nature, that must draw and attract love, must be in them that have the same nature, that have the same capacities that I have; so that every one that considers, must say, this is true, even to the light and sense of my own conscience; thus it ought to be; this is the very right of the case; and he that laid this law upon me, doth by this law require no more than the very nature of the thing requires.

But then considering that apostate, lapsed creatures cannot arrive hither to this loving of God above all, with all the heart, all the soul, all the might and mind; neither can there be that redintegration of kind dispositions and affections, mutually towards one another, that is required in that other precept; having all lapsed and fallen, without

a reparation and renewal of their frames, without having their frame repaired towards God and towards one another; this makes the Gospel necessary to come in, in reference to fallen lost creatures. This was the original duty of man, and still is incumbent upon him as a just duty; but he cannot come at it till there be a reparation and renewal of his nature; and for this the gospel (as was hinted) doth contain prescriptions, or a proscribed course. Now as to God, the gospel runs upon duty, suitably to our lost state, under two heads,—Repentance towards God, and Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; this law lying with its eternal invariable obligation upon all intelligent nature, upon every reasonable creature,—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.”—Aye, so I ought, saith conscience, but I have not done it, I have been a rebel against him; a thing very inconsistent with dutiful love. I have been a stranger and an alien to him, alienated from the life of God; a very inconsistent thing with communion love, with conversible love. What then is to be done? here is no returning to my duty and pristine state again, for a fallen creature, for one that hath degenerated and been in a state of enmity and rebellion against God, (as I have been,) but by Repentance. I can never come to love again till I repent. Here is that, therefore, which the gospel does injoin in the first place,—Repentance towards God. I was under an obligation to him, as I was the work of his hands; and as a reasonable creature, I was to love him with all my heart, soul, might, and mind, and I have been a rebel to him, and an enemy against him; but through his grace I repent of it; I repent of it with all my heart, and with all my soul. And by repentance, it is, that the soul is to return into the exercise of this vast all-comprehending love, towards the all-comprehending good; it comprehends all our duty towards him, who comprehends in himself all excellencies, majesty, glory, and felicity. Now will not any considering man’s conscience say to this, It cannot but be so; that he who was under so natural an obligation to love God with all his heart, soul, might, and mind; and hath been disloyal, an enemy, and false to him, and a rebel against him, ought to repent of it? In my very conscience he ought; every man that considers will say so. What? Have I been a traitor to him that gave me breath, and shall I not repent of it? or doth that gospel enjoin me a wrongful thing that calls me to repentance? And shall I not be a vile creature if, being so called, I will never repent;

but bear within me an impenitent heart, an heart than cannot repent, as that fearful expression is, Romans ii. 14? The words carry that in them, which may affright a congregation, and strike the hearts of all that hear them with terror. An heart that cannot repent! A heart that could sin, that would offend and affront God, but that cannot repent; repentance is hid from it! To the sense of any man's conscience, this is an horrid creature that hath been an offender all his days, but will never repent. The gospel calls him to repentance; the gentle alluring voice of the gospel; but he will not repent. This carries evidence with it to the consciences of men, what there is of right, and what there is of wrong, in this matter.

And so for Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, doth not the thing carry evidence with it to the consciences of men, That he who is to make up (upon such terms as you have heard) that which otherwise must have been an everlasting breach between God and the sinner, should not have the soul, when called thereto in the gospel, and being now in its return to God, take him in its way, and pay a dutiful homage to him whom God hath set over all the affairs of lost souls, to be to them a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins? But in order thereunto, here it must be begun, for the poor soul thus to own him in the high authority of his office. This is the homage, which is in sum, the meaning of faith in Christ; the paying deference to him whom God hath set over all the affairs of souls; that is, by resigning themselves up to him: that is the homage that you owe him. And herein lies the substance of faith,—gospel-faith, self-resignation, a self-surrender, whereby you put yourselves absolutely into the hands of Christ, and own his high authority, as he is a Prince and a Saviour. And is not this the most reasonable thing in all the world? Doth not every conscience of man say so when he considers, If ever I will be reconciled to God, it must be by the blood of Christ: and he hath an office over this lost world, founded in his blood? And shall I not come and pay my deference to him at the footstool of that throne which God hath set up for him? When he hath said to the Son, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," shall not I come and pay my homage to this Son of God, at that throne? (Psalm iv. 5.) the Redeemer's throne; and say, Lord, being now convinced of this state of my case, and being reduced to this, to bethink myself of returning to God, and I know there is no coming at him,

but by thee; and this throne is set up in the way for returning souls; I therefore come and pay my homage at this throne; that is, I come and resign my soul, give up myself, put myself into thy hands to be under thy conduct: thou didst die the just for the unjust to bring them unto God; and now I come to thee to be brought, I submit to thy authority, I commit myself to thy grace. This is faith, gospel faith, and can any thing more approve itself to the conscience, than the right and equity of doing so? Is it not a righteous thing, and a just thing, that this law should be laid upon returning sinners? If you go to God immediately,—No, saith he, go and do homage to my Son; there is no coming to me, but in him; and when you do so, when you thus receive the gospel, take hold of the gospel covenant, take him for Lord and Christ, and resign and give up yourselves. This sums up that duty, and the subservient duty of repentance towards God, as the way that leads to the end. And see now, whether the gospel of our Lord, both as to the truths of it, and as to the precepts of it, do not carry with it a self-recommending evidence unto the consciences of men.

SERMON III.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 2.

Commending ourselves to every Man's Conscience in the sight of God.

THE matter is in itself so obvious, that this self-recommendation is not thus spoken of the persons, personally considered, but with reference to their work of dispensing the gospel of Christ, and holding forth the great things contained in it: that that laid our ground fairly enough in view, for that which I mainly intended to insist upon from these words, and that is,

That the great things of religion do carry in them a self-recommending evidence to the consciences of men. And here, having shewn you what is meant by conscience, what that principle is that is to be applied unto, appealed unto, in this work of ours; we come to evince to you the

* Preached, January 25, 1690.

truth of the thing, that there is that self-recommending evidence in the great things of religion, even to the very consciences of men. We propounded, (as you know,) to prove it by instances, and we have proved it,

1. By instances under the head of truths, or the doctrines unto which assent is to be given; and we have proved it.

2. By instances under the head of precepts, duties, enjoined to be done;—and now we shall farther prove it.

3. By instancing in prohibitions of sin to be avoided; and in them you will find the same recommending evidence to men's consciences, if such prohibitions, as do but come under your notice, be considered a little; as that general one, "Oh, do not that abominable thing which I hate." (Jer. xlv. 4.) What convictive light doth it carry to every conscience of man, that allows himself to think and consider? I, a creature, the work of God's own hand, in whose power and pleasure it was, whether I should ever be or not be, whether ever I should draw a breath, or see the light in this world, yea or no; that I being lately sprung into being, by his pleasure and vouchsafement, should allow myself despitefully to do the thing he hates, and that he hath declared himself to hate? How can this, (if men do think,) how can it but strike conscience? What? to spite the God of all grace; Him, whose nature is love itself, goodness itself, kindness? For me to do the thing that I know he hates, how is it possible but this should recommend itself to conscience, if men do not shut the eye and stop the ear of conscience, that it shall not be allowed to discharge any part of its proper office and work?

But to descend to more particular prohibitions, there the thing will be still plain; do not live after the flesh, if you do, it is mortal to you; "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." (Rom. viii. 13.) What evidence doth this carry with it to conscience? Take the prohibition and the enforcement together, as we should do in the former instances; Do not this, do not the thing I hate. When we do know ourselves to be a sort of compound creatures, made up of flesh and spirit, can we be ignorant which is the nobler part? Can any man's conscience allow him to think, that flesh ought to rule; that it belongs to the baser flesh to be the governing thing? "Do not walk after the flesh;" doth not the thing carry its own evidence with it, that we should not; that the mind and spirit should not be enslaved to so base a thing as flesh?

Again, "Do not grieve the Spirit of God, do not quench

the Spirit; (1 Thess. v. 9.) What evidence doth this carry with it to any conscience of man? Our own hearts tell us, if we consider, we need a guide in this wilderness; we need an enlightener, we need a sanctifier, we need a quickener, we need a comforter within, an internal one of all these. What? Is it reasonable to think; doth not the matter speak itself to our consciences; when it is said to us, whatsoever ye do, do not grieve the Spirit? (Eph. iv. 3.) You are lost if you do; what desolate creatures will ye be if you do! What forsaken wretches! You will run yourselves into a thousand miseries and deaths, if you be forsaken of that Spirit; your end can be nothing but perdition, if you be not under the constant conduct of that Spirit. I might preach to you thus, upon as many several texts as I give you instances in this case, to shew the truth of this one thing, how God doth speak to men's consciences in the gospel-dispensation.

When again he saith to men, love not this world, nor the things of this world; If any man man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; (1 John ii. 15.) that is, do not so love this world, as thereby to stifle, as thereby to exclude the love of God, that it shall and can have no place in you. Doth not this carry its own light with it, its own evidence? What a foolish wretch art thou that thinkest this world can be to thee, in the room and stead of God! Can this world be a God to thee? Can this world fill up God's vacant places? What a pitiful sorry God wilt thou find it in a few years or days? Thou who dost turn God out of thy soul, and wilt have it filled and replenished only with this world, doth not this carry with it conviction to conscience? What can, if this do not?

Again, do not take more care for this temporal life, than for spiritual and eternal life; or to give it you in the words of our Saviour, "Labour not for the meat that perisheth; but for that which endureth to life eternal, which the Son of Man shall give." John vi. 27.

Doth not this carry its own evidence to you with it? That is, when I know I have but a short temporal life; which, do what I can, will soon come to an end; and there is an eternal state of life which must come afterwards. I know I am a creature made for eternity, and for an everlasting state. Doth not this carry its own evidence with it, when I am forbid to take more care for this mortal life, than for life eternal? When I am forbidden to make

more solicitous provision for this perishing life, than an immortal life? Doth not the reason of the thing speak itself in my conscience? But I go on,

4. To the last head which I proposed to give instances of. We have gone upon divine truths, divine precepts, divine prohibitions; we shall only instance further, upon the head of divine judgments, or judicial determinations. I cannot call what I intend by a fitter name, or nearer to that of the apostle, who knowing the judgment of God, that they who do such things are worthy of death,—here is the divine judicial determination, *de debito retributionis*, what is justly to be retributed to those that are found to disobey the stated known rules of his government. His judgments in this sense, they are a light that goeth forth; Hosea vi. 5. (to borrow that expression;) they carry their own convictive evidence with them to the consciences of men. Hosea vi. 5. How equal they are! take those two in the general, that we have confronted to one another. “Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings; Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” Isaiah iii. 10, 11. Doth not this speak itself, that when we know the world is divided into good and bad, into righteous and wicked, it should fare ill with them that did ill, and well with them that did well? Doth not this carry its own evidence with it to conscience, that God should render to every man according to his works; that is, the course of his work, and, consequently, the habitual inclinations from whence they proceed; every thing working as it is, and men working, as they are, either according to what by nature they were, or according to what by grace they are become; so they ought to be judged? When we know the world is divided into two parts, under two great parents, as the apostle calls them the children of God, and the children of the devil, herein are the children of God manifest, and the children of the devil. 1 John iii. 10. These two families, these two sorts of posterities, do divide the world to every man’s sense, and the world being so divided, is it to be expected that God should deal with his own children and the devil’s children alike? Let conscience be appealed to in this case: they that live here all their days in this world under the law, and according to the dictates of the prince of the darkness of this world, despising God, hating his ways, throwing him out of their thoughts, making it only their design to please themselves, and do the devil’s

work, when we know there is such a sort of men in this world, and that there is another sort that have given up themselves to God in Christ, have taken hold of Christ and of God in him, to be theirs; being born, “not of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;” (John i. 13.) as all they that do receive Christ are. When we know, I say, there is such a contradistinction between a race and a race, a family and a family, can any man in his conscience expect that God should deal with all alike? And therefore, when you have particular determinations to the particular distinguishing characters of the one sort, and of the other, the equity and reasonableness of the determination cannot but speak itself in every man’s conscience that doth consider the case. As, for instance, the love of Christ: it is determined on the one hand; “Grace be upon all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” Ephes. vi. 21. And, on the other hand, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha;” (1 Cor. xvi. 22.) an execrable thing, an accursed thing, till the Lord come to plead his own cause and quarrel himself. To what conscience of man doth not the equity of this determination or distinguishing judgment appear and recommend itself? What! do we think (when men must have their final felicity from the blessed Judge, if ever they be happy) that he is to dispense equally to them that love him, and to them that hate him? And so, when the business of obedience to his gospel, the laws of his kingdom, is mentioned as the contradicting character to that of disobedience and rebellion. He will be “the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him,” Hebrews v. 9; and will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that obey him not. 2 Thess. i. 8. Doth not this distinguishing judgment approve itself to any man’s conscience? That when every man must be beholden for this salvation to Christ the eternal Son of God, into whose hands and power this world is put, the whole universe, indeed, all the affairs of heaven and earth; do you think he will make no difference at the last between them that obeyed him, subjected themselves to that vast just power of his; and they that lived in continual rebellion against him, and defiance to his power and authority?

And so, if we should take the determination which is given us, concerning the stated method of God’s final procedure in that which is called the day of wrath, and the revelation of his righteous judgment; to wit, that to them

who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, he will give eternal life; (Rom. ix. 7.) such as, by patient continuance in well doing, do steer their course answerable to so high an hope and expectation of honour, glory, and immortality, said God: nothing but eternal glory and blessedness will answer the enlargedness of the capacity, desires, and aspirings, of these souls; they shall have their seeking. These are a sort of souls that breathe after nothing but the celestial glory and felicity, being refined from the mixture, dross, and baseness, of this earth: no terrene good will satisfy them, or serve their turn; for they are all for heaven, all for glory, and immortality: I will give them eternal life. This is the judgment that is made aforehand; eternal life shall be theirs. But then there is another sort, that are contentious, and will not obey the truth; Rom. ii. 8, 9. that is, that are contentious against the truth they should obey, and that should govern them: no, they will not be governed by truth; they will be governed by lust, by terrene inclinations, which bear them downwards towards this earth: "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man: it will be upon them, every soul of them, that do evil, whether Jew or Gentile; because there is no respect of persons with God, Romans ii. 11. What can more approve itself to the judgment of conscience than this determination doth? Yea, God hereupon makes his appeal to men: Are not my ways equal? Ezek. xviii. 25—29. Be you, your very conscience itself, in the judgment seat, and let that pronounce, Are not my ways equal? what conscience of man but must submit here, and fall in with the choir of them that say, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways." Rev. xv. 3. There is nothing to be said against all this; every conscience of man must yield and submit to God in this case.

It remains to say somewhat by way of use.

1. We learn hence, that upon the whole, there cannot but be much sinning against light in this world; and especially under the gospel, where there are those so clear, evident, and convictive things, that are insisted upon so much from time to time, which even make their own way to men's consciences; though through them they do not make their way to their more abstracted hearts. Do but appeal to yourselves; what are the things that you hear of in these assemblies from one Lord's day to another? Are they not the

things as I have now given you instances in, and in former discourses? Do not you hear of such things most? And do not these things speak themselves in your very consciences? Yet, is it not apparent that the course and tenor of men's lives run counter to the tendency of all these things? Oh, then, how apparent and insolent sinning against light is there among us in our days! A fearful thing to think of! that men should in their consciences know that such and such things are true; and that, if they be true, they must be considerable; if they be true, they are as important truths as can be thought of; and yet they will not think of them. They know such and such things are commanded; but they never set themselves about them. Such and such things are forbidden, but they take no care to avoid them. Such and such judgments are fixed and determined by the righteous will of God, and they take no care; have no forethought to make a title clear to the reward that is promised, or to avoid the penalties threatened. What sinning against light is all this? And what is the issue of all this like to be?

2. You may further see hence, that if man be so capable a creature, through his having that principle settled in him of judging of things; to wit, truths, precepts, prohibitions, divine determinations, or judgments, as you have heard, then he is as capable a creature, by the same principle, of judging of himself, and of his own case hereupon. I pray consider it, it is one and the self same principle by which I am first to judge, Is such a thing a part of divine truth, and to be received accordingly? and afterwards to judge, Have I received it accordingly; yea or no? And so, in reference to the other several heads, it is but the same principle that I am to use, and put in exercise, both ways. If I am a creature capable of judging of truth, of duty, of sin, of desert in general; then I am capable of judging somewhat of the state of my own case hereupon, in reference to all these. And pray let that be considered only in the way to what is further to be considered.

3. It is, then, a very strange kind of stupidity, that men do not more generally lay themselves under judgment, one way or another, when they have this principle in them, that is so capable of doing, and the proper direct use whereof (at least) is to do it. It is strange that men should spend all their days amidst the light by which they must be finally judged, and never go about such a thing as the forming of a preventive judgment concerning themselves. And

yet we are told that this is the only way of escaping the severity of a destructive doom at last from the supreme Judge. "Judge yourselves, and ye shall not be judged." That people should pass away their days, and under a gospel, and never find time (as it is, God knows, with too many) to ask themselves the question, Into what sort and class of men am I to cast myself? There are those that do belong to God as his own children, the members of his family, his special domestics. Am I of that family, or am I not? Do I belong to God, or do I not? Do the characters of a righteous person or a wicked one belong to me? Am I one that fears God, or one of them that fear him not? That love him, or that love him not? Am I (in short) a regenerate person, or an unregenerate? A convert, or an unconverted one? It is strange how men can dream away their time under a gospel as we live, and never ask themselves such questions as these are, inreference to so great and important a case; let one day come and go after another, and take it for granted that things are well, without ever inquiring. To what purpose, I pray, is there such a principle in the souls of men as conscience, when this signifies nothing? It is thus tied and chained up from doing any thing of its proper business in their souls. If it be brought into true light, (as it may be with some, if their case do infer so,) it will speak comfortably to them, if their case doth admit it. But if you have no converse with your own consciences, have nothing to do with them, never converse with them, never commune with them, they never speak to you one way or other; you have neither comfort from them, nor are awakened by them. But again,

4. We further note to you, that sure, upon the whole matter, man is become a very degenerate creature. The state of things with men living under the gospel, gives so much the more clear and certain judgment of the state of things with men more generally and indefinitely considered; for if they that live under the gospel, notwithstanding the clearer representation of things there which are of the greatest concernment to them, and the most earnest inculcation of such things by them who have that part incumbent on them to open and preach the great things of the gospel among them; I say, if among these there be so deep a somnolency, the spirit of a deep sleep poured out; if even these men are generally unconcerned, and do not care what becomes of their souls, and what the state of things is between God and them, certainly, upon the whole mat-

ter, man must needs be a very degenerate creature, to have such a principle of conscience in him to so little purpose, so much in vain, which was designed in his original and instituted state to be his guide and conductor all along through the whole of his course; but now-a-days it doth not, for the most part, or at least not in reference to men's greatest concernment, the state of their affairs and case God-ward, and as things lie between them and him. And again,

5. We may learn wherein the degeneracy of man doth generally and principally consist and lie, and what is the most mortal ail and evil that hath befallen men by the fall; that is, the interruption and breach of the order between the faculties, that which should lead and guide, and those which should obey and follow: here lies the principal maim and hurt of the soul by the fall; it lies in this chiefly, that the order is battered and broken between faculty and faculty, between the practical judgment (which is the same with conscience) and the executive power, which should act and do according to the dictate of that judgment or conscience: here is the maim; it doth not lie so much in this, a mere ignorance, or (suppose that) in a mere inaptitude to know, or an incapacity of knowing the things that are needful to be known; but it lies chiefly in this, that the things we do know, they signify no more with men, than if they knew them not; the inferior powers do not obey and follow the superior: as, for instance, now, among us, who believe the Bible to be the word of God, and who do profess the Christian name, take a man that is under the dominion of this or that particular lust in his nature, it is plain this lust carries him against a thousand texts of scripture; what will a text of scripture signify to a man that is under the violent hurry or impetuosity of a lust? Though conscience tells him, at the same time, this is a divine word, a divine dictate; this word is from God, and it speaks like itself in my conscience, that it is a divine word. Alas! how little doth a text, or multitudes of texts of scripture, prevail in such a case, when a man's heart is carried by the power of such a lust? "The lusts of your fathers ye will do," (John viii. 44.) as our Saviour told the Jews; so that is the true state of man's case, naturally: a degenerate creature he is; and herein lies his degeneration, or principal maim, that he hath got by his fall; the order is broken between the faculties, insomuch, that now a man's knowing, or having the notion of this or that thing to be done,

or not to be done, signifies no more to him, than if there were no such notions, no such knowledge; when there is a competition between the judgment of conscience, and an inclination of heart, you may lay a thousand to one on the side of the inclination, that carries it: here is our maim, and it is fit we should understand, and needful we should consider, where it is, and what is our hurt by the fall: we see our way, but have no inclination to go in it; we see what we should do, but we do not do it; like here in the poet,—“*Video meliora proboque deteriora sequar;*”—the same maim that Pagans have complained of, I see the better, and do the worse. It were a sad case if we should lie under such a evil as this is, and never know it, never take notice of it, where our hurt lies, and where our cure must be wrought. And that is the next thing,

6. I would infer, to wit, wherein regeneration most principally lies: when a man understands what it is to be degenerate, he will the better know what it is to be regenerate; it must lie in this, in the exalting the law of the mind into its proper dominion and government, the placing that upon the throne which is to beget a man, spirit of spirit; whereas, before, he was only begotten flesh of flesh; for when flesh is a ruling and governing nature, then the man is called flesh; but when the spirit is become the ruling and governing thing, (which is the new nature,) then he is called spirit; and he is made spirit before he ought to be called so. And this is the effect of regeneration, the creating of a man's spirit again, that is restoring him to himself. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.” John iii. 6. When a man's light becomes a vital thing, a powerful efficacious thing, then he is a child of light. “You were darkness, now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light.” Ephes. v. 8. And we are never to look on ourselves as regenerate, till it comes to this; till the Divine Spirit have exalted our spirits into their proper dominion; till there be a principle begotten that shall make divine discoveries significant; when it may be said, “The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death.” Romans viii. 2. And thereupon we may infer,

7. That a degenerate and an unregenerate man is a miserable creature; as he is a most depraved creature, so he is a most wretched creature; for, take the state of his case, as things are with the unregenerate man, his soul is the

seat and stage of a continual war, to no purpose. Indeed, the soul of a saint in this world is the seat of war, but it is a war to a good purpose; a war wherein he finally prevails, and wherein he is habitually victorious all along. But the soul of an unregenerate man is the seat of war in vain; for the right principle is always worsted, perpetually worsted; there is not a war as there is in the regenerate, in the faculties taken separately and apart, as in the very heart itself, and in the will itself. The regenerate person hath a war; there is a love to God, with its opposite; but that love is the prevailing inclination: there is faith with unbelief; but then faith is habitually prevailing in the regenerate person. In the unregenerate person there is no such thing as faith in the heart, love in the heart; but a total unbelief, a total enmity, and total fearlessness of God, and a total vacancy of desire after him, and delight in him; but there is light in his conscience: his conscience tells him God is worthy to be loved, worthy to be desired, worthy to be delighted in, but there is nothing in his heart correspondent, so that this soul is a continual seat of war, in vain, and to no purpose; for the bent of his heart always carries it against the light of his mind and conscience; so that, although he doth acknowledge in his conscience that God is the chief good, he always keeps off from him; that he is the highest authority, yet he always disobeys him; never fears him, never stands in awe of him; as such, therefore, this sort of creature is a miserable creature, he is a creature composed for torment, having a principle in him that always tells him what he should do, but no principle to enable him so to do; so that continually he doth against what he should do. This is as much as is possible to be made for torment; but then remember, it is self-composed; you have made yourselves so: if this be the case with any of us, we have fought against the grace and Spirit of Christ, by which this sad case should have been redressed: and we have habituated ourselves to a course of living after the flesh, by which flesh hath got dominion over conscience; whereupon conscience can never come to rule it, but dictates to it always in vain. Again,

8. They are very happy souls in whom there is a reconciliation brought about between the light of their consciences and the temper and inclination of their hearts, by the conforming of the latter to the former. This creates an heaven within them, when a poor soul sees its way, and walks in it; sees that God ought to be loved, and he loves

him; that he ought to be trusted, and trusts in him; that he ought to be delighted in, and delights in him: this is heaven on this side heaven, this is heaven under heaven, when conscience is the governing thing in his whole conversation; so that he doth not consider, Wherein shall I advantage myself by this and this negociation and affair? increase my estate and my condition in this world? He doth not, finally, and ultimately, consider that, but how shall I manage this affair to please God, so as I may approve myself to him, and so as that my own heart and conscience shall not reproach me about it? O happy man that walks by this rule! This is the new creature's rule; they that walk according to it, peace shall be upon them, and mercy upon the Israel of God. Gal. vi. 16. When a man hath been busy about his affairs, he may be abroad all day, and can come home and visit his tabernacle at night, and not sin. Job v. 24. Oh blessed thing! What can be the meaning of that? Can any man suppose it a sin to go home to his own house? No, but that he can visit his tabernacle without conscience of sin. I have kept a good conscience this day, blessed be God: it may be I have met with temptations, to be in a debauch by those that would have insulted over the weakness of my flesh; it may be I have, but God hath kept me. Blessed be God, now I can visit my tabernacle without sin, and lay me down in rest and peace; I can visit my tabernacle without spot, without any such spot. What a blessed thing is it, when God brings about that reconciliation between him and them, and where the peace is kept and continued between a man and his own conscience, not by stupifying of conscience, (a fearful thing that is,) but by the conforming of a man's heart and inclinations and ways thereunto.

SERMON IV.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 2.

Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

WE have had occasion several times of considering the context; "We all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord; so ends the foregoing chapter. "Therefore, (so begins this chapter,) seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy we faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." You know what observations have been recommended to you from this portion of scripture, principally from these last words, but relatively considered, as well as absolutely. As,

1. That there is such a principle in every man, as that of conscience, unto which the great things of religion do carry with them a self-recommending evidence

2. That the business of the gospel ministry doth lie very principally in a transaction with the very consciences of men.

3. That this transaction is to be managed in the sight of God. And,

4. That from all this proceeds, in very great part, the unfainting vigour and resolvedness of faithful ministers in their work.

We have insisted upon the first of these; we will now proceed as far as we can with the rest, and begin with the next in order; which is,

2d Doctrine. That the great business of the gospel ministry doth very principally lie in a transaction with men's conscience. We are here to shew you, 1st. wherein this transaction lies; and, 2dly, to shew that the work of the ministry lies in it, and must so do very principally.

* Preached February 8, 1690.

1st. Wherein this transaction with the consciences of men doth lie. Why,

1. In dealing with men about such things chiefly as do most directly come under, and as are most apt to take hold of their consciences; in insisting (I say) chiefly upon such things as are most likely to fasten upon conscience, and take hold of that.

2. In endeavouring to set such things in as clear light as may be, to represent them as advantageously as we can, that conscience may have nothing to do but to discern the very evidence of the things. This is plain, this is clear: to represent things so that at first sight they may be assented and submitted unto as much as in us lies. And,

3. To appeal hereupon to conscience about it; that is our business, recommending ourselves to every man's conscience; that is what we have to do, *provocare*, to call unto conscience: 'Come, do thy part; see if there be not evidence in this and that truth; see if there be not equity in this or that precept; see if there be not wickedness or danger in this or that sin; see if there be not righteousness and reasonableness in this or that judgment or determination, that we find recorded in the word, and pronounced in reference to such and such cases.' These (you know) were the four heads instanced in, to let you see the things of religion that do carry in them a self-recommending evidence to the consciences of men. Our business must be to appeal to conscience about such things; to call upon it to do its office, to judge and pronounce, Are not these things so? And,

4. To endeavour to awaken conscience, supposing it drowsy and somnolent, as God knows, it is too much with the most; when we have appealed to conscience, to appeal again, as that petitioner did to that great prince: "I appeal from thee," said she.—"From me? (said the prince.) Whither will you appeal?"—"I appeal (said she) from you, asleep: you were asleep just now, while I was telling my story: I appeal from you asleep, to you awake." So we are to appeal from conscience to conscience; from conscience asleep to conscience awake. That must be our business, to endeavour, as much as in us is, to awaken conscience to the exercise of its office in that great business, that we recommend ourselves to it about. And,

5. To answer what we can the cavils and foolish counter-reasonings of carnal hearts against truth and against duty, or in favour of any way of sin, that the litigating humour

may (as much as in us is) be repressed, and men's spirits be subdued, that they may have no more to say; but that their mouths may be stopped, and they laid under a restraint to lie down silenced and convinced before the Lord. And,

6. To urge conscience to its final answer, to its determination upon the whole, as there is such a thing as an answer of conscience to be finally given in particular cases, that we may apply ourselves to men about. And if conscience be rectified and sanctified, and sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, it will be brought at length to give a good answer, a complying answer, a yielding answer; as that which the apostle speaks of: "A like figure whereunto (having spoken of the ark before, that saved Noah and his household from perishing in the universal inundation) even baptism doth now save us; not the putting away the filth of the flesh, (not the external sign,) but the answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter iii. 21. The main and principal thing that we do apply ourselves to men, and the consciences of men, about, is, to bring them back to God; that is, whereas the bond was broken between God and men, we would fain have them under new bonds, we would fain there should be a redintegration, that they may come into a covenant relation to God, through Christ, again; of such a covenant entered into between God and the returning souls of men, baptism was a seal; the confirmation. It is not the external part of baptism that will avail a man any thing, not the washing away the filth of the flesh; why, will not that do? No, but that whereunto baptism is to seal; that is, the answer of a good conscience. When sinners are dealt withal, 'Come, will you yet have God to be your God,—God the Father, Son, and Spirit, to be your God?' And the soul is brought at length to yield a ready, free, complying answer; 'Aye, with all my heart.' This is that will save a man; this brings him as into an ark, to save him from the common deluge of wickedness and wrath that do overwhelm this world. Then he is safe, then he is in the ark; that is, when his conscience hath given a complying answer, with a sincere conscience, 'I do take God to be my God.' The sign (it may be) that was applied many years ago, avails nothing, without the thing signified: but if the thing signified do come to obtain, to take place, here is one that takes God to be his God; then the business is done; then the man is safe, when the sign before applied is now answered and filled up; there is that

which is correspondent to it; the soul is now won, and brought to give its answer; the covenant stands between God and it, it is a sealed covenant; and so is such an one marked out for safety and preservation from the common ruin. And this is that which we have to deal with the consciences of men about, to bring them to a final answer. Sinner, wilt thou still live without God in the world? Wilt thou still wander from God? go astray from God? Dost thou still think it safe to live in estrangement from God, and neglect of him? never thinking of worshipping him, trusting on him, loving him, and delighting in him, from day to day? Or wilt thou yet at length be brought, upon the many applications that have been made to thy conscience, to answer, with a sincere conscience, 'Now I am willing, from my very soul, that God shall be mine; and I will be his in and through Christ.' It is herein that our transaction doth receive its happy issue. This is the issue we drive at to bring conscience to a final answer, if it be possible, 'I am won, I am overcome; I do answer, in my very conscience; I judge it best and safest, most equal, most dutiful, and most comfortable, to fall in with the gospel offer, and take God in Christ, for my God.' But,

2dly. Why must our business thus lie in a transaction of men's consciences? To that I shall need to say very little, because the things speaks itself. That is,

1. That there being this principle in man, which signifies nothing else but a power to judge in such matters, relating to such practices as shall be laid before him. And,

2. The objects carrying in themselves (as you have heard) a self-recommending evidence to this principle, nothing remains, nothing is left, but that in the course of our ministry, in the way of our dealings with men's souls, that we do thus apply ourselves, do thus deal with this principle of conscience. Touching these objects, it is the office of conscience to judge of things, and the things themselves carry with them an evidence that comes under the notion, cognizance, and judgment of conscience; even by that very light wherewith they are clothed, and therefore the matter speaks itself; our business must lie there or nowhere; if we do not in these matters apply ourselves to the consciences of men, and treat with them, we had as good talk with stones and pillars.

Therefore I shall leave that, and speak somewhat to the third observation, the use of which too will best fall in afterwards together.

3rd Doctrine.—This transaction with the consciences of men must be in the sight of God,—there it must be made. I shall here briefly shew, 1st, what this means; and, 2ndly, why it must be so.

1st. What meaneth that such a resolution should be taken, and such a course held, we will transact, and do transact with the consciences of men in the sight of God? What can the meaning of that be? Why,

1. Negatively, the meaning of it is not, barely, that God shall see, or will see, how this transaction is managed. That is not all that is meant by it, for it is very manifest that the import of this speech holds forth to us somewhat electively done in this matter; but God's seeing us is not a thing subject to our's, or any man's choice, he will see whether we will or no; and if that were all that were resolved in the case, it were to resolve God's part, and not our own part; and this were idle and foolish for us to do; he will do his own part, and this in particular; he will see, look on, and behold whatsoever we do, and whatsoever you do. "All things are naked and manifest to his eye, with whom we have to do." (Heb. iv. 12.) And, therefore, it were a piece of very impertinent officiousness for us, to take upon us to determine and resolve, that God should see what we do in this matter, should look upon you and us, and see how the transaction between us and your consciences is ordered, that he shall take notice of it; that cannot be the thing meant; as if any man should say, I will do such or such a thing in the light of the sun; nobody will understand the meaning of that to be, I will make the sun shine, or cause the sun to shine while I do such a thing: he can resolve nothing, but in reference to his own act, and in reference to his own part. And so it is here, it is only in reference to our own part, that we resolve such a transaction in the sight of God. Therefore, positively,

2. There is a part or act of our own implied in this, that we will do such and such a thing, and this in particular in the sight of God. And what is that? That is, we will appeal to the sight of God, and to his judgment, about what we do in this matter. And this is a thing electively and voluntarily done, as a matter of choice, that we will appeal to his eye: it is true, it is no matter of choice that God will see, but it is matter of choice that we will appeal to that eye of his. And this is the great character of sincere ones, often mentioned in scripture;

that is, that as they know God beholds and sees them in every thing, so they do study and labour to approve themselves to his eye, and (as it were) invoke his observation. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.) It was a dignostick of sincerity, that was enjoined as a test upon Abraham; "I am God all-sufficient, walk before me, and be perfect or upright." (Gen. xvii. 1.) Walk before me, walk so as apprehending my inspection, and so as to approve thyself to the observation of mine eye, through thy whole course; and with this, there is a conjunction mentioned of his uprightness; implying that to be a dignostick of this: "Walk before me and be upright;" walk as in my sight, (as only the upright man will do,) and therein shew thyself an upright man. So the Psalmist, "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living." (Psalm cxvi. 9.) I will studiously approve myself, through the whole of my walking, unto the view and judgment of his observing eye. And so it is said of them who do truly, or that do the truth, that they bring their deeds to the light, "that they may be manifest that they are wrought in God." (John iii. 21.) They do willingly expose their deeds to be viewed in the light, from the secret consciousness that there is a divine power and presence with them that doth help them on in their way and course: and this, they desire, should be made manifest, that they do not live at the common rate; that they do not walk as men, (as the expression is, 1 Cor. iii.) That it may be seen that their course is managed in the power of a divine principle, that their works are wrought in God. Here is an elective appeal all along to the divine eye; which hypocrites and unsound persons would decline and shun even to the uttermost; "they will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved." (John iii. 20.) And when it is said, "there is no darkness or shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves," it implies, fain they would keep in the dark from the eyes of the looker upon the ways of men, who sees their goings. They are for the night, for a corner, for darkness, but they can find none; they vainly seek it, though this be the wish of their hearts, as the poet expresseth it, "*Da mihi noctem, da mihi nubem;*" Oh for a cloud, Oh for a dark night! We do appeal to the consciences of men, in the sight of God; we appeal to his eye voluntarily and

freely desiring him to be judge when we deal and treat with men upon this account, whether we do not sincerely desire their best good, and highest glory, in this negotiation of ours. This, therefore, is the plain meaning of doing what we do in this case "in the sight of God;" that is, as electively appealing to the eye of God, in the transaction and management of this affair.

And so there are now two parts manifestly distinguishable; that is, God's part looking on, and man's part in appealing to his observing eye, and expressing a desire of his complacency in reference to those things he is looking upon; but then, as to our own part, or man's part, wherein we are concerned, which lies under our present consideration, that you may also see is two-fold; that is, there is the preacher's part, and there is the hearer's part: it is the former of these that is directly here meant; and the latter implicitly and by consequence.

1. The former is meant directly, that is, they whose business it is, as ministers of the gospel, to treat and deal with the souls of men; their part is directly there expressed, to appeal to the eye of God, concerning their own integrity and the uprightness of their aims, in all the applications they make from him, and upon his account to souls. But then,

2. The hearer's part is implied; not as that in reference whereto we can undertake, but as that in reference whereto we do and must endeavour; that is, that they also may be brought to appeal to the eye of God, in this transaction that is between us and their consciences. This is that we must endeavour. As,

1. We must endeavour to make them sensible of the divine presence, in which we are at such times as these. That is incumbent upon us on our part, that we engage you as much as in us is, to do your part; that is, to appeal jointly with us to the eye of God, about that for which we appeal to you and your consciences; our business must be to make you apprehensive and sensible, that we are in the presence of God; that there is a divine eye inspecting us, looking upon us: we must put you in mind of this, that we speak, and you hear in the presence of God: and under the observation of his eye, his piercing eye is upon us, he sees with what mind and design the speaker preacheth; he observes with what temper and disposition of mind every hearer heareth. This we are to our utmost to make you apprehensive of. And,

2. Supposing deviations and wanderings, (to which we are always too prone,) we must summon you into the divine presence, so as to let the matter we deal with you about, be transacted as in that presence: we must deal with you as upon such a supposition as this, It is an easy thing for you to put off a man that speaks to you?—you think you may boldly and safely slight the words of a poor mortal man: but we must have you into the presence of God, and all this affair must be transacted as under his eye. If you do disregard what a poor mortal man saith to you, come, let you and I go before the Lord now, here he is upon the throne; pray, let him have the hearing of the controversy between you and us; give him the hearing of it, let him see the state of the case, submit the matter between us to his judgment, whether you ought not to receive such and such truths, whether you ought not to comply and yield to the authority of such and such precepts, and whether you ought not to dread and shun to the uttermost such and such sins. Pray, let the great God have the hearing of the business; we summon you into his presence, and would not have you regard us in what we say, but him. And if we should go to particular instances; it may be, there are such and such sins that divers of you have been from time to time admonished of, and it hath been all in vain; you would never give us the hearing; we have spoke (as it were) to the wind. Suppose a licentious young man have given up himself to walk in the way of his own heart; and we have reasoned the matter with such, and debated it with them, whether it were not safer for them to be under the divine government, to walk according to divine prescriptions, than follow the hurry and impetus of sensual inclinations; telling them this will be your death, this will be your ruin, this you will rue for another day; but they will not hear us. Then we only say in this case, ‘Come, and let you and I go before the Lord;’ and let the matter be reasoned out in his sight, or in his hearing, and let him judge between you and us, whether you ought not to hearken, whether it will be fit for you, a creature, to oppose the will of your Creator; one that was raised out of the dust but the other day, to oppose your appetite and inclination to his authority, to his wisdom, to his good, and righteous, and holy will? Do but try, and see what courage and confidence you can have, thus to give the cause to your own will, fancy, and humour, against his will, wisdom, and authority; now you

are brought before his throne, and now the matter comes to be transacted immediately as under his eye, between you and a poor messenger of his, that he employs in his work; and so, though we can only directly do our own part in this business, as appealing to conscience under God's eye; we must likewise put you upon your part, that is, must summon you, and draw you in with us, into such an appeal to God, when we are dealing with your consciences in their souls' concerns.

Now, by this time, I hope you see what this transaction with the consciences of men, as in the sight of God doth mean. And if.

2ndly. You would know why it must be thus, why this transaction should be with the consciences of men in the sight of God, manifold reasons presently offer themselves. As,

1. It is his work that we are employed in, his business that we go about, when we speak to men to turn and live, when we would have them repent and believe the gospel; when we would have you come back to God, and pay your homage unto him, it is his work that we are doing all this time. And why should we not, as much as it is possible, aim and endeavour, that we may see how his work is done? That is, that we bring you under his eye as much as in us is.

2. We go about this work of his continually in his name. It is his work, and done in his name; by his authority we continue in it, being sent of him. Why should not what is done in his name, be done under his eye, even of our own design and choice, as much as is possible, on the one hand and the other? For whatsoever we are to do, we are to do in the Lord's name; we that speak, are to speak in the Lord's name; you that hear, are to hear in the Lord's name, or hear what is spoken in his name. And why should it not be a matter of choice with us, that all be transacted as under his eye and in his sight? And,

3. He hath equal power over us, and over you; his power obtains alike over all; and where we are sure his power is alike over all, why should we not all endeavour alike to walk under his eye, and labour to approve ourselves to his eye, under which all are? And,

4. He perfectly knows all matters of fact that do belong to this transaction; and, therefore, since we are sure he

doth, it is better that we consider it, and accordingly, study to approve ourselves to his inspection; he doth know all the matter of fact; he knows my thoughts, and all your thoughts, throughout this whole transaction, on such a day, and at such a time as this. And,

5. He is the only competent judge of the matter of right; whether you or I do right or wrong, in reference to what is spoken and heard. And lastly,

6. To be sure, he will be the final judge; it is good for us to consent and agree to it, that he shall be the present judge, and that then this transaction be carried on designedly under his eye; he will be the judge at last, when the secret of all hearts shall be laid open, and there is no declining his judgment; certainly, therefore, it is the wisest and best course, as much as possible by consent, and willingly to bring things under his eye, and notice now; and endeavour to approve all this transaction to the inspection, the present inspection of that eye, the final judgment whereof we cannot avert.

And so way is made for somewhat of use, in reference to this two-fold observation, that we have thus far insisted on: many things might be said, but for present take this.

We may see by all this what the case is like, of them that live long disobedient to the voice of the gospel, under which they live. See a little and judge of the state of their case and affairs. They that live stately under the gospel, must be supposed to have many applications made to their consciences, for that is the very business of the gospel, immediately to apply itself to the very consciences of men; for you that have lived long under the gospel, (whether successfully or unsuccessfully,) there have been many applications made to your consciences, by those that have been employed in this work about matters of the highest importance and concern; you had best consider with what success and with what effect; but if it hath been with little, that is, if hitherto you have disobeyed the voice of that gospel, under which you have so long lived, it cannot but have been with very great regret, many turns and reclamations of your consciences: if conscience were not a capable principle of judgment, when it is applied unto, when appeals are made to it,—it would be the vainest thing in all the world to talk of commending ourselves to the consciences of men, in the sight of God, as the apostle

here speaks. Why to their consciences? It were as good do it to any thing else as conscience,—if conscience be not a principle susceptible of conviction, when it is applied unto. Therefore now let it be considered, that conscience is a judge wherever it hath place and is applied unto; it doth (as it were) keep its power; and, indeed, it is capable of sustaining several parts: where there is a judicature, there is a registry too; and it is as well capable of recording things as of judging them. It may be, many have made it their business to slur and blot the records that are kept in the court of conscience. But that is a vain thing, this shall all come into view again. Every time that thou hast come, with a vain heart, into the presence of God; every time thou hast offered here the sacrifice of a fool; every time thou hast come like such an one, with thine eyes in the ends of the earth, when they should have been intent upon the Divine Majesty, to pay thy homage to him, every time thou hast opposed resolution against conviction of conscience, thou wert convinced in thy conscience, certainly there must be a change, and a reformation; things must not be with me as they have been; it is not a right way I have been, but thou hast resolved I will not reform,—I will live as I have lived, do as I have done: every time that Christ hath been offered to thee, and thou hast refused him, and he hath had cause to complain, as in the prophet, “My people would not hearken to my voice; Israel would have none of me.” (Psalm lxxxi. 11.) They that call themselves mine, profess themselves christians; call themselves by my name, would have none of me; every time thou hast been urged, If thou wilt have life, thou must have the Son; “he that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son, hath not life.” (John v. 12.) Come, (saith God,) wilt thou have my Son? Thou hast not said yea; thy heart hath not consented; and that is all one as if thou hast said, No; when the thing hath not been done so often, hast thou been recorded a refuser of the Son of God? thy conscience hath been convinced over and over, I ought to receive the Son of God; this command being brought to me from heaven, to believe in his name; that is, to resign myself to him, and submit myself to him; but I never did, I never have; this is a most fearful case, that there ever should be such records in a man’s conscience against him; to which there have been continual additions, from Lord’s day to Lord’s day, through

a long tract of time, and yet my course hath been the same. Notwithstanding all the reclamations of conscience, there hath been no reformation in my heart, none in my life; I am just the same as I was seven or ten years ago; so many convictions of conscience yet to be answered, for they never have been yet. Oh, think of the state of their affairs that have lived long under the gospel, disobedient to it. Conscience hath been still applied to, and appealed to in the sight of God, under his eye and notice; and yet there hath been no consent, no compliance given; "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." (Rom. xiv. 22.) That carries a dreadful intimation, Cursed is he that condemneth himself in that thing which he alloweth; *that he alloweth*. It was a good thing to have accepted the Son of God, to have turned to God, and come to an agreement with him in and by his Son, and to have broken off every evil way, and to have betaken myself to a strict and regular course of walking with God, a very good thing! What a cursed thing, a dismal thing is it then to condemn oneself in the thing which he alloweth? I allow all this to be good, and so am self-condemned for not doing it. "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts." (1 John iii. 29.) When a man is condemned in his own heart; when he hath a judgment in his conscience about any matter, indefinitely considered, and his practice runs counter, so as to bring himself unawares under the judgment of it. "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemneth thyself." (Rom. ii. 1.) Which is spoken in reference to what was said in the foregoing words, "Who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things, are worthy of death, not only do the same, but take pleasure in those that do them." (Rom. i. last verse.) They know that judgment; it stands as a judgment, and a righteous one in their view; they themselves have judged this judgment to be right. Thou art then inexcusable, O man, that judgest in what thou judgest; thou hast judged such and such a way to be evil, and such and such a determination in reference thereunto to be righteous, and yet by doing that thing, thou dost run thyself under such a judgment and doom. Oh! what an inexcusable creature art thou!

SERMON V.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV 2.

Commending ourselves to every man's conscience.

OUR business must be at this time (as you foreknow) the application of two of those observations together, which have been gathered from these words, (two doctrines applied together;) to wit, the second, that the great business of the ministry lies in an immediate transaction with men's consciences; and the third, That this transaction with the conscience of men is to be managed in the sight of God. These two have been opened, and are now to be applied together; and there are many things which it is very obvious to infer from the one or the other of them.

As,

1. That therefore, in carrying on the ministerial work, such things are mostly to be insisted on, as are most accommodate to conscience, and are apt to take hold of it; and about which we may, with the greatest confidence and clearness, appeal to the consciences of men: when once it is understood what principle in men we are to apply ourselves to in the ministerial work, it is then very obvious to collect what sort of things we are principally to insist upon in the managing of it. And you see what that principle is; it is not that we are wont to call wit, or fancy, or honour, or even the speculative understanding, or a disposition to religious disputes, about little, and doubtful, and less necessary matters; much less is it carnal appetite and inclination, that is to be concerned, so as to be pleased, or (at least) not to be displeased, not to be crossed, not to be vexed, not contended against; and, therefore, the things we have to say to men, in carrying on of our ministerial work, they must be quite of another nature from what would accommodate such principles as these in them. And you may easily apprehend how instructive this inference may be to all of you; and I hope you do apprehend it, though in the direct aspect of it, it doth only respect gospel ministers. And you might very well think it strange,

* Preached January 19, 1690.

and very little worth the while, that so many hundreds of persons should come together, only to hear ministers preach to one another; but yet, when you do understand what is fit for us to preach, you will also understand what is fit for you to hear, and what is necessary for you to receive, and to expect, and covet to hear most of all, and before other things; and so you cannot but see of how universal concernment, what I now infer, must be to us all; that is, that you are not to expect from us, (if we will faithfully pursue that which is our proper work, of applying ourselves directly and closely to the consciences of men;) you are not to expect (I say) fine and quaint sentences, elegant and well-formed orations; you are not to expect curious airy notions, and speculations; and much less are you to expect, that we should only prophesy to you smooth and pleasant things, that we may be sure will not offend, that will not bear hard upon any man's inclinations, how ill or irregular soever they may be; you cannot think any thing of this to be our business, when we have conscience to deal with in this matter, and are to apply ourselves immediately and directly thither, and in the sight of God, and under his eye: nor are you to expect that we should entertain you much with perplexed disputes about little and disputable matters; and which, commonly, by how much the more disputable they are, are so much the less necessary, God having so mercifully provided, that those things that should be most necessary, should be always plain, and so should need the least dispute. I know some have wondered, that when divers have very much concerned themselves in this juncture of time, both from the pulpit, and by the press, to propagate disputes about lesser differences, in matters of religion there should be so great a silence about these things among us; and we must really and freely declare to you, we have no leisure to mind those lesser things, we are taken up about greater, and we think we are bound to be taken up about unspeakably greater things. I do consider again and again, that saying of the apostle, "Study to be quiet, and do your own business." (Thess. iv. 11.) And for my part, I think this to be our business,—to deal with the consciences of men in the plainest and most important things, such as are most apt to fasten upon and take hold of conscience, for as to those lesser things, there is much that is very disputable about them; some indeed do think those things to be indifferent, which others think to be unlawful in the worship of God; yet

this is plain then, by consent on both sides, that they may be safely enough let alone, as to what they carry in themselves; and, therefore, we content ourselves to let them alone. This is plain, they may be well let alone: and when the apostle doth here speak of this thing, "by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God," you see what, and about what things it was, by what follows:—"If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost;" why then, by the manifestation of such truth as is necessary to prevent men being lost; that is, as is necessary in itself to their salvation, that they may not be lost; it was by such things by which they sought to commend themselves to the conscience of every man, in the sight of God. I know, indeed, there is a necessity, commonly alleged by some for these lesser things; that is, that though they are not necessary in themselves, they may become necessary as being enjoined. It is very true, indeed, if that were agreed on both sides, that they were indifferent,—we could readily say so with them; but they themselves very well know that that is not the state of the case between them and us; while on the one side such things are indifferent, on the other side, it is said, in the worship of God it is unlawful. And though it be true, indeed, that we are bound to obey every injunction of man, for the Lord's sake; yet we are bound to obey none of them against him; therefore, that is plain, about things in dispute, the safest way is to be unconcerned, in matters of which, there is some doubt. And every good man must concur with us in this principle, though the particular application of it to this or that case, the peculiarity and difference of their own judgment, obligeth them to disagree; but we shall certainly agree with all good and serious men, that differ from us about these lesser matters, in insisting principally and chiefly upon such matters as are necessary to save souls from being lost; for it is plain, that good and serious men do so too. And let those matters alone for the most part, and have as little mind to concern themselves about them, as we have; and no doubt, but that when we shall more generally agree to pursue such things most, as tend to promote and propagate the power of godliness, and keep it alive, and prevent (as much as in us is) all from acquiescing and taking up their rest, in any form whatsoever without it; when we shall all agree to make it our common business, to press the things that

do belong to living, real substantial godliness; and mutually to seek one another's common welfare, as we would do our own: when we agree to press and insist on these two great capital things, upon which hang all the law and the prophets; that is, loving the Lord our God, with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our might, and with all our mind, and loving our neighbour as ourselves; I doubt not, but as to all these lesser differences, or differences about lesser matters, either we shall come to an agreement about them too, in time; or our disagreement will be upon the matter, equal to an agreement;—that is, we shall disagree without displeasure, without being angry at one another for our disagreement; or, because that such and such will not make our consciences the measure and standard of their's,—a poor matter of quarrel, and certainly a most unrighteous one, that I should be offended at any man, because he will not make my conscience the measure of his; and it is upon the matter, all one in this our present state, whether there be a full and throughout agreement in every little thing, in judgment or practice; or, whether we can, very contentedly, bear with one another's differences. If we can do so, if we can disagree with one another modestly, and without expecting that another should resign and surrender the judgment of his conscience to the government of mine: If we can disagree with an humble sense of our common, yet remaining ignorance, and how little do all of us know, and how much yet needs to be added to our knowledge, even about the most important things; truly, disagreement upon such terms, so placid, so charitable, so calm, so unapt to offend, and which doth so little offend, will be a good step,—the next step to a perfect throughout agreement. It may be, that will never be in this world, or while our earthly state continues. But if our disagreement be thus managed, it will be less material; whether it be or no unto our peace, it can never be necessary unto them that are of a peaceable temper and disposition of themselves aforehand; but they who are not so, that have an unpeaceable temper and disposition in them, will always find one matter of quarrel and another; and if such things were once composed and taken up, would be sure to find out others; but this we may always reckon upon, that such as will be faithful in the ministerial work, we must expect to hear from them such things (as you have heard) that may carry in them a recommendableness to the consciences of men: in which,

when conscience is urged with matter of duty upon them, it will apprehend a *bonum*: my conscience tells me I shall be the better for it if I take this course, if I walk in such a way as the great things which concern the substance of religion direct unto, whereas those lesser matters, when you come to seek in them for a *bonum*, search into them for what they have of real good in them; you think to grasp at them for somewhat, and you grasp at nothing; you go to embrace them, and you embrace only a shadow, and hug an empty cloud and no more. They are things which conscience cannot feel to have any real and substantial goodness in them;—that then is the first thing hence inferred. Are we, in our ministerial work, to apply and commend ourselves to the consciences of men, and even in the sight of God? We then must deal with them about such things, that are most apt and accommodate to this purpose, to take hold of men's consciences.

2. If the work of the ministry do lie so much about men's consciences, we must reckon that the work of the Holy Ghost (who is to animate this ministry, and make it prosperous) must lie first and most immediately about the consciences of men too; not that it takes up there, but it is through conscience that it must touch men's hearts. "We commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God; but if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not. But God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." If you view the series of the discourse, you will find that that speaks (as well as the matter speaks) itself, that God's way is to shine into hearts through convinced consciences: and this ministration, in all the foregoing chapter that the apostle refers to, is called the manifestation of the Spirit, and by it we are "changed into the same image from glory to glory, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord; to wit, as by the Spirit of the Lord." "Therefore," (saith the apostle) in the following words, "having received this ministry, we faint not;" a ministry, managed by the Holy Ghost. Now, if the immediate first subject of this ministry hath to do with the consciences of men, then the consciences of men must be that which the Holy Ghost must have to do with too; for the supreme Agent, and the subordinate, are both to operate upon the same sub-

ject,—as you now that are writing, your hand and pen write upon the same paper, and not your hand upon one, and your pen upon another. It is conscience that is the seat of conviction, and thither the Holy Ghost, by the gospel ministry, doth apply itself for this purpose; “When he is come, he shall convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” (John xvi. 8.) The Comforter, (so we read it,) when he is come, shall do so and so, but sure we do much misread it when we read it so. *Paracletos* is the word, the *paraclete*, the proper signification is the advocate or pleader, a pleader as at law. The disciples were here overwhelmed with sorrow, to think what would become of them when their Lord was gone, of which he had been immediately foretelling them; “Because I have told you that I must be gone from you, sorrow hath filled your heart;” that is, they did recount with themselves, since he had told them, in the close of the foregoing chapter, that they should be witnesses for him, because they had been with him from the beginning; then, think they, the whole weight and stress of the christian cause in this world lies upon our shoulders, and we shall surely sink under it; Who are we that we should think to set up a new religion in the world,—a religion, against which all sorts, both Jews and Gentiles have so rooted and natural a prejudice? What, are we for this? Why, saith our Lord Christ, never trouble yourselves, when I go, the advocate shall come,—that pleader, that mighty pleader; and he shall make strange work in the world when once he comes; he shall take up my cause; whereas I have been traduced and charged as a seducer, and a deceiver, he shall convince the world of sin, because they believe not in me, and of my righteousness and the equity of my righteous cause; and, thereupon, of the very completing and perfection of that righteousness, which is to be had by me, which depends thereupon; and of judgment, when I shall be known to be enthroned, and to have all government, and principality, and power, put under me, or into my hands,—and so the christian cause shall live, and spread, and triumph, when I am gone, and so much the more for my being so, for if I be not gone, that great pleader will not come, and when he comes, this shall be his great business, conviction,—he shall fasten such conviction upon the consciences of men, they shall not be able to withstand and baffle. Oh, when that mighty Spirit comes among us, then will no man be able to persist in a carnal

course and habit of heart and life; but this Spirit will make them weary of it, they will never be able to endure the weight and pressure of his convictions, when through the gospel ministry he comes to fasten and take hold of consciences, and to implead them upon such an account. What? Is this christianity? Is this like a living union with the Son of God, the Lord from heaven? To live continually like worms of this earth, grovelling in the dust, always minding and savouring no higher, and no greater thing? But, again,

3. Is the ministerial work to be managed in the very sight of God, with the consciences of men? Then (this having a very ill look upon the kingdom and interest of the wicked one) it is obvious further to infer, that the devil's work must lie very much too about the consciences of men; that is to blind conscience, to cheat conscience, to deceive conscience, to disguise and misrepresent things to the consciences of men; so you see it allows, if our gospel be bid,—if it doth not reach home with convictive and energetical light to the very consciences of men, it is because “the god of this world hath blinded their minds;” it doth reach home with such light, except to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded their minds. If men cannot see what is their way and duty in very plain and evident things; as that a man, who was a sinner even by nature, and under wrath, can never be acceptable to God, but for the sake of a Redeemer; and never for his sake, if he have not living union with him, if he be not in him, and so in him as to be a new creature,—old things being done away, and all things being become new. If men cannot see truth in so plain matters as these, that speak themselves to every man's conscience, it is, because the God of this world hath blinded their eyes. If the work of the Gospel, and of the Spirit that breathes in it, be with the consciences of men, the devil's work must lie there too; if it be possible to blind conscience and disguise things to conscience; that is, to corrupt men's judgments of things, and to make them to apprehend things otherwise than they are. And so it was that he did apply himself to our first parents, only by putting false glosses upon those plain preceptive and minatory words that should have obliged and awed conscience. Oh, never think God meaneth such severity to you, ye shall not die if you eat of this fruit; never think he intended you should die; no, this is that will

make you wise and knowing, far beyond what you are, you will be as gods, knowing good and evil. His business was to put a false gloss and colour upon things, to deceive their judgments and consciences, and to lead them into transgression, and this his design is still to keep men in that state of apostacy into which he had drawn them from returning to God, only by imposing upon and cheating their consciences. Notwithstanding this loose and careless course you hold, never trouble yourselves, all will be well enough, a formal religion will serve the turn, and be less painful and laborious to you than that real one, and that living one that is from time to time so much pressed upon you. It will serve your turn to go to church, or go to a meeting, and hear a sermon on the Lord's day, and live as you list all the week long, you never need concern yourselves further. All the devil's care is to keep conscience from doing its duty and its proper office, that if it be applied and appealed to by us, in the ministry of the gospel, you may not attend it; it may not be at leisure to hear what we say, that it may be kept asleep, or diverted some way or other, or that it may otherwise attend things than according to the truth.

4. We may further infer, hence, that since the business of the ministry is to transact with conscience, from time to time, in the very sight of God: they that live under such a ministry, if conscience ever come to be awakened into exercise, they must live a very weary life, if they live in a course of sin and estrangement from God. They that will, (I say,) under such a ministry, sin on still, and wander from God, still they will lead a very weary life; it must needs be a very uneasy course that such must hold in the world; for if conscience be awakened and do attend, they will be continually hearing things that tend to disturb and disquiet them, and make them apprehend danger, and see themselves like to be ruined, and undone, and lost, in the course that they hold: and therefore, certainly, the case is very deplorable of such persons, who, under such a ministry, do still live in sin, whether they live in a course of very gross wickedness, or whether they keep in a course of vain formal religion, and no more. They must be very uneasy if conscience be awake; and if conscience be not awake, it is worse, and their case more deplorable. And really it is dismal to think of it, that such persons should bear so much, from day to day, that hath a tendency in it

to make them to fear and suspect their present way, and present state, with so little effect; for on they go, only because (though that be uneasy to them) they apprehend to get that sin subdued and mortified, that hath governed in them and had the throne, will be more uneasy; and since it comes to pass, that, things being brought to this pass, either sin must be mortified, or conscience must be mortified, they betake themselves to the latter. If they cannot be patient of it, that sin must die, and undergo mortification, then, of consequence, they must betake themselves to this, that conscience must undergo this dying and mortification; and so, really, they have a very uneasy task of it, that they must, for their own peace sake, be continually fighting against conscience, from one Lord's day to another, and endeavouring that it may let them alone in their old security, in their old carnality, in their old neglect of God. Here is their business with their consciences. Oh, conscience, let me live in neglect of Christ, and be quiet! Let me live fearless of God in this life, and be quiet! Let me live a prayerless life, and be quiet! But conscience cannot very easily submit to let such be quiet, because there are such courses taken, from time to time, while they live under such a ministry, whereby we must be applying ourselves to their consciences, in the sight of God. This awakens conscience afresh, and then it must be laid asleep again; so toilsome and uneasy a way of it have some to perdition; they are fain to fight their way to hell, even through so many and so great difficulties. And,

5. We may further infer, that if the gospel ministry is principally to be taken up in dealing with the consciences of men in the sight of God, it can be no shame to any man to be in this way conquered and subdued, and brought under to the foot of God in Christ; it can be no shame to any body to be thus conquered: for to be conquered by conscience, is, upon the matter, to be conquered by himself. You have no reason to be ashamed to be conquered by yourself; you yield to yourself in the case; you yield to your own light, that which God hath made your own; you yield to your convinced judgment; you have no cause to be ashamed of that. It is a shame for a man to be cheated, to be imposed upon, to be made to appear a fool, as every sinner is that goes on in the way of his own heart, "disobedient, and deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures." Titus iii. 3. But it is no shame for a man to be undeceived; it is no shame for a man to be brought to exer-

cise a right judgment, once certified and set aright in him. This is a glory, to be thus conquered; you are indeed conquered; you alter your course; you cease to be what you were: but it is brought to that pass, you do but yield to yourself, yield to your own light, yield to your own judgment, and to the power of that conviction you see is no longer to be withstood. And upon the same account,

6. They that do conquer conscience and gospel-light in such a sense, have no reason to boast of their victory; they have very little reason to brag; they that can say and tell their companions, I have heard such and such a sermon, and it put me into a deadly qualm; I knew not what to do; my heart almost failed me, and began to misgive me; and I began to think within myself, I must alter my course, I must become a Christian in good earnest: I had such thoughts as these, and such inclinations, but I have overcome them; I have conquered conscience; I have got the victory over them. Alas! these men have little reason to boast of this, of having conquered their reason, judgment, conscience, and light, and made these to give place to lust and sensual inclinations; when a man hath been summoned and called into the presence of God, and hath had so mighty a load laid upon his spirit, as to have such a thing contested with him in the sight of God, and under the divine eye, yet he hath conquered it, got the victory; this, certainly, he hath no cause to boast or brag of. A dismal victory! a few such victories as these will undo him quite. If God should let you carry the cause, carry the victory, from day to day, this victory will end in a total and endless ruin. Again,

7. We may further infer, that, since this ministerial work is to be managed with the very consciences of men in the sight of God, it is one of the most weighty solemn things that a man can possibly go about, to hear a sermon where he is likely to be dealt with at this rate; that is, generally to go to hear a gospel sermon, according to the true import of the gospel, and the true design of the gospel ministry, it is one of the awfulest solemnest things that a man can go about in the world; for he ought to reckon in this case, I am now going to such a place, and for what? Why, it is to hear a sermon, in which I expect my conscience is to be appealed to all along; and it is to be appealed unto in the sight of God; and the minister will summon me into the presence of God: and if I do not yield,—but my heart hesitates, and stands off,—I expect to hear

this from him; Come, let you and I debate this matter in the sight of God, before the throne of God, and see if you know how to baffle conscience, and reject its convictions, in the sight of God, and while God looks on and audits the business between you and me, and between you and your own consciences. It is a great thing to go to hear a sermon upon such terms: many little think what they do, when they run to a sermon as they would to a play, or to such a meeting as they would to a bear-baiting: but if they would but consider what the gospel ministry is, and wherein it lies, in a transaction with men's consciences, and that transaction to be managed in the sight of God, they would find it an awful thing to go to hear a sermon upon these terms.

2d Use. And, therefore, now for a conclusion to be added to these inferences, as somewhat of further use, pray let this put you, in the next place, upon reflection, upon considering; you have lived long under the gospel, under the ministry of it; the very business whereof was to transact with your consciences in the sight of God. Pray do but inquire,

1. Have you been wont to engage your consciences in this transaction? And,

2. Have you been wont to do it as in the sight of God, yea or nay? for hitherto you have been called, to this you have been called; your consciences have been applied and appealed to: have you heard their voice answering thus; Why, I am called to a transaction, to my part in a transaction I agree readily, my conscience shall be appealed to? And, further, have you agreed the transaction shall be in the sight of God, answering thus; "I am willing to be judged by the impartial supreme Judge, and if I cannot approve myself in his sight, I will condemn and abase myself in his sight?" I pray, hath it been wont to be so with you in that long tract of time wherein you have sat under the gospel? Have you engaged conscience in such a transaction as this? And have you done it in the sight of God, from time to time? If you have not, hence is your not profiting; hence is your sitting under the gospel, from year to year, to no purpose. Conscience hath been spoken to, and would never answer; you have been careful to keep it asleep, to keep it undisturbed; you have declined the divine presence; you would not come and present yourselves before the judicature of God; you have laboured to stifle all such thoughts as much as in you was; your case is,

then, as our Saviour represents it with the Jews: "Whereto shall I liken this generation; they are like children sitting in the market place, and calling their fellows, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." Matt. xi. 16. Even so it is with this generation. And is it not so with our generation, too? We speak to the consciences of men, and they do not echo back; they give no correspondent answer: when we would transact with them, they are dead, or asleep. And hence, no good is done; conscience is not engaged; it will not advert to the business in hand; it minds it not: and thereupon the kingdom of God doth not suffer violence, (Matt. xi. 12.) as in that same context; "For until now (saith our Saviour) the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." But now there is a dead calm, a dead flat, and we pipe to men, and they do not dance; we mourn to them, and they do not lament; there is no echo, no correspondent voice. This is now (saith he) the case of this generation. But I might here be a little more particular in my inquiry. And,

1. You know you have been often urged and pressed, as to a thing wherein the very substance of all religion doth inchoatively consist and lie, all serious and living religion; that is, a solemn surrender of yourselves to God in Christ. "Yield yourselves to God." Rom. vi. 13. "Present yourselves to him a living sacrifice." Rom. xii. 1. As it is said of those Christians, "They gave themselves to the Lord." 2 Cor. viii. 5. Hath not this been a thing plain to your consciences, that you ought to have done so? And have none of you lived in the neglect of it to this day? You could never find a leisure time wherein solemnly to apply yourselves to God in Christ, and say, Lord, I now come to surrender to thee thine own; I have brought thee back a stray, a wandering creature, myself, my own self: accept a poor wandering soul, that now desires to give up itself to thee, and take thee, in Christ, for mine. A plain thing as any thing can be to any conscience of man: conscience hath been frequently applied to in this case, as in the sight of God, and yet, from year to year, no such thing as this hath ever been done. Again,

2. To consider how often you have been spoken to about solemn preparation for such a day's work as this; to come with prepared hearts, in some measure, at least to design to come prepared to the holy solemnities of such a day.

God knows how often you have been applied to, and conscience hath been spoken to in this matter; but with what effect, you in great part know, that still are wont to rush upon the sacred solemnities of such a day without considering—It is for my life, for my soul; it is in order to eternity, that I am approaching into the presence of God; and that it is that God that made me, I have to do with; him I am going to serve, him I am going to seek.

3. How often hath conscience been appealed to about prayer? A course of prayer? Of secret closet prayer, and family prayer? God knows with what effect. A dismal thing, if any of you have suffered a conviction of conscience about this years ago, and yet still live in the neglect of this, against conscience, to this very day. And,

4. About the great business of watchfulness, concerning which we have heard so much of late. Conscience hath been there applied to, as in the sight of God. Pray consider, are any of us become more watchful for it over our spirits, and over our way and course? It will be of great concernment to us, to urge ourselves, faithfully, and impartially, with such questions and inquiries as these.

And then, to close all, pray hereupon let us be persuaded and prevailed upon more to commune with conscience, and to commune with it in the sight of God, seeing we are in the sight of God put upon it. And to comply with conscience, yield to it, comport with it, and if (as was said) we cannot find our ease to admit of it, that our consciences should justify us before God, let our consciences condemn us before God, let them judge us before God. If we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged of the Lord: we shall then have the matter thus taken up between him and us; otherwise, we still remain liable to his severe and uncontrollable judgment. And to urge this, pray do but weigh these few things.

1. That conscience, often baffled, will grow stupid. It is the way to stupify conscience to baffle it often: if you get an habit of that, of running counter to light, and of imposing upon conscience, and bearing it down, it will become so tamely passive, that it will lay no restraint upon you,—you may do what you will; conscience will say no more, but let you take your course.

2. If you do so, the Spirit of God will retire too, and withdraw, and not assist conscience, which (as we are told) it doth in a way of reflex operation; but it doth as much (no doubt) in a way of direct operation, too: it

works with conscience ; and then conscience ceaseth, when there is a cessation of all such exercise with conscience ; the Spirit can no more converse with us, than with that which is dead ; when that thing is dead, quite dead, mortified into a total utter death, wherewith the Spirit of God should converse with us, then it retires, and is gone, in displeasure, as being grieved, vexed, and quenched. Oh, what a dreadful thing is that ! It is a terrible thing when the Spirit is retired and gone, merely upon that resistance that he hath met with in our consciences. His business was to co-operate with them, to work with them, and by them. And we have made it our business to stupify conscience, to stifle and suppress it : and if the Spirit be gone thereupon in displeasure, this is a fearful thing. And consider,

3. That if, through the mercy of God, conscience should ever yet awake, and the Spirit return, by how much the longer it hath been stifled, so much the more terrible it will roar upon you, when it doth return. And if you be saved at length, you will be " saved as by fire," as I may allude to those words of the apostle. But,

4. If it never awake in this world, by how much the more industriously it hath been kept asleep in you, and by how much the less it hath done the part of an instructor and director, so much the more it will do the work of a tormentor hereafter, an everlasting tormentor. And this is a most dismal thing, for an intelligent immortal spirit to come down into perdition, into the place of torment, with open eyes, and to be asked there, " How camest thou hither ?" and to be forced to answer, " It was by running all my time against my light ; it was by contending against my conscience, and the grace of the Spirit of God, to the very last ; so I made my way to perdition." Then that conscience that could never be heard before, will be heard then, and will be felt ; the worm that dies not, gnawing eternally, even eternally upon the soul, amidst that fire and those flames that shall never be quenched. But, in the last place,

5. Consider, too, the sweet peace and tranquillity that must ensue upon complying with conscience all along ; following its light, obeying its convictions, keeping up a correspondence betwixt your judgments and consciences, and the temper of your spirits, and the course of your walking. This is an heaven upon earth. If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.

Upon these terms we may look in upon our souls, and behold all quiet: I have seen my way, and walked in it, as the grace of God hath kept me. "This is my rejoicing, the testimony of a good conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity; not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I have had my conversation in the world;" which is heaven on this side heaven. How pleasant Sabbaths would you keep on these terms, when, looking back upon the last week, you have the testimony of your conscience; I have laboured to my uttermost to exercise a good conscience towards God and towards men, according to the light that I have received from his word, and by that gospel ministry under which I am? With how much peace shall a man upon one Lord's day look back upon his course through the foregoing week, since the former Lord's day? This would make Sabbaths pleasant days to you, upon the review of that sweet commerce you have had with him in former times, and in expectation of being thus led on, from Sabbath to Sabbath, to the everlasting Sabbath, at length, that remains for the people of God.

SERMON VI.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 2.

Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

WE have considered the words according to what, in themselves, they do import, and it remains now only to consider them (as we also proposed to do) in the reference to which they bear to the foregoing verse. "Therefore, as we have received this ministry, we faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, commending ourselves." And so it appears very plain that this course which the servants of God have held, in managing their ministerial work, to apply themselves directly therein to the consciences of men, hath been one of their great preservations against fainting in their work; so that they have

* Preached February 22, 1890.

pursued it with so much the more vigour and resolution upon this account, that herein they have made it their business to recommend themselves in the very sight of God to the consciences of men. And so we have this observation, as hath been already told you.

4th Doctrine. That the faithful ministers of the gospel, from their applying in their work to the very consciences of men, have very great encouragement to go on in it without fainting. And hence it will be requisite only,

1. To shew, briefly, what this fainting means. And then,

2. To shew you how great an encouragement against it this is; to wit, their applying themselves all along directly to the very consciences of men, even in the sight of God.

1. What this not fainting meaneth. Fainting (as was told you) is two-fold, as is obvious to all, either bodily, or mental; and it is manifest, this is mental fainting that is here disclaimed and disavowed, such as we find mentioned in Hebrews xii. 3. "Lest ye be weary and faint in your minds." Our minds do not faint in our work, while we are enabled to recommend ourselves in it to every man's conscience in the sight of God; and that fainting of the mind is again two-fold, it signifies either sloth or laziness, or else despondency and dejection of spirit: the word rendered fainting, hath this double import in the other places of scripture, where we find the same word used: "Our Lord spake a parable to such a purpose, to teach us to pray always, and not to faint." Luke xviii. at the beginning. That we neither grow slothful in it, nor despond upon it, so, be not weary of well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. Gal. vi. 9. If you do not grow worse, if you do not suffer yourselves to be seized with a spirit of sloth, and if you do not yield to a desponding spirit. Now to be encouraged in our spirits doth include the opposite of these; for by how much the more there is of holy fortitude in any man's soul, so much the more there will be of lively and active vigour accompanying and going along with it.

And it is the design of the Apostle in this negative expression, to conjoin both these, fortitude and diligence, in opposition to despondency and sloth; and that there doth arise a very great spring of such enlivening vigour and fortitude, from this very reflection, that the faithful ministers of Christ may have upon the course of their

procedure in their work, *viz.*, That they have constantly all along in it, made it their business to recommend themselves to the consciences of men in the sight of God. That is the thing. I am now,

2. To make out unto you, (having shewn you what this not fainting meaneth;) and this encouragement (which, from our applying ourselves to the consciences of men we do receive) will appear to be different, or to arise to us in different ways, according to the different consideration we may have of the thing itself, this application to conscience in the sight of God; that may be considered two ways, either in the effect or in the design.

In the effect; the immediate effect I mean, and that is the conviction of conscience. The immediate effect of such application to conscience, is, the conviction of conscience; and the design thereof, that imports our steady aimings at this thing, to fasten conviction on men's consciences, as much as is possible to us: the former of these, therefore, speaks the convictiveness of this application to conscience, and the latter speaks the sincerity of it. The former is grounded on, and referred to, the former words in the text, "commending ourselves to every man's conscience;" and the latter refers to the latter words, "in the sight of God;" for as the convictiveness of this application terminates upon conscience itself: so sincerity herein terminates upon God, or upon the eye of God, who is the only judge of sincerity; hereupon these are the two things that are so very encouraging in this case,—the convictiveness of this application to conscience, and the sincerity of it.

1. The convictiveness of it; that is, a very encouraging, enlivening, fortifying thing to the heart of a serious minister, and one who is faithful in his work, and that from a two-fold account; to wit, as considering such a conviction of the consciences of men, (for we are now considering the effect and the aptitude of this application to produce and work it;) I say, considering this conviction of men's consciences,—1st. As the direct way to their conversion. And 2ndly, As that which however gains for the great God a testimony in their own very souls.

1st. It is a mighty encouraging thing, as it is the direct way to their conversion. If men be convinced, if the words of the gospel do once take hold of their consciences, this leads to conversion, it hath a tendency thitherward; and though we do not know that we convince the consciences

of men ; we do not certainly know it, but when we are told ; we sometimes are told, some do come to us, and own their convictions, and declare them to us ; yet if we do but hope from the very evidence of what we see, that conscience is taken hold of, that some conviction is impressed on the consciences of them that hear us ; this hope invigorates, enlivens, animates us, helps somewhat against fainting in our work. “ Having this hope,” (saith the Apostle in the close of the foregoing chapter, and referring to the self-same thing,) “ we use great boldness of speech ;” we read it plainness of speech, boldness it signifies ; having this hope, we use great *parressy*, we use great freedom of speech ; we speak as men that do expect to prevail, as those that look not to be baffled, nor to be disappointed in what we are designing in this matter, in our treaties and transactions with the souls, and especially with the consciences of men. We use great freedom of speech, having this hope, saith he : and so, in the following chapter, knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men ; we persuade men, and are made manifest to God, and we trust, also, we are manifest in your consciences. 2 Cor. v. 11. We trust we are, we hope we are, manifest in your consciences ; and, therefore, we persuade with so much the more vigour, and so much the more earnestness, as apprehending, as trusting, and hoping, that you do in your consciences believe the things to be true, and real, and important, that we deal with you about : and that this must needs be a very enlivening thing, and tends much to animate a serious minister of Christ, and one who is in good earnest with his work, will appear if you do but consider these two things ;—1st. What reason a man hath to hope, that conviction of conscience may end in conversion. And 2ndly. Consider how encouraging a thing this hope of conversion must itself be. These two things are distinctly to be considered, to make out our present purpose.

1. There is reason to hope, that when conviction hath taken hold of men’s consciences, it may end in conversion ; and so the hope of this, arising from the very plain evidence of things, that there is some conviction wrought in the minds and consciences of men, it gives ground to a farther hope, to an higher hope ; if they become convinced more may become of it. If our blessed Lord Jesus Christ hath by this means made way into their consciences, it is to be hoped he will find a way into their hearts ; and sure the

hope of converting souls is not altogether without ground, if we may hope that there are convictions wrought in the mind and conscience, and that upon these several accounts, to wit,

(1.) This is the only way by which, ordinarily and according to the constitution of human nature, the hearts of men are accessible. They are accessible but this way, that is, through their convinced consciences:—they are not otherwise accessible, than as light is let into their consciences, by which they may discern the truth, the greatness, the importance, the necessity of the things themselves that we deal with them about. And,

(2.) This is the gaining of a soul in part, the convincing of his conscience, the design is an entire conquest of the whole soul; this is a work that consists of parts, and is to be done by parts; and when the conscience is won, here is part of this work done, and there is so much the less behind; there is less to do than if men's consciences were not in the least apprehensive as yet what they were to believe, or what they were to do in order to their being saved.

(3.) The very leading part, the introductory part of the work is done, when this is done; when conscience is convinced about the great things proposed to men in the gospel; so that they say, I do in my conscience apprehend this to be reasonable, just, and necessary, which I am required to do by the same gospel; when this (I say) is done, the leading introductory part of the work is done. As in going about to take a rebel-garrison, there is a mighty thing done if a port be gained, and especially if the noblest port belonging to such a garrison be taken. And it is the Apostle's similitude afterwards in this Epistle, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds, and the subjecting every thought and imagination to the obedience of Christ." The conscience or practical judgment is subjected, so that we have an end of men's counter-risings; they have nothing in their judgment to oppose, their imaginations they are gained, their notions, their thoughts, their apprehensions are certified and set right in these points. This is now a great thing, for it is the leading thing, and the introductory thing, in order to the work of conversion. The judgment, which, (I say) in reference to matters of practice, is conscience; that is the leading faculty, and when once that is gained, and a conquest is obtained over that, it is as if, in the

taking (as was said) of a rebel garrison, the counter-scarp is won, or the great port-royal is won, which is a great thing. And,

(4.) Not only when conscience is convinced is the soul so far won, gained, subdued, and brought under; but it is also turned against the rest that hold out, as if in the taking of some principal fortress; besides that the opposition from what part is gained ceaseth, suppose a battery be placed there against the rest that stands out; and this is the case, when conscience is once brought under conviction by the power and evidence of the great things of the gospel; here is a battery placed against an obstinate will, against perverse inclinations, against unruly, tumultuous affections and passions; so that now the man is made to batter himself if conscience be once convinced; but if there be an inclination in the sinner still to persist, and go on in his way of sin, he doth it at his own peril, and even at his own peril from himself, for a convinced conscience will infer this, that he must be continually battering himself, and galling himself, and shooting arrows and darts against himself.

And when the matter is once brought to this, there is some hope in the case that the sinner will turn, is like to turn, for there is not only so much of his strength gone for persevering in a sinful course, but it is turned and bent against him. Christ hath now got a party within him, and the colours of our great Lord and Redeemer are displayed in the fort-royal, he is then demanding entrance into the soul. Let the everlasting gates of the soul fly open, that the King of Glory may enter in; the kingdom of God is nigh, just at the door, even at the very door, when conscience is convinced about the great things of the gospel, the very port is taken, and the ensigns of our glorious Lord displayed there, so that it must require a great deal of obstinacy against him; now that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ are so very near at the door, and the voice of the summons sounds at the gate, Sinner, surrender now to thy rightful Lord, yield or perish. If this be said to him, and he is convinced already, I have no other way but to yield or die, and there is hope of safety in yielding; this carries a great appearance that conversion is towards, the matter is drawing to a blessed issue with such a poor soul. And,

(5.) When conscience is thus gained and won upon by so immediate direct application to it in the management of this work, the way is now open for the intromitting

and setting in whatsoever considerations besides may be of any use towards the bringing of the soul to a surrender and compliance with the Lord Jesus; that closure with him wherein the work of conversion doth most formally consist and lie; a turning to the Lord, as the expression is in the close of the foregoing chapter. If conscience be convinced, then is here way made for terrible considerations to be let in upon the soul. And if conscience be convinced, here is way made for most comfortable considerations to be let in upon the soul too; the way is open to reach and apply both these great principles of fear and of hope, which are mighty engines, by which the souls of men are turned this way or that: here are all the tremendous considerations that can be thought of, for which way is open, if conscience be convinced, I am a sinner, a guilty creature, I lie obnoxious to Divine justice and revenge every moment; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, they are my portion; nothing else is due to me. And then, at the same time, if conscience be convinced of the truth of the gospel, here is an open way made for all consolatory considerations that might move the principle of hope; Christ is represented as ready to receive a returning soul. The sinner must be supposed to believe, in his own conscience, that it is most certainly true, Christ will not reject a poor soul that throws itself at his feet, as ready to perish: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." In my conscience, must the sinner say, I believe this is true: he would never have come down into this world, and become man, and have died on a cross, to save sinners, if he would throw away a soul that returns to him, and casts itself upon him: I believe, in my conscience, this is true, that as I am lost if I come not to a closure with the Son of God in believing, so I cannot but be safe if I do.

Again,

(6.) There is reason for this hope that such convictions may end in conversion, because that very ministry that is thus directed to conscience, that is levelled at conscience, and hath done it with such effect already, is the ministration of the Holy Ghost, the ministration of the Spirit and life, as it is largely discoursed in the foregoing chapter throughout, and which makes the apostle say, "having this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not." This ministry; what ministry? Not a dead letter, but an animated ministry; that is, (as it were,) the very vehicle of life and spirit; therefore, we faint not; therefore, we go

on with all the vigour which a lively hope can give us in our work; as if he should have said, Why should we not hope to prevail, when we apply ourselves to the spirits of men, of creatures that can understand, that can use thought? Our business doth not lie with stocks, and stones, and brutes; but we apply ourselves to the very consciences of men, the very spirits of men; and we do it under the conduct of the Divine Spirit, whose ministration it is that is put into our hands; why then should we not hope to prevail? Why should we not hope, that they that come unconverted, should go away converted, at least if we can prevail upon them so far as that they are once brought to admit of conviction? And yet,

(7.) There is further reason for this hope, from what hath been done already in the same way, and by the same agency. We have read of thousands that have fallen under the power of this ministry; thousands at once, as in that, Acts ii. 37, who have been pierced to the very heart, and cried out; "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Heart doth comprehend and take in conscience there; the governing faculty, together with the governed, as is usual in scripture, to take heart in that latitude. A serious faithful servant of Christ in this work hath reason to argue thus; *Quicquid fieri potuit potest*. That which hath been done, and by the same agency, that method which hath succeeded to so happy purposes before, the like may be done again in the same way, by the same agency, and in the same method, why should not we expect, why should not we hope for it? especially if we add,

(8.) Lastly, that this ministry, in connection with the same power and presence, is promised to be continued to the end of the world: "Go and teach all nations;" I appoint you to go and make my claim to all the creation; for all power is given me, both in heaven and earth; and go you and teach all nations; disciple them, proselyte them to me; gather in the world, lay my claim for me, and in my name, to all the world, and tell men every where what I am, the Redeemer, and what I have, by my blood, the price of that redemption, purchased, even an absolute dominion and power over all the world; I died, and was buried, and rose again, that I might become Lord both of living and dead. All power hereby is consigned and made over to me, and by virtue of that power, I commission you: go forth every where, and challenge the world, upon that account, to submit to me, their rightful Lord. And

herein lies being converted, when the hearts of men are brought seriously to do so, to recognize the Redeemer's right, and to make an absolute surrender and resignation of their souls to him, and to God through him. Now this ministry, and thus attended, is promised to continue to the end of the world: "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world." We know very well those particular persons were to shut up their time with that age, and yet this work was always to go on till the end of time, and through all ages: and why should not we expect, who come with the same authority and commission, but that when we do, in the business of this ministry, apply ourselves directly to the consciences of men in the sight of God, there should still be some success, even as long as this world lasts, and as long as this ministry lasts, why should we not always hope? But then,

2. Supposing there be ground for such an hope, that our applying ourselves to the consciences of men, so as to convince them, may end in conversion, how doth it appear this hope is encouraging? If there be reason for this hope, is there any reason to be assigned why this hope should give courage, vigour, and liveliness, to those that are employed in this work? The evidencing that there is, will rest upon two things; 1st. that the faithful ministers of Christ do very seriously desire the conversion of souls; and, 2dly, that the hopefulnes of what a man desires cannot but be a very enlivening thing to the spirit of any man. Let these two be put together, and it evidenceth our present purpose; that is, that the serious ministers of the gospel do desire the conversion of souls, and that the hopefulnes of any thing that a man desires, must needs be very reviving and consolatory to him.

1. The former of these doth sufficiently speak itself; and I doubt not, in all your consciences, you never knew any minister of Christ, whom you had any reason to look upon as serious in his work, but you could not but apprehend him very much to desire the conversion of souls: for,

(1.) It is the very end of their office. How can it be but we must desire to reach the end for which our very office itself is appointed, and for which we were put into it?

(2.) The desire of the conversion of souls, it is nothing else but spiritualized humanity; that is, supposing we do believe a future state, or (as the apostle expresseth it in the

next chapter) do in any measure understand the terrors of the Lord, the terrors of the judgment day, which is there referred to; "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men. And herein we are manifest unto God, and we trust, also in your consciences." You must suppose if we should understand and know any thing of the terrors of the Lord, and of a judgment day, that we must desire the conversion of souls: you will not look upon as so inhumane creatures, that we should have a prospect before our eyes of so dreadful a destruction as unconverted souls will certainly fall into, and not desire their escape, not desire they may fly "from the wrath to come;" effectually so to fly as to escape that wrath. And again,

(3.) It is a required conformity to our blessed Lord, in whose name we come to you, whom we find to have been a mighty lover of souls. Did not his descent into this world testify it? Was not his death upon the cross the most significant? And is not the remembrance of it a standing testimony hereof? And how can we bear his name, and sustain to be called the ministers of Christ, and not mightily desire the conversion of souls? And,

2. If we do, then the hope of it cannot but be a very enlivening and encouraging thing. The hopefulnes of what a man desires, and bath his heart set upon, carries the most invigorating power with it that any thing can be supposed to do. For,

(1.) It is very plain, despair of any design or undertaking, damps all endeavours. No man can rationally endeavour that whereof he hath no hope. It sinks a man's spirit to be engaged in a work in which, from time to time, he can hope to do nothing, as common experience and the reason of things do speak. And,

(2.) On the other hand, it is very plain, that hope is the great engine which keeps the world in motion, and at work every where: it is the spring of all action all the world over, and of every kind whatsoever; the intelligent world, I mean. No man propounds an end to himself, but the hope of effecting it is the very thing that sets him and keeps him on work through the whole course of that endeavour that is requisite to it. The merchant trades in hope; yea, and (go to the very meanest employment) the ploughman ploughs in hope, and sows in hope, that he may be partaker of his hope. And sure we are not in our work to deviate from the common rules that guide all mankind in every undertaking

whatsoever, and that doth influence them throughout that undertaking. Why are not we (think you) to plough in hope, and sow in hope, that we may be partakers of our hope?

Then, these two things being evident, that it is in the eyes of serious ministers of Christ a desirable thing; and that they that do seriously desire it, must needs be very much encouraged in their design and endeavour of it, when it doth appear to them an hopeful thing; so far as there is hope that the conviction that is taking hold of the consciences of men, may end in their conversion. Then this apprehension must needs contribute a great deal to their not fainting in their work, who are in good earnest engaged in it. I might add,

(2.) That it is an encouraging thing, an heart-strengthening thing, thus to apply ourselves to the very consciences of men in the pursuit of this work, that however it will be as to the former thing, yet we are sure to gain, in men's consciences, a testimony for the great God. If conscience be but convinced, if we can so far recommend ourselves to the consciences of men, as that they come to be convinced, this is truth, this is duty, here lies my danger, there lies my hope. If men are in their consciences convinced of these things, and yet will go on in their destructive ways in the paths that lead down to the chambers of death, we have gained this, however, that, if they will go on, if they will perish, it will be a testimony for God in their own consciences. And this will be a great thing; for, as it follows presently after, in the 5th verse of this chapter, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake." Not ourselves finally, but only ourselves your servants for Jesus sake; and therefore his interest and his concernment must be greatest and highest in our eye: it is to him, therefore, we owe the principal deference and highest honour. And there will be a convincing testimony for him in your very consciences, whether you turn or not turn. If we can but prevail so far, in applying to conscience, as to convince it, you will go down with conviction into the place of torment, and thereby a testimony will be gained for our glorious Lord, that his overtures were all easy, all reasonable, all kind, and all indulgent: and this is a great thing we shall have gained, though it be but *secunda post naufragium tabula*. It is a consolation, though it be a consolation against a sad case, a very sad case, that any should descend to perdition, from under the gospel, with convinced consciences.

But no more of this at present.

SERMON VII.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 2.

Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

WE have considered the words, according to what they import in themselves, and we have it now in hand to consider them, according to that reference which they bear to those of the foregoing verse. "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;" whence we have collected,—That the application which the faithful ministers of Christ do make to the consciences of men in the sight of God, affords them very great relief and encouragement to go on with an unfainting vigour and resolution in their work; and we proposed to show that it is so, upon a double account, to wit, the convictiveness, and the sincerity of it: the convictiveness of it towards them, and the sincerity of it towards God. We have hitherto been shewing you how encouraging it is upon the former account, in respect of the convictiveness of the thing; and so it is, encouraging upon a two-fold more particular account.

1st. As thereby there is very great hope conceived of conversion. And,

2dly. As hereby a testimony is, however, gained to the great God and our Lord Jesus Christ in the very consciences of men. The former was fully insisted on; and now I go on further, to the second, to wit, That the convictiveness of such application tends to gain a testimony to our great God and Saviour in their very souls. And this is a very encouraging thing, an heart strengthening thing, to a serious faithful minister of Christ, that he shall hereby gain such a testimony in men's consciences for God and his blessed Son. They will be obliged to acknowledge and own, that the great truths of the gospel, upon which the principal weight and stress is laid, as to their salvation, do carry a clear and convictive evidence with them; and that they are required to believe nothing to this purpose, which is not most evidently true; but

* Preached March 8, 1690.

must be forced to say,—I think, in my very conscience, these things are so; they are as they are represented; I am not imposed upon; there is no fraudulency or artifice used to disguise things, or to make them seem otherwise than they are. And thus it is also with the things we are to do, and we are warned to avoid, as by no means to be done; and likewise, the constitutions and judgments we find settled and declared in the gospel concerning them that do well, and them that do ill, and that are to be the last measures of the final judgment, are all most unexceptionably equal and righteous; we have nothing to say against them, and so, concerning the whole frame and design of the gospel, that it is wisely adapted to its end; that it carries that efficacy with it, when once it takes hold of conscience, that men must say, Here is a power not to be withstood; we cannot resist the power and spirit wherewith such and such things are spoken; things come to us in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit and of power; they must say there is kindness and love beyond all that could be expected or conceived in the whole frame and contrivance of it: here is manifestly a design to pluck souls out of death, to reduce backsliders unto God, to save lost creatures from perishing; and upon the whole, therefore, here must be a testimony gained to the truth of God, to his authority, to the equity and reasonableness of his laws and sanctions, to his wonderful wisdom, which he hath shewn in methodizing things so as the gospel acquaints us, in order to the recovery and salvation of souls; and to his kindness, goodness, and mercifulness, towards poor perishing sinners, beyond all that could have entered into the heart of man to expect. It is plain, that when such applications are made immediately, directly, and properly to conscience, such a testimony is gained to the great God and Saviour in all these respects.

And now it is evident, that this cannot but be an encouraging thing to every serious faithful minister of Christ; for you must consider (as they will do) to whom they do belong; they consider whose they are, and whom they are obliged to serve: and if these two things be eyed and looked upon together; to wit, that glorious Lord to whom they are related, and their most entire devotedness and fidelity to him: these two things concurring, cannot but make such encouragement as this arise naturally from the above-mentioned ground.

1. It is to be considered, that the Lord, to whom they

are related, he is infinitely more than all this world; the whole creation is but a tittle, a nothing to him, his honour and glory are more worth than all things. If all this world, as it was raised up out of nothing, were presently to be reduced to nothing again, that is, a thing little to be mattered, in comparison, if we bring it into comparison with the glory of this great name: which glory will shine satisfyingly to itself, even to all eternity, whatsoever should become of this created sphere and universal thing; consider this in the state of their case. And then, consider,

2. That in the temper of their minds, there must be entire devotedness and fidelity to this great Lord: and so as the glory of his name is a greater thing in itself than all things besides, so it must be to them; because, with their relation to this great Lord, there is conjunct that most entire affection and devotedness to him, that whatever becomes of all things else, this must always be principal in their eye, the glory of the great Lord: you find, therefore, that this is the main design they drive at, and are obliged to do in all their ministrations; that is, that there be such convictions upon the consciences of men, as from whence a glory may result, "a glorious testimony unto God in Christ," saith the Apostle, (speaking of his own labours in the ministry,) "according to my expectation, and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, (that my heart should never sink through shame, nor through fear,) but that, with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death." Phil. iii. 17—20. If one had said to him, What need you toil and harass yourself in such labours, and to run such hazards as you do, in a continual course? What are you to gain by it? Gain, saith he, why I shall gain my point. I shall gain my great design, the only thing I am solicitous for, and the only thing, in comparison, that I aim at; that is, that Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death; whether I live, or whether I die, all is one to me; I am content to run through a thousand deaths for the glory of that name;—that that name may be glorified in my living and dying. Here is a continual glory arising to that name out of this application to men's consciences, when all men, out of conviction of conscience, must be forced to own and acknowledge the truth, and authority, and righteousness, the power, wisdom, and goodness, which are all comprehended in this great name;

and therefore, it is, that the ministers of Christ are to make this a measure to themselves, in all their ministrations, to direct them to this very end and mark; that is, the bringing men under such convictions, that a just testimony may result to this great name,—the name and honour of their glorious Lord. The Apostle's reasonings do most evidently imply this, which you find he useth in that 14th chapter of his former Epistle to these Corinthians, verse 24; he is there directing and ordering how they should order, manage, and methodize their ministrations, so as that they might be most apt to convince; that they should prefer plain instructive words, before strange tongues, though that might very much amuse, and gain to them (it may be) a great deal of applause, that such and such could speak in assemblies so many languages; but, (saith the apostle,) when the business of instruction by prophecy, (as the word must there be used, and it is frequently, when that is attended to,) if there comes in one that is unlearned, such an one is convinced of all, and judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. This, (saith the apostle,) I must have all your ministrations directed unto; you must aim at this, to carry things so, that the hitherto Pagan world, (as they shall have opportunity to observe and know what things are taught among you,) from the plain evidence of the things, may be judged and condemned in their own spirits, and may be brought down on the knee, to fall and kneel, and confess God is in the midst of this people; God is in these ministrations of a truth: you must order things so, that this end may be effectually obtained, observably gaining a testimony to God out of the consciences of those you shall have to do with; and if this be any one's end, upon which his heart is set, upon which he is principally intent, according as his success is, in order to this, his great and principal end, so will his encouragement be, and the strength and vigour of his spirit in prosecuting his work: according as his labour is either more actually successful, or hopeful, accordingly is his spirit raised up and kept up within him in his work; and this is a thing which carries its own proper right with it, whether it do fall in with the conversion of souls, or whether it be severed from it.

(1.) If it fall in with it, it adds the greater weight to it, for the poising and bearing up a man's spirit in his work;

for then this testimony ariseth so much the more clearly, and so much the more fully, when it proceeds at once from the concurrence of an enlightened mind and convinced conscience; and also, a renewed changed heart, when it is the sense of the mind, and of the heart, together. Oh, how joyful and raised a testimony do convinced and converted ones bear to the truth, and righteousness, and authority, and wisdom, and power, and grace of God in Christ? When hearts are won, with what complacency do they then celebrate all the glories that have shone forth to them with efficacy and success, through the gospel dispensation? What pleasure do they take to speak highly of his great name, whose power they have felt, whose light they have seen, whose grace they have tasted of, in and by this dispensation? But then,

(2.) If these should be severed, yet so much the greater thing is a testimony to the great God, and his Christ: that there is in that case, more to poise and weigh up the spirit of a faithful servant of Christ, than there can be in the want of the other, to sink and press it down. These two things being compared with one another, the glorious testimony that is borne to this name, and the actual infelicity of a soul, which hath refused to be happy, and did peremptorily choose the way to perdition, that takes hold of hell, and leads down to the chambers of death; so much a greater thing is the former of these, than the latter, that there is more to buoy up the spirit of a faithful servant of Christ in his ministerial work, than there can be to press and sink it down.

And so, upon that former account; to wit, the convictiveness of such an application to the conscience, doth very great encouragement arise to those that are faithful in their work of preaching the gospel, to go on with unfainting vigour in it, as this convictive application to conscience, both is the way to the conversion of souls; and also, as it tends to gain a testimony to the name of God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

But then, as we have to consider to this purpose the convictiveness of this application to conscience, so we have to consider well in the next place,

3. The sincerity of such application to conscience: we apply and commend ourselves to the consciences of men, in the very sight of God, under the eye of God; he sees our aim and design, and our whole transaction, from step

to step, from point to point; there is no thought in our minds, no word in our mouths to this purpose, but comes all under his immediate notice and cognizance; and hence ariseth our strength and vigour in our work, hence it is we faint not; we serve our Lord Christ, we serve the great God, to whom we have devoted ourselves under his own eye. To the sincere, it is a great consolation their sincerity is known; one may serve a man in great sincerity, and yet never be understood, for he cannot look into the thoughts, he cannot discern the intention and bent of the heart: but when every thing lies open (as we know it doth) to his immediate view, with whom we have to do, and for whom we are concerned, this is a very encouraging thing to the sincere to know that it is known. It escapes not the especial notice of his eye, in whose approbation and complacency we are most of all concerned; for hereupon, these two most encouraging things do most necessarily succeed and follow;—1st. That by this, their sincerity, they are directly and immediately in a good posture towards God, so as to receive the highest encouragement from him. And, 2dly. They are consequentially, by most manifest and direct consequence, in a good state towards men; so as at least, from them not to receive any hurtful or sinking discouragement: I say, it puts their affairs into a good posture towards God, from whom they are to have the highest encouragement; and it puts them consequentially into so good a posture towards men, as that, from thence, they shall receive no hurtful, heart-dejecting, or heart-sinking discouragement. As to God, 1st. As to the former, the posture and state wherein it puts their affairs towards God, is, 1st. They are sure of acceptance. And, 2dly. They are sure of reward; be the success of their ministration what it will or can be supposed to be, or the worst that can be supposed.

They shall be accepted with God, and shall not lose their reward, whatever the issue of their labour be. Some scriptures do conjoin these together, or give us good ground upon which to apprehend the certain conjunction of them, that they are not severed one from another, as in the nature of the thing we are sure they cannot be. Do but observe to this purpose that known and famous place, Isaiah xlix. 5. It is spoken directly and principally of our great Lord himself; but it is applicable, in a subordinate sense, most justly unto all that do serve under him. In the third verse of that chapter, it is said, “Thou art my

servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." And verse 4th. "I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain." That name of Israel is put upon him, as sometimes, elsewhere, the name of Jacob is, as signifying Christ-mystical, and comprehending all his people with him and in him. "Then I said, I have laboured in vain; yet, surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God. And now saith the Lord, that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob to him: Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength." I shall not stay to dilate (as I might with much point) upon this scripture. Again, look back to the 2nd chapter of this epistle, where our text lies, and you will see, from the 14th verse onward, much to this same purpose. The apostle speaks of the pleasant savour which the faithful ministers of Christ do carry with them in their ministrations, or in respect to the gospel which they dispense, both in reference to them that are saved, and in reference to them that perish. "Thanks be to God, (saith he,) which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, (and they that triumph in Christ are far from fainting,) and maketh manifest by us, the savour of his knowledge in every place: for we are to God, a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one, we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other, we are the savour of life unto life." It is true that we are so; a sweet savour of God in Christ to the one and the other, or in reference to the one and the other. And where there is a certain acceptance, there is a certain reward, which, when our Lord himself did eye, we are not disallowed to eye, you may be sure; "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despised the shame, and is sat down at the right hand of God." Heb. xii. 3. That great and eminent servant of his, Moses, it is recorded of him, not as a blemish, but to his honour, that he had respect to the recompence of reward. Heb. xi. 7. And the apostle Paul tells concerning himself, when he avowed himself to be the apostle and servant of Jesus Christ, (as in the beginning of his epistle to Titus,) he adds, "in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, hath promised;" as if he would, by that answer an inquiry, which (it may be) some, who had heard of his name, might wonderingly make, What should be the matter that Paul, that wise man, that

learned man, that man so strenuous an assertor of Judaism, and so devoted to the strictest sect of Pharisaism, should suffer himself to be imposed upon, so as to espouse the despised Christian name and interest? He, it seems, is become a minister of the gospel of Christ, a servant of him that was crucified at Jerusalem not long ago, as a common malefactor; how comes such an one as Paul to espouse that interest and profess that name? Why, I do it, (saith he,) "in hopes of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised." Here is enough to keep me from fainting and sinking in this work, may a faithful minister of Christ say, notwithstanding whatsoever of labour and toil it carries in it; and, notwithstanding whatsoever inconvenience it may draw after it; it is all in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised. And they know their Master and Lord that employs them, that he who will not suffer so mean a thing as a cup of cold water, to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, to lose its reward, will never let a devoted life, spent in his service, and in an endeavour of serving that great design of his, which his heart doth so appear to be always set upon the saving of souls, to lose a correspondent reward: therefore, such sincerity, in applying to the consciences of men in the sight of God, knows who sees it, who judgeth of it, carries in it encouragement enough, directly God-ward, and Christ-ward, from whom they are encouraged, and principally concerned to expect and seek it. But,

As to men. 2dly. It carries enough in it by consequence, to fortify them against every thing of discouragement from men. What is there from men to discourage? principally two things, reproach and danger. They may be liable to reproach, but sincerity is a guard against it. "According to my earnest expectation, and my hope," (saith the Apostle,) "that in nothing I shall be ashamed." Phil. i. 20. And so in the words immediately before the text, "We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty or shame, (as the word may be rendered;) not walking in craftiness, or handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending," &c. And, as in the close of the 2nd chapter of this epistle, "We are not as many which corrupt the word of God," (adulterate it *caupoinzeing* it,) "but as of sincerity, as of God speak we in Christ." We do nothing we need to be ashamed of, as long as we do but apply ourselves about such things as carry their own evidence in them to the consciences of

men. Our work admits well enough to be done above board; we need seek no corner, no darkness, no shadow of death, wherein to lie hid; we may well go open faced in all that we do; we have no other design, but to convince men, and bring them back from their destructive ways, and finally, become instruments of their being safe and happy.

And then for any thing of danger; it is true, they may be liable thereto, even from them whom they do convince: convictions do sometimes work that unnatural way, that is, to enrage, to exasperate; we read of some who were pricked to the heart, who cried out thereupon, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Acts ii. 37. We read of others cut to the heart by that sermon of the first martyr, Stephen. Acts vii. 54. And they, thereupon, immediately gnash their teeth; and their business is to gather up stones, and stone him to death. This, it is true, may be, and admit it to be so, the sincere desire of his glory for whom they so expose themselves in their ministration, approving itself to his very eye, carries enough in it to fortify them against the most formidable appearances of this kind. The apostle makes this supposition, even of running the hazard of a fiery trial; when he is exhorting them that speak, "To speak as becomes the oracles of God." 1 Peter iv. 11. And with this same design, that our great Lord, for whom we speak, may be glorified, may have a glorious testimony arising to him. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability that God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." And the very next words are, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is sent to try you;" never be concerned for yourselves, though there be danger of a fiery trial incurred, if you can but be conscious to yourselves of your own sincerity, that you speak as becomes the oracles of God, with this design, that God and our Lord Jesus may be glorified." And so doth the transaction of all this affair, in the sight of God, carry with it a great matter of encouragement; that is, sincerity puts our affairs directly into the best posture that can be wished, towards God and Christ; and leaves them not in so ill a posture towards men, as that any thing should be feared from them, or can possibly arise from them, to cause dejection or despondency of spirit, in any one who is with such sincerity engaged in this great work.

USE. Therefore, now briefly to apply all:—there are sundry things, which it is obvious to collect and gather from all that hath been said to this point, that may be very useful and instructive to us. As,

1. That such as are sincerely, and with due seriousness, engaged in the work of the ministry, they cannot but be solicitous about the issue of their work, how it will succeed, what will become of it; they do, (it is true,) through the mercy of God, go on in their work without fainting, as it is their business to apply themselves to the consciences of men, in the sight of God; but yet, with very great concern; for what do they apply themselves to the consciences of men about? It is about things upon which their salvation depends,—it is, that they may not be lost. “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” We consider them as perishing creatures, if our gospel should be hid from them; therefore, we make it our business to apply ourselves to their consciences, in the sight of God, that it may not be hid. And hence is our not fainting; it shews in those that do seriously concern themselves, and serve Christ in the work of the ministry: there is great solicitude about the issue of their work, lest souls should miscarry and be lost under it.

2. We may collect, that the true reason of this solicitude is the uncertainty of the issue; they do not know how matters will succeed with them about whom they are concerned. It may be life, it may be death; it may be they will be saved, it may be they will be lost; some may be the one, some may be the other. Seeing that they need support against fainting, it shews that they are solicitous, and whence their solicitude doth arise, and what is the true cause of it; and though it is true indeed, there is support from the consciousness of their own sincerity, and from the aptitude of such means as they use, that souls may not be lost; yet, all this while, the dubiousness and uncertainty of the event doth so much deject them, and make them liable to fainting, that they reckon it a very great mercy that they do not faint: “therefore, having such a ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.” It is the mercy of God to us that we sink not, nor faint in our work, to think how little hold is taken upon the consciences of men, and how apt men are to run counter to the conviction of their own consciences. It is God’s great mercy we do not faint, and quite give off, and say, we will never speak in this name more, to be so little heard, regarded, attended

to, and complied with in the design of all that we say. And again,

3. We may gather hence, that God hath so graciously ordered the matter, that the very cause of a faithful minister's solicitude shall yield him the matter of his relief; that is, his sincerity, his applying himself to the consciences of men in the sight of God. It is a man's sincerity in this case, that makes him be concerned, for they that are insincere, will never be concerned; they care not what becomes of their hearers, if they can but discourse plausibly an hour when they must, they are little further concerned. But then, (I say,) observe the goodness of God, that from the same thing, whence their concern comes, their relief comes; that is, their sincerity; if they were not sincere, they would not be concerned: but, because they are sincere, thereby they are relieved, they transact all in the sight of God; and so, the same thing that gives them trouble, gives them relief.

4. We may further gather hence, that where there is the least need of relief, there is the least to be had. They have no need of relief against any solicitude, and heart-affecting concern, about the issue and success of their work, who are not sincere in it; and thereupon they have not that relief which otherwise would arise in this case. These things do measure one another: where no relief is needful, none is had. They need no relief, where there is no concern; and they have none, because they are not sincere. And again,

5. It is plain, that the safety of souls that do attend upon the gospel dispensation, and the comfort of their ministers, do very much depend upon the same thing; that is, the successfulness of the application to conscience in the sight of God. If conscience be first convinced, and those convictions be complied with, and answered in the inclination of the heart, and course of the outward practice, such souls are safe and happy; and, according to the prospect and appearance that can be had hereof, those who are engaged in this great design of saving them, are relieved and comforted so much abundantly the more; their fullest consolation, and the salvation and happiness of the souls they are concerned for, meet in the same point. And therefore, again,

6. If any do miscarry under the gospel, by which, and in the ministration whereof, applications are still made to their consciences in the sight of God, they perish under a

double guilt, as having not only been necessary to their own ruin, but to the discouragement, as much as in them lies, of those in their work, that were intent upon saving them. And this is a double guilt,—guilty of their own ruin, and guilty of the sorrow and solicitude, and afflicting care and grief, of them that would have saved them. And that this consideration doth not weigh nothing, you may plainly see, in that such use is made of it, as we find elsewhere. This apostle urgeth the Christians, Philipp, ii. 16. that they would demean themselves, “as sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they lived, and shined as lights in the world:” that, as light was, through the word of God in the gospel, let into their consciences, it might shine through again in their conversations, that they might hold forth the word of life; and why? upon what design or consideration? “That we may be comforted,” that we may rejoice, as not having run in vain, or laboured in vain. Whatsoever greater weight there was to be in the consideration of their own salvation, and eternal well-being, this consideration also was not without its weight; it cannot be said of it, that it had no weight. That we may rejoice, too, and rejoice with you, in the day of Christ, as not having run in vain, or laboured in vain. But, in the last place,

7. We may further collect, that, if there be a final disappointment as to any, so that (as the expression is after the text) they come at length to be “lost;” and here is the utmost cause given, that can be given from men, of discouragement and heart-fainting to the ministers of Christ; yet all doth proceed from men’s baffling their consciences: these dreadful consequences do result from thence. If men would but use their consciences, and be true to their consciences; if they would but receive the truth whereof conscience is convinced, and comply with the precepts and rules that conscience doth discern the equity and necessity of, all would be well; we should be comforted, and you would be saved. But if neither of these be, you see whence all proceeds; it is from baffling of conscience, from either it’s not admitting of conviction, or it’s not complying with conviction that hath been admitted. Therefore, I shall shut up all with this only double word of counsel; that is,

1. That you labour to keep conscience always awake, and bring it awake to such attendances upon the dispensation of the preaching of the gospel; labour beforehand to pre-engage conscience; tell your souls beforehand, when

you are to come to such an assembly as this, O my soul, thou art going to a place where thy conscience is to be dealt withal, and in the sight of God! there is a great transaction to lie between thee and some or other servant of Christ, and the whole business is managed under the divine eye; then say to thy conscience, Awake! awake! be in a prepared posture, in a ready posture: let me not carry conscience slumbering, conscience dreaming, conscience in a deep sleep, unto such an ordinance, but labour to have it awake, in order hereunto: and that it may be so, urge upon it those former heads. That you may bring wakeful consciences to these holy assemblies, from time to time, you are very much concerned to keep them awake all the week long: if, from day to day, and from morning to night, you will buy and sell without conscience, and eat and drink without conscience, and manage your affairs in your families without conscience, then it is likely you will come without conscience, or with a drowsy slumbering conscience, on the Lord's day, to the assembly too; you will find conscience on those days as you use it on other days. And then,

2. When you are under these holy assemblies, and particularly under the ministration of the gospel, labour then to keep conscience in actual exercise, endeavour that your consciences may go along with all that is said, and put them on giving their assent, their actual assent: take it from them, that so you may be (as it were) preaching to yourselves all the while the minister is preaching to you; that conscience may be preaching over and over again; that there may be an echo within from conscience, repeating the very voice of the minister in your own hearts; and if this were done, if there were such a conscientious attendance upon this holy ministration, with respect to the eye that observes you, as well as us, and a design all along driven to one and the same purpose, to approve ourselves to that eye, we might hope somewhat would come of our having the gospel so long continued among us, and of having our holy assemblies, with so much freedom to resort unto. But if nothing of this be, but still conscience must be kept asleep from duty to duty, there is nothing to be said, but that hereafter it will awake for torment.