

SERMON VIII.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 3.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

UPON what hath been so largely discoursed to you from the immediately foregoing words, I know not how to overlook these, that are so immediately and apparently subjoined. Though they have much of terror in them, they may have much use, and may be useful (even as they are terrible) to promote and help our escape from that most terrible issue of things that they import. The reasonableness of their connexion with the foregoing words, is obvious to every eye: "We 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. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." The reason of the thing speaks itself. If we do insist upon such matters as do carry in them a convictive self-recommending evidence to every man's conscience; if we do directly and immediately apply ourselves to the very consciences of men, in all our ministrations; if we endeavour to draw them into the Divine presence, and manage all our transactions with their very consciences, under God's immediate eye, and debate matters with their consciences before the throne of God; if this be our way of treating with the souls of men, so as that when they do not hear us, —will not listen to us, we do arrest them, we do arraign them; Come, I must have you into the presence of God, and debate the matter with you, under the eye of him that made you, and that made me: if this be the course of our dealing with souls, and they will not hear, and our gospel remains to them yet an hidden thing, it is all one to them, as if we had said nothing; if it "be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." This is the plain series of the discourse in this context.

And so the import of the words, in themselves, is as plain

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as any other words a man can make use of. This is the doctrine.

Doctrine. They to whom the gospel of Christ is an hidden gospel, they are lost souls.

In speaking to this, we are, 1st, to open to you the meaning of the gospel's being hid, the thing supposed here; and, 2dly, to shew what is meant by being lost, the thing asserted upon that supposition; and then to show, 3dly, the connexion between the one and the other of these, upon which the use of the whole will ensue.

1. What is meant by the gospel's being hid? It may be said to be hidden several ways, according to the several ways wherein it may be said to be revealed. And there is a fourfold gradation to be taken notice of in the revealing of the gospel, or the things contained in the gospel, unto men, as there is a fourfold principle that is herein to be applied unto. As,

(1.) There is the principle of external sense, unto which the gospel is first to be brought. "Faith comes by hearing," (Romans x. 17.) as the apostle tells us. And then,

(2.) There is the principle of understanding and intellect, unto which that hearing is subservient and introductive: men are to hear, that they may understand; and it is a plague and doom upon them, when they hear and do not understand. And,

(3.) There is a principle of conscience, which is the mind and understanding, as it hath to do with practical matters; (as we have formerly told you;) being to judge concerning them, either as things to be done, or as things that have been done. And so we judge, either by way of prospect, or retrospect: as you have heard, conscience is the principle, and as such a principle, it is to be applied unto: so much we have lately insisted upon to you. And then,

(4.) Another principle is the heart, at which the gospel revelation doth finally and terminatively aim. It aims more immediately at conscience, but ultimately, and finally, at the very heart, as you see afterwards in this very context: "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them." But how should it shine into them? or what of them should it shine into? The sixth verse tells you, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,

hath shined into our hearts to give us the light;" so that there are these several steps in the revelation of the gospel, or of the things contained in the gospel, unto men.

1. By the external sense, that by which that discovery is to be transmitted to the mind or understanding. And that it may be excluded, and shut out from thence, the god of this world is mightily industrious to blind men's minds, that the gospel may meet with a stop there; not make its entrance so far. And then,

2. It is further aimed at to be revealed to men's consciences, that through the mind it may strike conscience, and fasten convictions upon men there, concerning what they are to do, or what they are not to do, or what they have, or what they have not done, or what they are thereupon to expect God to do, or not to do, against them, or for them. And then,

3. Finally, the gospel is to be revealed to the very hearts of men. He that hath made the light to shine out of darkness, hath shone into our hearts, wherein the design of the god of this world is defeated and disappointed; so that the beams of gospel light do strike through, (notwithstanding all the resistance and opposition he makes in the minds and consciences of men,) and, at length penetrating to the heart, hath shone into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And, accordingly, these several ways may the gospel be said to be hid. As,

1. When it is never preached to a people at all; so the great things that it contains, and unfolds in itself, they remain a great and continued secret, as they may have done long to many a people, and yet do to very many. In that sense, for several foregoing ages, the gospel had been an unrevealed thing, as we are told by the apostle, Romans xvi. 25. "Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." That gospel which had been so long kept secret, it became then revealed, when the preaching of it was set on foot, even in all the several nations, by permission, there being no restraint, no prohibition, to preach it to any nation; no nation being excluded, but a commission given to preach it to all inde-

finitely ; that is, to any, as there should be opportunity. Now, it is said to be, in that sense, an hidden gospel, the same thing that we have elsewhere : “ The mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but is now made manifest to the saints ; to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, (Colossians i. 26.) which is Christ in you, (or among you,) the hope of glory.” That is one sense wherein the gospel is an hidden gospel. Where it is not so much as preached, nor hath been ; where the external dispensation of it hath never come, there hath been no application made to men’s external sense by it, or concerning it. This is not the direct intendment of the apostle here ; he speaks to them whom he supposeth to have had the gospel hitherto, and at this time to have it. We are, in the gospel dispensation, actually applying ourselves to the consciences of men in the sight of God, and yet he supposeth the gospel to be hid. It is not hidden, therefore, in that sense ; or its being so hid, that is here meant.

2. It may be hid when it is (though preached) not understood : and though it be revealed to the external sense, it is not revealed to the minds of men : and so, though there be an external light, there still needs an internal one, to make it, in the useful and designed sense, a revealed gospel. So it often is, that men may sit very long underneath the dispensation of this gospel, and yet remain very ignorant of the true import and meaning, even of the most principal and noble part of it, and which it is of the greatest concern for them to understand. The frame and scheme of gospel truth and notions, it may have found no place in the minds of many that have long sat under the dispensation of it. They may have been yet ignorant (as the apostle speaks to those Christian Hebrews) which be the first principles of the oracles of God, though they had the gospel long with them, whose design it is to acquaint them with, and instruct them in, these things. They may be such as the apostle elsewhere speaks of, as are ever learning, and never come to the knowledge of the truth. And though they have this gospel among them,—they have this book in their hands, yet it is a sealed book, and they have never concerned themselves to get it unsealed : they read it, and yet it is sealed ; they open it, and yet it is shut ; really shut up. If one say to them, Understandest thou what thou readest ? they do not. They hear the word as a tale that is told, that passeth through their ears, but en-

ters not into their minds; so may things be said to be hid that get not so far; they pass not the tegument or involu-
crum of a dark mind, a blind mind that admits them not. The expression is of that import, in reference to a particular thing, that our Saviour had been discoursing of to his disciples often, when he was among them. It is said, that the saying did not enter into their minds, for it was hid from them: "They understood not this saying, and it was hidden from them, that they perceived it not." Luke ix. 45. The business was what he had foretold them of again and again, touching his own approaching sufferings: it met with obstructed minds; they could not endure to hear with that ear. There was the same sense latent with them all, which Peter was more alert and open in owning and speaking: "Master, favour thyself, these things shall not be unto thee." They who had so high an expectation of his temporal reign and kingdom, such a thing as this, though he had told it them over and over, and told them again, in this chapter, upon his transfiguration, or a little after, that such and such things he must suffer, such and such things should be done to him, it entered not into their minds, they perceived it not, it passed as water glides over a rock, that admits it not. And so it is with the greatest and most important truths of the gospel that can be spoken about, that can be brought under their notice. Commonly they do give them the hearing when they come to such assemblies: they hear of the lost undone state of sinners, as they are such, and that there is reconciliation to be had by a Redeemer; but that Redeemer must and will have the throne; have their hearts changed, and their natures renewed. God's kingdom must be set up in their souls, and in its power take place in them; and sensual lusts and inclinations must go down, be subdued, and brought under. Men hear such things, but they do not enter into their minds, they will not allow them to sink into their minds; and so they hear them as if they heard them not. It cannot be said, they were never told them, that they never heard them. The first passage towards the heart, the ear, there the word goes through; but at the mind, there, with many it stops. They do not, that is, they will not, bend their minds and understandings to take in so plain and so important things. And,

3. The gospel, it may be hid from conscience; so, as though it do enter into the mind, there it meets with another obstruction; conscience excludes and shuts it out.

Many will not allow themselves so much as to understand any thing of it; as many, too, will not allow themselves so much as to hear it,—keep quite out of the hearing: but if it be heard, and if it be understood, yet here, at this third passage, which it should have to the heart, it meets with obstruction; that is, conscience doth not admit of conviction about it, a conviction of what is to be done, or what hath been misdome, or unduly omitted to be done, and what is due hereupon in point of vindication of the jealous holy God. In this respect, the gospel may still be an unrevealed gospel; that is, that it doth not get into the consciences of men, so as to strike them with conviction about these things, and to make them see and determine, and pronounce a judgment within themselves: This and that, and the other thing, an holy righteous God hath required me to do, that I might live, is all equal, and righteous, and good. It is so far an unrevealed gospel to them, that men will not be brought to see this, though it be never so plain; or again, to see that what I ought to have done, in order to my being in a reconciled state, and a safe and happy state, towards God, I have hitherto not done. I have not exercised repentance towards God; I have not believed on the Son of God; I have not come to a covenant closure with God in Christ; one thing or other, from day to day, hath shifted these important matters off: though I have heard, indeed, such and such things should be done, yet so much of life-time is worn away with me, and I could never find the hour, the leisure time, when to get into a corner, to enter into my closet, and shut myself up with God, and say, I am now come to thee about the affairs of my soul; to make over a soul unto thee, according to the tenor of thine own covenant, and there solemnly to take hold of that covenant, and give up that soul. “They gave themselves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” 2 Cor. viii. So plain a thing as this is, the yielding themselves unto God, conscience will not see it, and be convinced, that thus it ought to be; but days, and months, and years, are worn out under the gospel, and so great things as these omitted. Men are continually called upon to turn, that they may live; but they never find a time to turn. They will not settle this judgment with a convinced conscience, I must break off this course, or I am undone; that is, a course of estrangement from God, a living without God in the world. The gospel is, in this sense, a hid and unrevealed gospel; it doth not go so far

as to take hold of conscience, though conscience is applied and appealed unto, from time to time. And then,

4. It is hid from their hearts, and that is another sense wherein the gospel may be an unrevealed gospel, as it is not yet effectually discovered; or the great things contained in it, are not with a penetrating light pierced into the heart, which is the thing the gospel dispensation doth finally aim at. As you have it in this very context, the thing designed is, that through the ear, and through the mind, and through the conscience, the heart may be at last invaded, and the light of the gospel may seat itself there, in that very centre of the soul, and so there become vital light, diffusive of power, and influence through the whole man: and this is yet an heavier case, when conscience is convinced, and yet the hearts of men are not struck, not struck through; the word doth not strike into them, as our Saviour said to the Jews: "My word hath no place in you:" you do not give it a place, it cannot find room; there is a resisting heart, that excludes and shuts it out.

It is in these latter senses that the gospel must be understood to be spoken of as an hidden gospel here, as the mind understands it not, or as the conscience is not convinced of it, or as the heart doth not entertain or give reception to it. You find, in the foregoing chapter, that the case of the Jews being spoken unto, upon the occasion of that comparison, which the apostle had been making, in the whole of that chapter, between the Mosaical or Judaical, (2 Cor. iii.) and the evangelical dispensation, he gives the preference (as there was cause) to the evangelical dispensation, far above the Mosaical and Judaical, in this respect, that there was a clearness which went with the gospel dispensation, which did not accompany the Mosaical one; and, likewise, that there was a power and efficacy that went with the gospel, that went not with the law. Towards the latter end of the foregoing chapter, he discourseth to them, that, in opposition to the former dispensation, there was a clearness of light in the latter dispensation. Whenever the law was read among the Jews, it was a veiled thing: he refers to that which is an usage among them, at this day, when the law is read, to have a veil covering them, as I have seen, (and it is like many of you have seen,) looking into their synagogues: but the apostle, you see, speaks there of the veil on the heart; which, as the former doth import opposition to the clearness and perspicuity of light, that did shine in the gospel dispensation, this speaks somewhat

opposite to that efficacy and power upon the heart, which did accompany that dispensation too; so as that souls should be transformed and changed by it, into the image and glory of it. "We all with open face, beholding, as in a glass;" so we read it, and we read it with disadvantage, considering the similitude that he had made use of before: for the word we read *open*, signifies unveiled, he having been, a little while before, speaking of the veil. "We all, with unveiled face, (so it should be, to make the matter clearer, though the sense be the same,) behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord:" but, for that poor people, they had a veil not only upon their faces, but a veil upon their hearts, so as that nothing should enter there. But when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away: when *it* shall, the expression is impersonal; when there shall be a turning to the Lord; when the season of the general turning of that people to the Lord shall be, the veil shall be done away. And now we, for the present, with unveiled face, behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image. And when the gospel is hid in this sense, it is a very dismal thing; that is, that it should go through the ear, and through the mind, and through the conscience, and, after all this, stop at the very heart. A veil enwrapping the heart, shuts it up: light shines, shines round about in the external dispensation, shines into the mind, things are competently understood; shines into the conscience, and that is convinced that those things are true and right which the gospel doth hold forth; and my practice, in reference thereunto, hath been wrong, injurious, altogether inexcusable, and, consequently, unsafe: and yet the heart holds out; this last fort yet surrenders not, is not taken; the glory of the gospel is not revealed there, doth not shine into the heart, so as there to take in the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; as the 6th verse of this chapter speaks.

You may be sure, if there be a revelation in the last sense, there is a revelation in all the foregoing senses. If the gospel be thus revealed in the very heart, then we may be sure it was in the conscience, it was so in the mind and understanding, and it hath been so in the external discovery and dispensation of the gospel to the ear and outward sense. But if it hath not been revealed in the first of these senses, it is in none of the rest. If you speak by way of affirmation, the affirmation of the last implies the affirmation of all the former; if you speak by way of negation, the nega-

tion of the first implies the negation of all the consequents.

But as was told you at first, on this occasion, that it is not the hiddenness of the gospel, in the first sense, as having never been heard and preached, that is intended here; but in the latter sense it is chiefly meant; that is, if persons who hear this gospel, never understanding it; or, understand it, but are never convinced of it; or are convinced of it, and their hearts are never altered, never effectually changed by it,—then is the gospel an hidden gospel to them in the sense here meant.

And so the hiddenness of the gospel, in the intended sense, may be two-fold; or may be considered under two distinct notions, either as sinful, or as penal.

1. As sinful. And in the first sense, (which I have told you is not meant,) ordinarily, the gospel cannot be said to be hid in a sinful sense. Those that live in the remotest parts and quarters of the world, it is not their sin that they have not the gospel, while there was no means or opportunities of their ever having it; nor will it be charged upon them, where there was a simple impossibility of coming by that knowledge, which the gospel contains, or is the means of; it will never be imputed as their sin, that they had it not. As it is said in reference to the law, (and indeed, by the law there is meant the whole revelation of the mind and will of God;) “They that sin without the law, shall be judged without the law; and so, they that have sinned without the gospel, shall be judged without the gospel; they that have sinned with the law, shall be judged by the law; and they that have sinned against the gospel, shall be judged by the gospel.” Law is there taken in that sense, for that revelation of the mind of God, which is superadded to natural light; “They that have sinned without this, shall be judged without this; and they that have sinned under it or against it, shall be judged by it.” There will be no excuse to them from punishment, if they have violated and resisted that law and light which they had; if they go about to excuse themselves, any of them that way, I had not an express written law; when you sinned without law, you shall suffer without law. It will be but a like case with that of the soldiers’ excuse to the commander, Pericles, the Athenian General, when he charged him with a fault, and asked him how he came to

do it, *invitus feci, invitus ergo pœnas dabis*. "I did it unwillingly," and you shall, therefore, suffer unwillingly.

But the great iniquity is, or then is the gospel hid in a sinful sense, when men have it among them, or may have it, and will not hear it; or do hear it, and never understand it; that is, never apply or set themselves to understand it; or receive no conviction from it, or receive no suitable impression on their hearts from it. Thus, all the while, is the gospel hid to them by their own iniquity, that they do voluntarily make resisting efforts against it, as every thing of sin must have somewhat of *voluntarium* in it; it supposeth, that otherwise, a brute agent might be as capable of sin as a rational one, and that cannot be. But here lies the iniquity, that men might understand, and they will not; might consider and be convinced, and they will not; and there is a natural faculty that should turn them, even in their very hearts, but there is a sinful disinclination, and they will not turn: for it is the will that is not turned; "You will not come to me that you might have life." And so, when the gospel is hid, it is hid, not because men cannot see, but because they will not; they do (as it were) pretend the veil; stretch forth the veil before their eyes, or bind it close over their own eyes, hoodwink themselves that they will not see.

As the case is stated by the apostle: "Alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them; and because of the blindness of their hearts, through the ignorance that is in them." Ephes. iv. 18. But what kind of ignorance is that? See how it is paraphrased,—it is a blindness of heart,—it is a blindness, because they will not see, a voluntary affected blindness: and this makes the hiddenness of the gospel to be so in a sinful sense, for here is *voluntarium* in the case; the same thing that we find spoken in reference to natural light in the pagan world; that is, that there was that which might be known of God among them, it was manifest in them, for God had revealed it to them, or among them, as the particle there used may signify: but they liked not to retain God in their knowledge. Rom. i. 20—28. As it there follows; "That knowledge was ungrateful to them, and an unwelcome thing to them; and, therefore, they fence against it, and exclude it from among them, what they can, as a man, would keep off fire from his bosom; such was the light of

God which shone to them; "Light shineth in darkness, but the darkness will not comprehend it." John iii. 19. The minds of men do fortify themselves against this light, as much as in them is: so in reference to gospel light too, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world." John iii. 19. Here was supervening light, necessary light, come into the world; "But men loved darkness, rather than light, because their deeds were evil." And so the gospel is an hidden thing to them, because they do exclude it, even to the very uttermost; stop it where they can stop it, either by not understanding it, or not considering it, or by not admitting conviction about it, or by not obeying from the heart. And then,

2. Being thus far sinfully hidden, it comes also to be penally hidden by a *nemesis*, hidden by a just *vindicta*; ye will not understand, then ye shall not understand; you will harden your hearts against light, against grace, and against the design of the gospel, and they shall be hardened; that is, God doth only say, "I will let you have your own design:" he doth harden, *non pertirudo Malthiam, sed non impertiendo gratiam*; as Austin's apt speech was of old, to that sense; you do make it your business to harden your hearts, and fence and fortify them against the light and grace of the gospel; and since you will have it so, so let it be. So long (it may be) a contest hath been driven on with such souls; but at last, God sees fit to recede, to retire, to give off; now you have conquered, enjoy your victory: these are victories, that undo men, that tend to their ruin. We are never to suppose, that the doom passeth before the desert, such a doom as that especially; "Let them that be filthy, be filthy still; they that are unjust, be unjust still." Rev. xxii. "And when I would have purged you, and you would not be purged, your iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die." Ezekiel. But when that hath been persisted in long and highly, as the case was, in reference to the old world, it comes to this at last, "My spirit shall not always strive with men." Gen. vi. 3. God did contend long, even by his Spirit, against the wickedness of an apostate world, till at length, a deluge and flood comes; and a little before that, the determination goes forth; "My Spirit shall no longer strive with man:" I see men are intent upon perishing, they will be lost, let them be lost: I have been striving with them so long, and they will have that course that ends in perishing;

my Spirit shall give them obstruction in their way no longer." And this was the determination, at length, in reference to that people of the Jews, that peculiar people that he singled out from the rest of the world; he bore their manners long, he contended with them long, while they always resisted the Holy Ghost; (as Stephen tells them;) "As your fathers did, so do ye." Acts vii. 51. Implying this to be, with that people, an intailed war upon their posterity, with the Spirit of God: you do but keep up a war against the Divine Spirit from age to age, as your fathers did before you; "They rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit, till he turns and fights against them, and becomes their enemy." Isaiah lxiii. 9. But what did things come to in this contest, between the Spirit of God, and the fathers of this people, to whom Stephen speaks? Why, in reference to them, it comes at last to that terrible doom, which we have in the 6th chapter of Isaiah, and 10th verse. All that goes before in that chapter, is nothing else but a terrible preparation for that awful solemnity, of pronouncing this doom. Here is a glorious appearance of the great God in the temple, in the very year of King Uzziah's death, of which you may read in the known story; "I saw" (saith the Prophet) "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple; above it stood the seraphims, each of them had six wings; with twain he covered his face, with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly." One of these seraphims crying to another, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, the whole earth is full of thy glory." Here is a most magnificent, splendid, and glorious appearance; And what was it for? What was the design of it? The prophet is called forth, he is astonished at the sight, and cries out, "Woe is me, I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." Well, he is fortified, being almost sunk in his spirits upon the terrible majestic glory of this appearanae. One of the seraphims flies to him, with a live coal in his hand, lays it on his mouth, toucheth his lips, tells him his iniquity is purged away. Well, what is after all this? Now, saith God, "Thou art thus prepared, I have a message for thee to go upon." And what is that? Why, saith he, "Go and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not; see ye indeed, but perceive not; make the heart of this people fat, and their ear heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with

their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and be converted and be healed." This is the design of this glorious appearance, and this solemn message, after this august manner; a thing, that might even shake the foundation of heaven and earth, to have the case represented and in view, as really it was: and you find that this very thing, this passage in this chapter, it is with the greatest awfulness imaginable, reiterated again and again in the New Testament: several times by our Saviour, and at length by the Apostle Paul, when finally testifying at Rome against that more perverse infidelity of this people, than ever he met with among Pagans; as indeed, it was always observable of them, they were more high, and haughty, and peremptory, and malicious, in their unbelief. Some, indeed, (when the apostle had convened them together at his dwelling house in Rome,) believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not. "And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed." (Acts xxviii. 25, 26, 27.) After the apostle had spoken our word; and it is this terrible word repeated and recollected; "Well spake the Holy Ghost, by Isaiah the Prophet, to our fathers; Go unto this people, and say, Hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts, and they should be converted, and I should heal them." This the matter may come to, conversion and healing; and I am speaking to you, to represent it to you, that it may come to this, on purpose to prevent (if God will) the other ever doing so; and if it be considered seriously, and taken to heart, as the importance of such a case doth require; it will never come to this sad issue among you. If there be none of you that do bend your minds, and fortify your consciences, and obdure your own hearts against the truth, and against the grace, and against the gospel of our Lord, things will have a better issue with you; they shall issue in things "that accompany salvation, though I thus speak." Heb. vi. 9.

SERMON IX.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 3.

But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

WE have shewn (and the matter is in itself plain) how these words relate to those that go before; that, in as much as it is the design of the faithful ministers of Christ, in the course of their ministry, to commend themselves to the consciences of men in the sight of God; and that the great things that they deal with men about, are therefore supposed to be such as do carry in them a self-recommending evidence to men's consciences, as you have heard they do; that in this state of the case, things being thus, if yet the gospel do remain an hidden gospel, those to whom it is so, must be lost souls; and that is it, which is with us the ground of discourse from these words, to wit,

Doctrine. That the gospel being hid to them, who continually live under it, is a very sad token of their being lost; it was propounded in speaking of this to open to you.

1. In what sense the gospel may be said, and is here meant to be hid.

2. To shew what this being lost must mean.

3. What connexion there is between these two,—The gospel being hid to any, and their being lost. And then the use will ensue.

The first we have shewed already, what is meant hereby, the gospel's being hid. We are now next to shew you.

2. What this being lost doth signify. In general, it is not an external or temporal ruin that is here spoken of, but a spiritual and eternal one: it is the soul's being lost, and lost for ever, which is manifestly the thing here meant; that being lost, which doth certainly ensue upon blindness of mind, infidelity, and exclusion of the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, as the following words shew; and which, therefore, shews that it must be a spiritually eternal ruin that is here meant. But that being the meaning

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in the general, we must know that men may be lost two ways; that is either actually, as it is with them who are already in hell, on whom the infernal pit hath already shut its mouth; or else as they are liable and tending to such a ruin. And it must be in this latter sense that they are spoken of as lost here, to whom the gospel is an hidden gospel. It is spoken for the warning of survivors, and to make such look about them that do as yet live fruitless lives, and are unimpressed under the gospel, which in the name of the eternal God is from time to time preached to them. And nothing is more ordinary, either in scripture or in common speech, than to speak of men as lost who are in visible tendency unto destruction, though they are not yet actually destroyed. Now for this liableness to be lost, or this tendency to destruction that is here manifestly meant, and in respect whereof those here spoken of may be said to be lost; that may again be twofold: that is, either it may be such a liableness to destruction as is common to the apostate children of men as such: or else that liableness to destruction which is special with some more than others, or as having somewhat peculiar in it which renders their case worse than the common case. In the former sense all the apostate world is spoken of as lost; all the apostate world that remains yet unreconciled, unconverted; "The Son of Man came to seek and save that which is lost." Matthew xviii. 11. Every unconverted sinner is in this sense a lost creature. And so indeed they may be said to be all lost; Luke xix. 10. the whole apostate world yet continuing in their apostacy; upon a double account, 1st. In wickedness; and 2nd. Under wrath.

1st. In wickedness. So all unconverted sinners are lost creatures, lost in sin; nothing is indeed more ordinary than to speak of a wicked person (even as he is such) under the notion of a lost person. Even among pagans themselves, of a very wicked man, a debauched person, they say he is *perdite nequam*, and that he is a man *perdidissimus moribus*; a flagitious person is a lost person, and the word that is commonly used in the Greek in profane authors (as you have it used again and again in Scripture too, *Asotos* and *Asolia*) signifies one that is lost, or one that is unsaved, or cannot be saved. So all the ungodly world is lost in sin and wickedness; which sin is death began, being in its prevailing power over them, they, being under the dominion of it, are dead. "To be carnally minded is death," that is, to be

under the dominion of a carnal mind is death; he is a dead man, he is a lost man that is under the dominion of a mind habitually carnal, not capable of savouring divine things, the things of the Spirit. Rom. viii. 5, 6. "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Eph. ii. 1. who were dead, lost in death. Death hath a present and actual dominion over all this apostate and unreconciled world; reigns over it in conjunction with sin. That is not to be understood barely of liableness to natural death, that is a low diminishing sense of that reign of death spoken of Rom. v. The restitution of that life is meant which was lost in Adam's transgression, by which not only did men become not only mortal but sinful: not only mortal as to their bodies, but sinful (and so under death) as to their souls; which was also the plain meaning of their being all dead; "The love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge, that if Christ died for all, then we were all dead." 2 Cor. v. 14. An universal death stretching its wings over all this world, and covering it with a deadly shade every where; and all were alienated from the life of God, destitute and forsaken of the divine, the vital presence; God departed and withdrawn and gone, as he is from this apostate world yet unreconciled: and so are all said to be lost in wickedness, *perdite nequam*, as the common phrase is.

2dly. All were lost in wrath too, or under wrath; "The wrath of God being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," Rom. i. 17. who hold the truth in unrighteousness, as men universally do. And so, in this double respect, men being generally said to be lost; lost in sin, and lost under divine wrath; the phrase of their being lost is so applicable to them as the like phrase would be to any man in this case, supposing these two things to concur in the particular case of any man; 1st. That he is a person dreadfully diseased, that some mortal disease is upon him that is likely to be the end of him very soon; and 2nd. That he is an offending criminal besides, that he hath fallen under the sentence of the law that condemns him to die. When these things concur in any particular person's case, that is, he is a most dangerously diseased person, hath a mortal disease upon him, and that he is under a sentence and doom to die at the same time; who would not say the man were lost? It is a great question whether his disease or the halter will dispatch him soonest. But he is lost the one way or the other: so it is with the

apostate world; they are lost in sin; this is their disease which carries death in it. "To be carnally minded is death;" these men carry their own death about them wherever they go: and then they are under a doom besides; that is, all the impenitent unbelieving world lie under a doom, under a sentence. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Rom. viii. 1. What doth this imply, but that there is condemnation to all the rest, only those are excepted from condemnation who are in Christ, walking not after the flesh but after the Spirit? all the rest then are condemned men, dead men, all lost? This is one notion wherein those not actually destroyed, or on whom the infernal pit hath not already shut its mouth, may yet be said to be lost, as being liable to be lost, and as in a visible manifest tendency to destruction, that being continually impendent and approaching. But then,

Besides this common case wherein men may be thus said to be lost, there is somewhat special in the case of some that renders their case far worse than the common case; so as that if all may (in the forementioned respects, till redeeming mercy have taken place in reference to them) be said to be lost, they much more, as having somewhat in their case much more dismal, much more frightful than is or can be in the common case of unreconciled sinners merely as such. You would think the case to be very dismal of Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed by vindictive flames that caught hold of them from heaven: hell rained down upon them (as it were) out of heaven, fire and brimstone and an horrible tempest. Yet our Lord tells us of some whose case was much more dismal than that of Sodom and Gomorrah; some that were under his own preaching, under his own ministry, from day to day he was preaching grace and life among them in that gospel which was designed the savour of life unto souls. Many that heard it were surprised and admired, "wondering at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth." Luke iv. And yet even among these, there were some whose case was worse by far, and more dreadful than that of Sodom and Gomorrah; and it is easy to apprehend in general wherein. I shall not descend to particulars now, but reserve that to a further place afterwards in our discourse. It is very evident that among those that are lost in the sense and intentment that hath been mentioned; that is, as being liable to perish, and and whose destruction is approaching and impending;

among these some are yet, though lost, recoverably lost, others are irrecoverably, of the common case of the apostate world as such; though it be said of them they are all lost, yet they are recoverably lost; that is, if you consider no more than the common case as such; for there are proper apt means appointed for recovery and salvation which may probably have their effect upon them, their blessed effect, to recover and save them. And though there be degrees, very different degrees of danger, some may be more in danger, some are less so; yet the case admits of very vast difference when the gospel first comes among a people, and when it hath long continued among them.

(1.) When it first comes among them, here are the proper apt means set on foot for the saving that which was lost: the Redeemer approacheth them, makes his first trial upon them: Have you a mind to be saved, have you a mind to accept of a Saviour, of a Redeemer, to put yourselves under his shelter, and under his government, which you must do at the same time? Here are hopeful appearances in these men's cases. It is true the Redeemer comes to them as a company of lost creatures; but he comes on purpose to propose to them the certain means and methods of their being saved. And you that now have a mind to fall in with the Redeemer, you may have him; you must then take him to be yours, and give up yourselves to be his: and if this agreement on your part be cordial and vital, and you are in good earnest in it, you are safe in the midst of danger; yea, though you live in surrounding deaths that do engulf and are ready to swallow up, and are sure to swallow up all that do not so. But consider here,

(2.) That a people among whom the gospel hath long continued, and it may be with happy success as to many, many have been gathered in; but there are also such as yet stand out: they have heard the words of grace sounding in their ears often, which have sounded to them like a tale that is told. All that hath been said to them of the Son of God's having come down into this world to die a reconciling sacrifice for lost sinners, that he might bring about union and peace and friendship between the offended Majesty of heaven and them, hath made no more impression on them than so many breaths of air would do upon a rock. Sure the case is far worse with these men than the common case of sinners, as such, can be supposed to be. There may be even of these yet some whose case is not altogether desperate; we do not know what wonders the power of grace may yet

work, but there may be among these some also that are lost irrecoverably, upon whom an irrevocable doom is past; so as that repentance is hid on both sides, both from God's eye and theirs; they will never repent, and he will never repent: they have an heart that can never repent, and God hath passed his doom that he will never repent. And now as touching this case, that such a case there is, plain Scriptures put us out of all doubt; some that are never to be forgiven in this world, nor in the world to come. I need not tell you for what crime. "All sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men, excepting that one, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which shall never be forgiven in this world, nor in the world to come." Matt. xii. 31. But I say as to their case, who may be thus said to be irrecoverably lost, while they yet are on this side hell, whether it may be known to others, or even to themselves that they are so lost, I shall say nothing now; I have spoken my mind to that very publicly another way in that book called "*The Redeemer's Tears*;" and may say somewhat more to it in the use, before I pass from this subject. But that there are some (I say) so irrecoverably lost, while they as yet are under the gospel is out of all doubt; whether they can know it, or others know it, which is less to be supposed, I shall say no more now. But concerning them, of whom this is not to be said of them, that they are irrecoverably lost, though their case be much worse than the common case: yet there may be degrees in it of greater, and less probability of their yet being wrought upon to their recovery and salvation. And that we shall come to and consider by and by, when we speak of the connection between these two, the gospel's being hid, and their being lost.

But as to the import and meaning of the phrase here, it is plain it doth chiefly refer to the latter sort of men, that is, that are lost in a worse sense than the common case doth amount to. It is not to be supposed that men's being lost in the common sense, can be the thing here intended in this scripture, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:" why, all are lost! it must therefore be meant in a peculiar sense. It is evident then he doth not speak here of men's being lost in that sense wherein all are lost by nature; but he speaks of them that live under the gospel, and are not yet recovered and saved by it, whether these may be said to be recoverably, or irrecoverably lost; yea, or no; whether it be the one or the other of them, the thing

is sad ; and because the determination is so very distinct, how to bring a determining line between those that are, under the gospel, lost irrecoverably, and them that are lost recoverably ; and since we cannot tell among all, those who belong to the one rank, and who belong to the other rank, and it may be no one person can tell concerning himself, that he doth most certainly belong to that more horrid view of such as are lost irrecoverably ; therefore we shall only take the matter indefinitely concerning those that are lost, in a worse sense than men in general can be said to be. And so we pass on in the next place,

3. To shew the connection between these two, the gospel being hid and such men being lost ; for I told you, in the doctrine that the gospel being hid unto such, is a sad token of their being lost, that I may state this connection to you ; you may in the general take this for a ground, that those are to be reckoned the significant tokens that do belong to the thing they betoken, either as causes or effects of it ; or whatsoever things are connected with one another as cause and effect, the one of these doth significantly betoken the other. Now that connection which there is between these two, the gospel's being hid, and the soul's being lost, is a connection of cause and effect. And this connection may be mutual and interchangeable ; that is, something of the gospel's being hid may be the cause of the soul's being lost ; and again, the soul's being lost may be the cause of the gospel's being hid. And so they may change places ; they may be alternate, as it were, in the matter ; they may be mutual causes and effects to one another. We shall consider,

1. The connection between these two the former way, that is, the gospel's being hid being the cause why they are lost. And if it be hid it must needs endanger their being lost by a casual contribution that it hath thereunto, whether we can say they are recoverably lost or irrecoverably ; the gospel's being hid to them is a cause of it, a manifest cause of it ; if they are at last lost ; into this it most manifestly results, the gospel was hid from them. If it be always hid they are surely lost ; if it be so hid that at length the veil be done away, it will appear, that though they were lost they were not remedilessly lost, but upon a two-fold account the gospel's being hid must be the cause of the soul's being lost. 1st. As the gospel's being hid doth include in it the want of somewhat that's necessary to salvation ; and, 2ndly, as the gospel's being

hid doth include somewhat in it that promotes their destruction. These two ways the gospel's being hid is the cause of their souls' being lost.

1. As it carries in it the want of somewhat that was necessary to salvation is the gospel hid to them, then they must want that without which they cannot be saved so long as the gospel is hid to them. The knowledge and belief of gospel truths, the acceptance of gospel offers, and subjection to gospel commands, are things without which they cannot be saved. But while the gospel is hid to them these things must be wanting: they must want the saving knowledge of gospel truths; they must want true acceptance of gospel grace and offers; they must want entire and sincere obedience to gospel commands; and without these they will be lost: these they can never attain to while the gospel remains hid; while it is an hidden gospel all things contained in it may be represented to them, but they are all so many parables, they understand nothing of the meaning of them; all that is said to them is only as a story told to a man asleep, or between sleeping and waking, and whereof there is no more perfect sense begot in their minds than there is of any thing that you mutter to the ear of a man asleep. They cannot believe what they do not understand, and they cannot accept those offers that depend upon truths which they do not believe; and they can never yield obedience to those commands which stand in conjunction with such offers, and their obedience and subjection thereunto must be in equal connection with their acceptance of those offers. I cannot take Christ to be my Saviour, but I must take him to be my Lord at the same time; and he that takes him to be his Lord, doth it without despair; but with hope that he shall be entertained by him, and treated by him as a Saviour. But nothing of this can be where the gospel is hid, and while it remains still an hidden gospel. So all this, while these souls do yet continue lost souls, even for this very cause, for this as the cause, that the gospel being an hidden gospel doth imply the want of things necessary to salvation. But also,

2. The gospel's being an hidden gospel doth imply also that which manifestly tends to promote their destruction. And under that head two things do come to be considered, indisposition on their part, and provocation on God's part; and both these growing so much the more, by how much the longer they continue void of impression under the gospel.

(1.) An indisposition on their part to all the duty they are to do, and to all the advantages they are to use and enjoy in order to their salvation; they grow more and more indisposed the longer they live under the gospel as an hidden gospel. It is necessary, in order to their salvation, that they should exercise "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." But they grow more and more indisposed to these, by how much the longer they continue under the gospel as an hidden gospel to them; and that in several respects.

1. The great things contained in the gospel that should influence them hereunto, they grow from time to time less and less considerable to them: what should have influence to the turning of a soul through Christ to bring him to exercise "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," grows from time to time less considerable. These mighty weighty motives are contained in the gospel. Sinner, if thou dost not turn thou diest! If thou dost not fall into a closure with the Son of God as thy Redeemer, Saviour, and Lord, thou art a ruined creature to all eternity. Lo, here is a glorious heaven before thee, that will be the reward of thy gospel obedience. Here is a place and state of torment, a fiery gulf, a flaming hell before thee, and in view too, that must determine thy place, and the state of thy eternal torment and punishment if thou turn not, if thou do not obey the gospel, if thou becomest not a serious penitent and sincere believer, a faithful dutiful subject to God in Christ. Here are the great considerations which the gospel presents men with, to influence their turning, their renovation and conversion to God through Christ. Now the longer men continue under the gospel, while it yet continues an hidden gospel to them, the less do these considerations signify with them from day to day; because the force of them hath been spent upon them (as it were) heretofore, and now they signify little, still less and less. Such considerations as these, though they are the weightiest and most important that can be imagined, yet they have been blown upon; and, saith the obdurate sinner, I have learned long ago to make light of these things; and, what? do you tell me of these things now? These are the greatest things that can be told them, or mentioned to them. But these things they have learned long ago to make very little of, so as they can say, in case you talk of heaven to me now, pray what doth it signify more now than it did ten or twenty years ago? Is

heaven grown a better thing than it was seven or ten years ago? and I made light of it then. And is hell grown a more terrible thing now than it was seven or ten years ago? and I made light of it then; and, pray, why cannot I as well do so now? These considerations, which should have the mightiest power upon the spirits of men, they still signify less and less, when they continue long under the gospel, while it remains still an hidden gospel to them; for these are blown upon, and men have taught themselves to make light of them, and to have them signify little or nothing to them:—if you cannot speak to me of somewhat greater than heaven and hell, eternal blessedness and eternal misery, you move not me, for these things I have heard and made light of long ago. And,

2. The longer the gospel is hid, the minds of men grow the blinder, as if there be no ability to face the sun without prejudice; the longer you face it the more your prejudice will be. There is a way of beholding that glorious light which shines in the gospel without prejudice, and with the greatest advantage, its beams being refracted as they are allayed by grace; and so it is not an amazing astonishing glory, but a cheering, reviving heart-exhilarating glory, that shines through the glass of the gospel dispensation. But if the gospel be so hid from men that it cannot be thus looked upon, then their minds grow blinder and blinder. The sun hath put out their eyes, as the god of this world is said to do in the very next verse. It is a very dreadful thing to be struck blind with gospel light; but that is the case with many,—gospel light strikes them blind, and their minds grow less and less receptive, the longer they remain under this gospel without effect, without receiving the proper impressions of it. The proper impression of it would contemper the eye to the object, the visible power to that glory that clothes the object; but while nothing of this is done, the longer the light of the gospel shines, the less perspicuity there is in the eye of their minds; it is less perceptive, less capable of taking it in. And,

3. Conscience is grown weaker; and so they are more indisposed to all the duties, and the use of the advantages that are requisite to their salvation. Conscience, it grows weaker, and is more debilitated for the doing its proper office. The context shews us plainly how the state of this case must be understood; that is, that in the ministration of this gospel, they, whose work it is, do apply them-

selves to the very consciences of men in the sight of God; and that truth which they preach carries in it (as you have heard) a self-recommending evidence to the consciences of men. Hereupon there is a close grappling between such truth and conscience; for they do apply themselves in the sight of God, in preaching such truths to the consciences of men, that they do, and that they must do; truth then is insinuating, and gets within; as it must be supposed to do when it is held in unrighteousness. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, (Rom. i. 18,) who hold the truth in unrighteousness." They that hold the truth in unrighteousness do hold it; it is got within them. Then, I say, there is a close and immediate grapple and tug between truth let in, truth intermitted, and conscience; but they have got the victory. Truth, so far as conscience receives it in, is engaged against corrupt inclinations, against vicious appetites, against a carnal heart that is averse and disaffected to God. Here lies the grapple between truth in the conscience, and the power of corrupt inclination in the heart. Well, vicious inclination hath got the victory; every such victory makes the next easier; every former victory makes way for a following one, with so much the greater facility; and conscience having been baffled once by the power of corrupt and carnal inclination can the more easily be baffled again. As you know, if there be two combatants engaged with one another in a very close tug and grapple, he that is conquered and receives the foil hath spent a great deal of his strength, and is grown weaker, and so is the more easily thrown again if there succeed another grapple. So it is in this case, when men have once brought conscience to yield, when they have succeeded so far in the design of mortifying conscience, further conquest is the more easy; for (as it hath been heretofore told you upon some occasion) when these two are engaged against one another, carnal inclination in the heart, and light in the mind, or conscience, they being opposite one to another, and mutually engaged one against another, the one must die; either conscience must be mortified, or corrupt inclination must be mortified. And whereas, the design, intendment, and tendency of gospel truth is to inforce a mortification of corrupt inclination; but the gospel is hid and doth not prevail in order thereunto, then the other part is doomed to death. There can be no consent, no yielding to it, that corrupt inclina-

tion should die: then that of course must be yielded to, let conscience die; if there must be a mortification, let it be upon conscience, and not upon appetite, not upon corrupt inclination, let that live, and let conscience die. And so much now is done towards the killing and mortifying of it; and so it grows weaker and weaker still, by how much the more the resistance to a gospel yet hid hath been continued and kept on foot. And so the indisposition grows more and more, the longer the gospel is hid; and so there is so much the more likelihood to be a being finally lost. That such will be finally lost, are in the way, and tending to it apace, in the concurrence of such things as do now meet in their case; as we would say of a vessel in a storm, and as was said of that wherein the Apostle Paul was, all hope that they should be saved was taken away; Acts xxvii. 20. No hope left of being saved. You may suppose such a concurrence in such a case, that there shall appear very little hope; here are so violent storms upon the soul that hath abandoned and surrendered itself, against conscience, to the government of lust and corrupt inclination.

And here is the Spirit of God gone; as we shall have occasion to show more hereafter. And here is the devil let loose upon a man. "In whom the god of this world hath blinded their eyes." Any one that looks upon this endangered vessel would say the ship were lost, it doth not obey the helm; for so the man doth not whose conscience hath no power over him, doth not govern him; she doth not answer the helm; she falls from the helm; she is lost, would we say of such a vessel. The storm is violent upon it; corrupt inclination grows stronger; God is gone, and the devil hath seized it, and taken possession, and is putting out the eyes of the poor creature as fast as he can. The man is visibly lost. We do not know what miracles God may work; we know not what he may do, but in all appearance the man is lost.

There are other things to be said concerning the growing indisposition upon such a soul, as to the things that are necessary to its being saved; and many things that will show the provocation grows on God's part while this indisposition is growing on man's part. And, take all together, and it seems a very hopeless case, if it be not altogether desperate. Truly there is very little hope left in such a case, that they should be saved at length to whom the gospel doth thus remain hid.

SERMON X.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 3.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

I HAVE already opened unto you what is meant by the gospel being hid, and what is meant by their being lost to whom it is so; and shewn you in what peculiar sense both those must be taken, different from what is the common case of the apostate unconverted world: that both here must be understood to superadd somewhat to that common case, wherein men as sinners in the state of apostacy, in the most general sense have the gospel hid to them, and are themselves in a lost state.

We have from hence gone on to shew you the connection between these two, the gospel's being hid and their being lost; and you have heard the one of these may be spoken of as betokening the other, and so they are manifestly put together here; and that these tokens are most significant when the token and the thing betokened have the relation of cause and effect one to another; that these two may be understood to have that mutual and reciprocal relation to one another.

That is, that the gospel being hid may be the cause that such are lost to whom it is so hid, and their being lost the effect; and back again, that their being lost may be the cause, and the gospel's being hid the effect; and, accordingly, with some difference may this context be understood, according to that two-fold sense, or reference, that one of these may have to the other. Take the former reference or habitude of these to the other, and the sense will run thus; that is, that since the great things of the gospel, about which we apply ourselves to the very consciences of men in the sight of God, are so very plain, and do carry so clear and convictive light with them, as they do, if yet the gospel shall remain hid to such as are thus dealt with from time to time, their minds will grow, in all likelihood, more and more indisposed to comport with the design of it; God will grow more and more displeased, his displeasure will rise higher and higher; their guilt will grow

* Preached April 12, 1691.

greater and greater, and they will be more visibly in danger of being finally lost; or, according to the latter reference, the sense will be thus, that the great things of the gospel are of such evidence, and of such manifest importance, that the consciences of men being applied to, and dealt with from time to time about them, it is hardly conceivable such things can be hid to such persons unless they be lost. The matter is otherwise unaccountable, why such things should not take hold of men; surely they are lost that such things will not fasten upon them. You know, according to the former reference, as being hid is the cause, being lost is the effect; this we have spoken already, and shewed you that the gospel being hid must be the cause of their being lost to whom it is so; both as its being hid doth exclude what is necessary to their salvation, and as it doth include what contributes to their destruction.

And now we go on to the other reference that the one of these hath to the other; that is, as being lost may be the cause, and the gospel's being hid may be the effect: and it is exceeding agreeable to the design of this context to understand the matter so. We do, saith he, in this ministry of our's commend ourselves to the consciences of men in the sight of God. This is plain; and this is our constant course. And what? is it a supposeable thing that our gospel should be hid to them while we do so? How can it be? It can be upon no other account but that they are lost; it must needs argue and suppose them a lost sort of men, upon whom a gospel, so applying itself to conscience, doth not fasten, takes no hold.

But then (will you say,) How must being lost be understood? I have told you already how it must be understood in this place; you are sure it cannot be that they are eventually lost, or already in hell; it cannot be understood so; and it cannot be understood that they are lost in that sense that is common to the apostate world, in respect whereof the Son of Man is said to have come to seek and "save that which was lost." But there are two things besides that it may and must mean in this case.

1. That they are sinfully lost; they are lost in sin; they are lost in carnality, and that in a deeper degree than is common to the rest of the world. There is a greater and more confirmed dominion of sin in them, in their several faculties and powers, than in the generality of the unconverted world, as such; greater, deeper, blacker darkness upon their minds; the god of this world (as it follows in the next

verse) hath put out their eyes, hath blinded them, so as they have less light, less eye-sight than before they had, (so it must be understood,) or than men commonly have, otherwise there were no peculiar reason in the case why this should be said of them. But we find it said. If it were to be understood that the god of this world hath no otherwise blinded them than he hath blinded the unconverted world, why should it be said that they are lost more than all others upon that account? That would argue and be a reason that all are lost alike, if all were blind alike. But he hath "blinded the minds of them that believe not;" he hath been dealing with them all the while they have been otherwise dealt with by another hand, to be brought to faith; he hath been endeavouring to confirm them in their unbelief, and hath made their minds more blind than ever they were; and they are at a remoter distance from believing than ever, as that fascination by which he hath possessed their minds, hath more and more taken hold of them. And it must be understood that they are lost more in heart-sins; disaffection to the holy designs of the gospel, enmity against God and against Christ hath prevailed to a greater height in them, and so they are lost, lost in sin. And,

2. They must be understood hereupon to be lost under deeper guilt and an heavier doom, that is from God, pentially upon them; so that he hath been even provoked to "swear against them, in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest;" as in that Heb. iii. 11, quoted from the 95th Psalm, that was sworn against them that believed not; as it was here in this context said, the minds were blinded of them that believed not.

But this (you may say) is very severe. And truly it is so. But how can we help it? We cannot by our thought, this way or that, alter the nature of things. They will lie as they do; but we may, by a due use of our thoughts, and according to that light which the Holy Scriptures afford us, come to understand things more to advantage. And some things I shall offer to you that may tend partly to justify and partly to mollify this severity. It is indeed very severe, that men under the gospel should arrive to that state, to that pitch, to be so far lost, as that to suppose them now to continue never so long under it, they shall never be the better for it. Let the plainest things that can be thought or spoken be said to them, they shall be always hid to them, because they are lost. A fearful

thing! But do but consider a little what I shall offer to you, which may have that double tendency, that I spoke of, partly to justify this severity, and partly to mollify it. As,

1. Consider this, that those that are thus lost, hereupon is likely to be still a hidden gospel to them, let them hear it never so long, they are like to be never the better for it. I say, Consider, that if any are thus lost, they were not always so lost. This is a thing that is come upon them, and which they have drawn upon themselves. It must be understood with reference to a former day which they have had, wherein the matter was otherwise, wherein they lay not under that dreadful stupefaction, and that heavy doom which now will come upon them. They had their day; those had so in that 95th Psalm, who are given us for a sort of paradigm, they against whom God "sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest." He bare their manners in the wilderness forty years, as the expression is, in the 7th of Acts, of dying Stephen. There is time supposed to have been afforded to such under the gospel, to whom the matter is come to this. They had their day; those that live within the compass of that light which revelation adds to the common light of natural reason; they have their more special day, and have always had so. There is a time, concerning which it is said to sinners, "To-day, if ye will hear my voice, harden not your hearts." He limits a certain day, a certain now; and this is a more critical now. There is a more peculiar crisis of time with such as live under the gospel than is with other men that have not that peculiar light which is afforded to the church of God in the world. God did, in a sort, connive at the nations of the earth that went every one in their own way, as it is said in the 17th of Acts, did overlook them, did not look upon them with so curious, so narrow, so inquisitive an eye; (as it were, speaking of God after the manner of men;) "but now (saith the Apostle) he commandeth all men every where to repent." As that Roman Consul, who, treating with Antiochus, (who made war upon some allies of the Roman state,) demanded of him in the name of the senate and commonwealth of Rome to withdraw his forces from molesting such a place. Saith the king, What time do you allow me to think of this, or consider it? He immediately draws, with a rod he had in his hand, a circle about the king, and tells him,—Now, before you stir out of this circle, declare whether you will be a friend to the senate and people of Rome, or an enemy:—so doth God circum-

scribe men, and set them limits. Now, out of hand, it may be in reference to some of us here in this assembly; the determination may be now, before you stir out of this place, Declare whether you will be reconciled, or persist in your enmity and unreconciled state. How many passages of Scripture do speak to this sense! "Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isaiah lv. 5, 6. Now or never; now you have time for it; it may be, shortly you will have none, nor any ever after. It is a great thing which you find in that somewhat parallel text, (Luke xix. 42.) our Saviour beholds Jerusalem with weeping eyes, in his approach to it, being then upon the opposite hill, the Mount of Olives, between which and that whereon Jerusalem stood there was a valley, in which ran the Brook Kidron; when he was on the opposite hill, and on his descent of that, he having a convenient view of Jerusalem, as it lay before him, he weeps over it in such words as these, (mingled with tears,) "Oh! that thou hadst known, at least, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes." Tears intermingle with, and at length interrupt the words, and cause that apotheosis, so as that the sentence was not filled up. "If thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace." It is filled up with a more speaking silence, by a silence more emphatical than words could be,—“If thou hadst known;” we are only left to conceive what had been if they had known the things that belong to their peace in that their day; “but now they are hid from thine eyes!” Oh, how terribly emphatical is that now!—Now they are hid, a little while ago they were not hid; now they are. The curtain is drawn that creates (for aught we know) an eternal night; that curtain being drawn between the wretched soul and that glorious light that did shine upon it: “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. There is such a now, and there is another now; wherein this now is over, as in that 2 Cor. vi. 2. referred to that of the Prophet Isaiah, xlix. 8; supposing then, any to be thus lost, they were not always so lost; the case was in this respect sometimes otherwise with them. And then,

2. Supposing them thus lost, and the gospel thereupon thus hid, permanently hid, this must refer to the former

provocation; with many of them God was not well pleased; they who had that day in the wilderness, whose carcases fell in the wilderness. If our congregations be full of carcases, if there be so many walking carcases that fill our streets from day to day, God is not well pleased; if the gospel be a lifeless gospel, God is not well pleased, he is provoked. But, further,

3. The causes of that provocation are high and great, so that we have no reason to think it strange if the effects that ensue have very dreadful severity in them. Let me but instance to you, in some concurrences that do make the cause of such displeasure and provocation. As,

(1.) That when men let themselves thus be lost under the gospel by their neglect of it, and their non-attendance to it; they are the greatest things imaginable which they did neglect, to which they refused their attendance, which they would not regard. When the gospel did in the first age of it begin to shed its light upon the world, (though in that more wonderful manner the things were not more wonderful than now,) you hear in that (Acts ii. 11.) that when that gift of tongues was so amazingly, by miracle, first conferred, all the people in that vast confluence at Jerusalem, at that time, from so many several countries, each one heard in his own tongue.—What did he hear?—"The wonderful things of God." The gospel is not another gospel from what it was then; it acquaints us with most wonderful things still. This was the aggravation upon Israel of old, upon Ephraim; "I have written unto them the great things of my law, and they have accounted them a strange thing," counted them strange to them. Hos. viii.

12. That might have been more commodiously expressed according to the significancy of the word there used, "were counted to the man alien thing," a foreign thing; a thing that concerned them not, which they had nothing to do with, which they looked upon as we used to look upon strangers, men that we never saw or knew before; we look upon them wistly; so they looked upon the wonderful things of the law of God, and so those do here upon the wonderful things of the gospel: whereas they are great and wonderful, they should command a man's ears, and engage the attention of his mind to consider and take notice of them; they look upon them as strange things, as alien and foreign to them, and which they had nothing to do with. This is very provoking, when such things are brought to our notice, as "angels stoop down to look

into." The descent of the glorious Son of God into the world, how did it amaze the glorious angels above! What is the meaning of this? say they. They look down after him.—What is the intention of this strange descent?—What is it for that the heir of heaven should go down into that lost, forlorn, wretched world? He that was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, is going down to visit that dark region of death. What means he there? What would he do there? Did they think he went down to die? Did they think he went down to be a man? Did they think he went down to offer himself a sacrifice upon a tree for the redemption and salvation of such? When so wonderful things as these are made known; and about these things (saith the Apostle) we apply ourselves to the consciences of men in the sight of God; we appeal to their consciences about the rights of the Redeemer, and what duty, and what homage, must be owed to him from the redeemed. And, if our gospel be hid you are lost; if you will not regard such a gospel, though having in it so great things, you must be lost. And then,

(2.) These great things are set in the gospel dispensation before men, in the clearest light. They are not represented darkly and unintelligibly, and in parables; but the most important things, and those about which they are most of all dealt with, are the plainest things, that every one that runs may read. What? is there so much of mystery in "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," and in loving the Lord our God with all our hearts, and souls, and might, and our neighbour as ourselves? Is there so much of mystery in these, that men will not regard the greatest things, and clothed with the clearest light? What else doth that mean—We recommend ourselves to the consciences of men in the sight of God? They are such things, as every conscience of man may be expected to admit conviction about out of hand, without more ado; then, sure, if the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. It comes from hence that they are a lost sort of men, otherwise such things could not be hid from them. And,

(3.) They are things that men are dealt with about in the highest name; for, when we come to you, to deal with you about these things, we do not come upon our own errand; we do not come to you in our own name; but the ministers of this gospel are ministers of Christ, and they come

to you in the name of Christ; and he hath expressly said; “He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that heareth me, heareth him that sent me.” This same gospel dispensation is the ministry of the Son of God, as the case is plainly stated before us in that 1st of Hebrews, beginning, “God, that spake many other ways in former times, hath now spoken to us by his Son;” and continues speaking to us by his Son; and (as he represents the case in the next chapter) “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by them that heard him; God bearing them witness?” And afterwards, in the 12th chapter and 25th verse, “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.” This is said, when we are told that our Lord was at the right hand of God on the throne of the Majesty on high; as in the 3d verse of that chapter, having given an account of our being under this ministry of the Son of God; though we are told, that, “he, having purged our sins by himself, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;” yet still we are under his dispensation, and still he is the great Speaker to us; so that now, when any suffer themselves to be thus lost under the gospel, in their own sinful and chosen deceiving blindness and enmity against it, no wonder if it be determined that it shall be an hidden gospel to them, and they lie long enough under the dispensation of it, and be never the better; for they have been affronting the Majesty of the Son of God under the dispensation all this time. He that did seek and command greater attention, and greater reverence, and greater subjection of spirit, and upon higher right and title than when there was that terrible appearance upon Mount Sinai, that shook the earth, and that seemed as if it would have put the creation into a paroxysm; there hath been a greater obligation to the deepest reverence and veneration upon them. And how just is the provocation when this gospel is neglected, and men lose themselves under it, for him to say and determine this,—Well now, as to you it shall always be an hidden gospel! And again,

(4.) There is this farther in the case, that these great things in that great name, in that most excellent name, have been hinted, not once but often; and often inculcated and urged over and over again in the authority of the same

name. What a mighty weight doth this add to the same load of guilt! and how much matter doth it supply to feed the indignation, to heighten the provocation, that such were applied to from time to time, in a continued course, for many years together. "The earth, that drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and brings forth herbs meet for him by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: if there be fruit, a blessing comes upon it, and follows it; if there be no fruit, nothing but briars and thorns, then it is followed with a curse, and a dreadful curse,—“It is nigh unto cursing, and its end is to be burned.” Heb. vi. 7, 8. “He that being often reprov’d, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” Prov. xxix. 1. A fearful thing, when the gospel itself shall not be my remedy!—shall be destroyed without remedy; no remedy shall remedy your case. And,

(5.) We must suppose the Spirit to have often been at work in this time, and while such things were from time to time inculcated; so it was with the people of Israel; “you do always resist the Holy Ghost.” Acts vii. He was then always striving, more or less, otherwise there could not always be a resistance. That is doing “despite to the Spirit of grace.” Heb. x. 29. And herein is the greatest provocation, as I have told you heretofore, there is a remarkable accent in that expression, “the Spirit of grace.” Oh, that Spirit of all kindness, and grace, and sweetness, and benignity! to despite him, what an high provocation is this? When he comes and toucheth any of your minds, and makes some impression on your hearts, saith he, secretly and inwardly: “Sinner, wilt thou yet return? Hast thou yet no desire after God?—no inclination to know a Redeemer, and choose and close with him? Now to spite a Spirit of grace, when he speaks to you so kindly, and so sweetly, and so tenderly,—Oh, sinner, do not go on, and perish for ever!—here is the very height of provocation. The word, in the original, signifies to injure inwardly the Spirit of grace, to make the injury enter into him, as it were; it imports to sting a man to the heart, to the very soul; as if it had been said, your injury pierceth into that Spirit of grace, that Spirit of love, kindness, and goodness; it enters into it. Thus it must be, when in such days, and at such times as these, the great things of the gospel are heard with no effect. And,

(6.) It must be supposed, conscience was in some measure convinced at this time; for applications were made to

it in the plainest cases. We have applied ourselves to the consciences of men in the sight of God, saith the Apostle. And now if our gospel be hid, it is that you are lost. And,

(7.) It must be supposed too, that affections have been stirred in some measure and variously; there have been some desires enkindled, and some fears awakened, and some hopes and joys possibly raised, and some tastes and relishes of the sweetness that is in this Gospel, and of the things contained therein; as it is supposed in that Heb. iv. 4, 5. after all this, to lose yourselves in darkness and wickedness; now if the gospel be hid, there is no recovering such by repentance, as he thereafterwards speaks. But,

(8.) This adds weight to all the rest, that they were very light matters for which men have exposed themselves to this fearful loss, even of themselves, of their very souls: a loss that nothing can recompense, nothing can make up. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matt. xvi. 26. What hast thou had in exchange for thy soul? The smallest matters imaginable, the temporary satisfaction of a lust. I sold my soul (may one say) to please my friend. I sold my soul (may another say) for the love I had, for the lust I had, to a cup of drink. I sold my soul (may a third say) for the pleasure I took in a vain idle companion. These are the things that kept me from closing with God, uniting with my Redeemer, and from engaging and persisting in the way of life. O that God, and Christ, and heaven, should be set so low! Thou didst break with me, (must the great God say, and must the Redeemer that died for you say,) thou didst break with me for a trifle, for a thing of nought; yea, thou didst prefer before me the vilest things, the most odious things. Thou didst rather choose to be a vassal, a slave to lust, than to live under the easy yoke and government of a compassionate and merciful Redeemer and Saviour. The deformities of wickedness were more amiable in thine eyes than the beauties of holiness. What can be said in this case, when the story comes to be told, and the matter is to be represented just as it is, that it is thus as you have heard?

And that is the third thing to be considered in this case:—That as former provocation must have been supposed, so that provocation must have been very high and very great upon these sundry mentioned accounts. But then I add upon all this,

4. That if any hereupon be thus lost (as you have heard) it is only that God hath retired from them, withdrawn

from them. He hath not positively hurt them; he never put any ill thoughts into them, or any ill disposition of mind. If it be severe in itself, and dreadful to you, that you are now a lost creature, God hath no hand in it, otherwise than as he retired from you:—"Thy destruction is of thyself, but in him is thy help found." Hos. xiii. 9. He was ready to help thee, and to save thee, thou only destroyed thyself; he only withdrew that presence for which thou didst not care, that Spirit which thou didst vex and grieve; that is all: he never put any ill thought or inclination into thy mind and heart, thou destroyedst thyself; he did but say, These wretched creatures do not care for me, do not care for my Son, do not care for my Spirit; well, I will retire, I will let them alone, I will let them have their own way. He had said to you, "Turn ye at my reproof, I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words unto you; I called and ye refused, I stretched out my hands, and no man regarded." Prov. i. Well, I behold your destruction now. It is not said, I will destroy you, but "I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh;" and it will certainly come. God tempteth no man, neither is he tempted by any; but every man is "tempted when he is led away of his own lust and enticed." James i. 14. And then I would add lastly,

5. That although all this be very certain, yet we cannot suppose the Apostle here to be absolutely decisive in his judgment concerning the final states of particular persons: such may be more lost, and in a worse and more dreadful sense lost than many others in the world, than the generality of the pagan world. But though they are so, it is not for all that determined that they are so lost as that they cannot be recovered. And we are sure they are not so lost as that they cannot be recovered, if they have not sinned that sin which cannot be pardoned; and which I do in the general believe that no man hath ever committed, or is guilty of, that is afraid he hath; indeed, your case is more dangerous than before, which should awaken you so much the more, because it is dangerous, and you are upon hazardous terms. They may be said to be lost, as being more out of the reach of the ordinary methods of grace, who yet are not absolutely lost, not sure to be finally lost. And no man hath reason to apprehend he is so lost, finally lost, irrecoverably lost, that comes once to be solicitous about it. No, if our God hath brought you to consider and bethink yourself; I am in danger to be lost, I know not what will

become of me, or of my case at length, if I that have been such a stranger to God should continue much longer a stranger to him; if I that have neglected to capitulate with the Son of God should much longer neglect it; I know not what will become of this, it may be bitterness in the end. If you begin thus to consider, I hope the issue will prove thus, that it will be said of you as it was of the Prodigal Son, "This my son was dead and is alive, he was lost but is found." But more to this purpose, (as I have partly intimated already,) I shall speak in the use.

SERMON XI.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 3.

But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

They are lost souls to whom the gospel is an hidden gospel. This (you know) we have been upon from these words; and we have in this shewed you what is meant by the gospel's being hid, and what is meant by the soul's being lost; and that both these are to be understood in a sense peculiar and different from the common case of men; and in what reference the gospel's being hid, and their being lost, doth differ from the common case, we have particularly shewn you: and have further shewn the connection between these things, the gospel's being hid, and soul's being lost, to whom it is so; the one doth betoken the other, and they are the most significant tokens which have connection with the thing betokened; as causes and effects, the one to the other. I have shewn this is the case here: that the gospel's being hid, it is a cause of the soul's being lost, both as it excludes what is necessary to their salvation, and as it includes what promotes their destruction. I have again shewed you too, that being lost may also be the cause of the gospel's being hid; and shewn how being lost is to be taken in that case: lost in wickedness, as men more extremely wicked are said to be, and lost under a divine doom. So they must be understood to be to whom the gospel is therefore hid, men given up and

* Preached April 19, 1691.

forsaken of God, and then the God of this world blinds them.

And because this appears very severe, therefore I did by sundry considerations endeavour partly to justify, and partly to mollify, this severity; now I come to the use of this important truth. And it will be useful,

Use 1. To inform us of sundry truths that by way of inference may be deduced here. As,

1. That it is no sufficient ground upon which any may conclude their state to be safe and good, that they live under the gospel: I pray consider it. It is not enough hereupon to ground a conclusion concerning your good and safe final state, that you live under the gospel. No, though you had apostolical preachers among you, for such these Corinthians had to whom this is with so much terror spoken. No, though you had angelical preachers, such as could speak to you, not with the tongues of men only, but of angels; for the Jews had that word before that was given to them as a gospel; (as the Apostle takes notice, Heb. iii.) unto them was the gospel preached, as well as to us. And their gospel was called the law, as that whole revelation went under the name of the law: "They that have sinned without the law, shall perish without the law." In those days when the law was the more conspicuous part of it, they had it "by the ministration of angels, but they kept it not." Acts vii. 53. Nay, though it were by the most divine preacher, our blessed Lord himself; "How can we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which began to be spoken by the Lord himself?" Heb. ii. 2. even that gospel was preached by the Son of God himself, and as it was, so was an hidden gospel to many, and they lost souls under it. A man may perish as well under an hidden gospel, as under no gospel. And again,

2. We are to infer, That the proper design of the gospel is the salvation of souls. If the gospel be hid it is hid to them that are lost; if it were not hid they would not be lost, that is plainly implied: but that which hath no design or tendency to save would not save, whether hidden or not hidden. But there is no interveniency in this case to hinder a person's being saved by the gospel, but only its being hid: therefore that which would save souls if not hid, must have an aptitude and designation to this purpose. Here is nothing to hinder a soul being saved by the gospel if it be not hid: by this you learn therefore that the true and apt tendency and design of the gospel is, to save

souls. How often is it called by names that signify so much? "To you is the word of this salvation sent." Acts xiii. 22. "After you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Eph. i. 13. "How can we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which first began to be spoken?" Heb. ii. 3. What doth the words of this gospel speak?—It speaks salvation. It is a great matter to know the gospel by its true name, and to understand it accordingly: to think what God hath sent among you, when he hath sent his gospel among you; and that which is its end and design, ought to be yours in attending it. The gospel would make great and glorious work (I doubt not) among us, if it were more generally come to this, that the true end of the gospel were our end, were convinced when we come to attend; how would it confound many a one if they were to give an account of their end in coming to attend, and wait on the ministry of the gospel? I am going to such a place, such an assembly, such a church, such a meeting-house. Well saith one, and what are you going for? I am going to hear what such a man can say; I am going to please my fancy and curiosity, to gratify my novel humour. God knows how few come to such assemblies with that temper of mind so as that they can truly say, being asked, He that knows all things, knows I go to look after the salvation of my own soul; it is a gospel of salvation that I go to attend upon, and I go to attend upon it as such, on purpose that I may be saved, that I may in this way be working out my own salvation. But what an affront is it to the great and glorious Lord of heaven and earth to pervert the design of this gospel. What? Have men nothing to play with but sacred things: things that carry the stamp of the authority and majesty, as well as the grace and goodness of Heaven upon them? Is there nothing else to be trifled with but things of that sacred and awful import? No wonder if the gospel be hid, and no wonder if souls be lost by multitudes at this rate. But again,

3. We may further learn, That while a man lives under the gospel, the great question that depends concerning him is, Shall I be saved, or shall I be lost? Here is the great question that depends concerning every one, and which they ought to recount with themselves over and over again. Here is this case depending concerning me; shall I be finally saved or lost? Oh! what an awful thought is this that every day that goes over my head, and every time I

go to hear a sermon, still this question lies under consideration; shall I in the issue, or end of my course, be a saved or a lost man? Sure at this rate we should be working out our salvation with fear and trembling; nothing becomes us more, nothing is more suitable to the state of our case. And,

4. We further learn hence, That men may be lost on this side hell. If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that *are* lost; hid before they reach hell, whither no gospel comes; and so lost before they reach thither. And then again,

5. By parity of reason, Men may be saved on this side heaven, as well as they may be lost on this side hell. We know the great Emmanuel was otherwise called Jesus, because he should save his people from their sins. If this blessed word hath taken effect upon thy soul, it is saved; that is, it is so far saved now from sin, as that it governs now no longer. Its empire is broken, its throne is thrown down in the soul. Here is salvation on this side heaven: salvation is this day come to this house, to this soul, he is already a saved one. There is inchoate salvation; salvation begun that ascertains consummate salvation, and from which that will not be separated. The New Jerusalem, that glorious city that comes down out of heaven from God; Rev. xxi 4. (supposing that be meant of a state of the church of God on earth;) the nations of them that are saved, walk in it. As soon as they enter into it, there they walk as saved ones. The nations of the saved, there they dwell, there they inhabit the city of God.

6. They to whom the gospel is not hid are not lost, or are of these saved ones; if they to whom the gospel is hid be lost, they to whom it is not hid are saved. They are in this state of salvation already. Oh! happy creatures and blessed state that you are come into. The gospel is no longer a hidden gospel to you, though it is to many a one beside. With what admiration may you say, "I thank thee, (Oh Father,) Lord of heaven and earth, that when such things have been hid from many a wise and prudent one, thou hast revealed them unto me!" Matt. xi. 24, 25. hast caused thine own bright light to penetrate, to strike through into my very soul, to shine into my heart, as it follows in this context: "And thereupon, though I was a wanderer, a stray and lost creature, thou hast sought thy servant, I went astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant,

for I do not forget thy commandments." Psalm cxix. last verse. Thou hast sought thy servant, and found him out. And thou mayest say of thy soul, as the father of his prodigal son; "This my soul was lost and is found." Luke xv. last verse. "We all went astray as lost sheep, and he bare the iniquities of us all," Isaiah liii. 6. that we might be recovered and saved at last. Oh you that find gospel light to enter into your souls, bless God, and admire! The gospel is not hid from me, I am therefore saved out of my lost state.

But besides these inferences of truth, there is a further and another sort of use that I must proceed to.

Use 2. It may be (upon what hath been before said in opening the doctrine of this text to you) some awakenings may be upon the spirits of some, perhaps some may have been in a going among us, and may say in their hearts, And what is likely upon all this to become of me? What is my final state like to prove? Shall I be saved, or shall I be lost? I would fain give some help in this case, and would in order to it, lead such into some distinction of thoughts, that they may not be confounded in their inquiry. Now this inquiry in general may be capable of being formed into three questions. Either 1st. The meaning of their inquiry may be, Shall I be certainly saved at last; or 2ndly. The meaning of their inquiry may be, How shall I do, certainly to know if I am certainly to be lost? or 3dly. The meaning of their inquiry may be, How shall I evidence it to myself, or have it evidenced to me, that there is any thing of hope in my case? That, going on in the use of prescribed and appointed means, things may be brought at length to an happy issue? That I may have such a present view of my case, as to judge and think of it, that it may be possible that I may be saved at last?

1. Now as to the first of these questions, supposing it to be the question of any whom God hath begun lately to work on; of any that he hath begun lately to awaken:—Then I must needs say to that question; Friend, you are too hasty, you make too much haste to think, that when God hath but newly begun with you, you should presently be at a certainty that you shall be saved. This may be more haste than good speed. When you have gone on a considerable tract of time in a serious endeavour of working out your salvation with fear and trembling; and giving all diligence to make your calling and election sure, it will

be time enough to put this question then; it is yet unseasonable for you. And then.

2. Supposing that the next be the question with any, **How shall I know that I shall be certainly lost?** As the the former question is an unseasonable one, this is a vain one, altogether vain. If you shall certainly be lost, what can it avail you to know that you shall? or do you think it is possible you should ever come to know it on this side being in hell? It must be by some revelation from God, mediate or immediate; but God doth not use to do vain things, to reveal any thing to no purpose: and this can be to no imaginable purpose. If you shall certainly be lost it can do you no good to foreknow it; and therefore the revelation of it is not to be expected from God any ways, mediately or immediately, and consequently it is a foolish vain question. But,

3. If the question be, **How may it appear that there is any thing of hope in my case, that in the use of the prescribed and appointed means, I may, through the grace of God, possibly be saved at last?** This is a sober question, and becoming a serious and considerate man, and one that hath a value for his soul, and a reverence for God, the great Disposer of our everlasting soul's concernments. And therefore in reference to this I would be assisting the best I can, and as God shall enable me. And there are many things that are to be said to it. As,

1. That you always ought to hope till there be most apparent reason for total despair. If there be not a reason for total despair, then you are under obligation to admit of some hope; nothing is plainer, that a reasonable creature, capable of futurity and of another state, he hath it as a law in his nature to use prospect, and to exercise hope, in reference to futurity. And I cannot but recollect a noted passage of that Platonic Jew, Philo Judæus, "That hope towards God, in reference to men's future concernments, is of the very essence of man; and he is not to be called a man, a human creature, that hath not hope in reference to his future concernments." And there is a great deal in it: it is to be looked upon as somewhat else than a lavish expression, for God hath (no doubt) contemplated the frame of all his creatures to their state: and having made man capable of futurity and eternity in another state; hope cannot but be an essentiating principle in his very nature. And therefore it is very unnatural and a doing violence to ourselves, to endeavour to take away all

hope in reference to that futurity which is yet before you, and which you have yet in prospect. You ought to hope while there is no apparent cause of total despair; for whatsoever doth not admit totality, there must be somewhat of the contrary, by reason whereof it doth not so. There can be no imaginable ground upon which a man should not admit of a total despair, but as there is some hope. If there were no hope, despair would be total; if there be found hope, despair cannot be total. And it is matter of duty to you, always to entertain and cherish some hope when there is no apparent reason for total despair. That I fore-lay in the first place.

2. There can be no reason for total despair while the gospel stands unrepealed; while it is neither generally repealed, nor repealed particularly as to you. All that while the connection remains between faith in Christ and salvation: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." John iii. 16. While this gospel that makes this connection between believing in the Son of God and not perishing, not being lost, but being saved, stands unrepealed, we have no reason for total despair. Still if I believe, I shall be saved; if I believe in the Son of God, I shall live. I have been a vile creature, it is true; a great rebel, not only against the authority, but against the grace of God; and I have deserved to perish a thousand times over, and to be given up as lost without remedy. But the gospel is not yet repealed that saith, Whosoever believes in the Son of God shall not perish, shall not be lost, but have everlasting life; it is not repealed in general, nor shall be to the end of the world. And what? Will any man say it is repealed as to him? It is repealed as to me? Pray shew that repeal! you cannot say that it is repealed as to you, unless you had a Bible reached down from heaven that saith, whosoever believeth shall be saved, whosoever believeth on the Son of God shall not perish, but have everlasting life, except John such an one, or Thomas such an one, or Elizabeth such an one. Shew me such a Bible that saith the gospel is repealed as to you; though I believe never so much I shall not be saved, I am an excepted person. Where is the exception? Shew me the Bible wherein is that exception.

Aye, but you may say, it is very true, I doubt not, that if yet I believe I may be saved; but alas! what reason have I to hope that I shall ever be brought to believe, ever be

enabled to believe, who have resisted the grace of God, and the Spirit of God so long, so often, so injuriously, so insolently, as I have done? What hope is that I shall ever be brought to believe? I add therefore,

3. That there is not only hope, nay, I may say, ground of confidence, that if you believe you shall be saved, but there is also ground of very great hope, if you do indeed set your minds to inquire and consider about this matter, that you shall be brought to believe. For that is the head which I lay down here as the third in order: that all the while the command, the law, stands in force as to you, that obligeth you to believe, all that while there is a ground and reason left you to hope, that you shall be enabled to believe, when the evangelical law doth particularly oblige you amongst the rest that live under the gospel, to believe in the Son of God, that you may not perish but have everlasting life, as much as if there were a law made in your case alone. If there were a particular law made concerning you, and laying the charge upon you—Do thou believe on the Son of God, that thou mayest not perish, but have everlasting life; I say you are as much obliged to believe on the Son of God, as if there were a particular law made concerning you, and none but you, concerning you alone. This is the command of God, this is the law, “that we believe on him whom he hath sent.” John iii. 33. It cannot be said that because there is such a law that obligeth you to believe in Jesus Christ, therefore you certainly shall believe; but it is to be collected with the greatest clearness imaginable, that there being such a law obliging you to believe, you have reason to hope you shall be enabled to believe if you do seriously design the thing. Is it to be thought that God should come (as it were) directly to you, that the Son of God should apply himself directly to you, sinner: I charge thee, accept my Son, believe in my Son, take him to be thy Redeemer, thy Saviour, thy Lord; and that there should be no hope that ever you should do so, or that he will give you any help in order thereunto? This is the most unimaginable thing in all the world.

Question. But you may perhaps say, How shall I do to understand this, that I am under obligation to believe on the Son of God, that I may not perish, that I may not be lost?

Answer. To that I say, (that I may leave this a clear and undisputed thing in your thoughts,) either you must be so obliged to believe in the Son of God, to receive and take

him for your's, your Lord and Saviour, or else, your not doing so is no sin. Now, where is that person that dares to produce himself, and say, I live under the gospel, that gospel is come to me, whereof this is the great fundamental law, the command of the great Author of it, even of the God of heaven; this is his commandment, that we believe on his Son: but it is a commandment that doth not oblige me? Where is the man that dares say, If I live an infidel under the gospel all the rest of my time, I am no sinner in it? If believing be not your duty, not believing is not your sin, but what? Is there any body that can say, or dare say, that to refuse Christ is not his sin? Then to accept him is duty. Therefore doth this gospel, still as you live under it, urge it on you as a duty out of hand to come to an agreement with the Son of God; resign thyself up to him, put thyself into his hands, and at his feet; into his hands to be saved, and at his feet to be subject, and to obey him. This the gospel chargeth on you; and while it doth so, while it calls you to repentance, and calls you to faith, you have reason to hope still; I have God's warrant, why should I not expect his help? If he calls me, why shall I not think he will help me, help me to repent, and help me to believe in his Son, that I may not be finally and for ever lost! And again,

4. You can do nothing in your circumstances more pleasing and grateful to God than to hope in his mercy; thus to state your case, I am naturally a lost creature, a perishing creature, I have deserved to perish over and over; that a Spirit of divine light and grace should never visit my soul more, or look after me more, I have highly deserved it; but yet I have heard of the nature of God, that he is immensely good and gracious; his name hath told me his nature, "The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful, long suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin." Exod. xxxiv. 5. I will throw myself upon that name, I will cast myself on his mercy; I have nothing to do but that; and that, why should I stick to do? Now, I say, you please him, you please him beyond all things that in your circumstances you are any way capable of doing. The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him and that hope in his mercy,—pleasure in them! Strange that any act of an abject, guilty, impure, perishing wretch should be pleasing and grateful to the pure, holy, glorious, ever-blessed, God; that he should be pleased with any act of mine. Why, it

is not as it is your's, but it is with reference to the object, as it is a thing suitable unto him, a tribute due to his great and glorious name. It is the best acknowledgment you can make of his deity, of his godhead, of his most excellent perfect nature, comprehensive of all perfection, but wherein we are taught to conceive this as the most eminent, when we are told that God is love. Here is a poor creature, as insolent as he hath been, (saith God,) as proud, as full of enmity and malignity against me, now I see he comes to acknowledge me to be God, that is, acknowledgeth me to be merciful, infinitely, immensely merciful, beyond limits merciful, beyond expression merciful. He takes pleasure in them that hope in his mercy. Now (saith he) they give me my due, now they acknowledge me to be God, that they will yet hope in my mercy. Remember all this while that it is hope that I am encouraging you to without security; you have reason to hope, but you have no reason to be secure, no more than he hath who in a battle encompassed with thousands about him alive yet, yet alive, but still deaths are flying about him as thick as hail. You have reason to hope, but no reason to be secure; but if you hope, you do the most grateful thing to God, you pay him the most pleasant grateful tribute that such an abject creature as any of us is capable of rendering to him: you give him the proper glory of the deity, boundlessly good and gracious, rich in mercy. This is to own him to be God, to own him to be infinite, to own that his ways do as far exceed your ways, and his thoughts your thoughts, as east and west, and heaven and earth, are asunder. Isa. lv. 8, 9. Again,

5. Know that it is not for you to prescribe limits to the exercise of this mercy, it is not for you to set bounds to it. If God limit himself and any way signify that he hath done so, so be it; but that he hath no way signified. But it is great insolency for any of us to talk of limiting him; to say, so far the patience of God shall extend, and no further; beyond such a sermon he will never give me one minute's addition to the day of grace. It is not for you to limit him; if he limit himself, you have nothing to say to that, but that he hath never told you he hath done, or will do in reference to your case. But I would have you to be possessed with the apprehension how uncreaturely a thing it is for any of us to take upon us to limit God, and set a day to the exercise of his patience, his sparing mercy, his bounty, and his saving mercy. If you do rightly take up

this matter, you will understand, that there is in despair the highest presumption. There is not in any thing higher presumption than there is in absolute despair. If you allow yourselves absolutely to despair, and say, God will never look after my soul; then nothing remains to me but to abandon it to perish. I say, you cannot be guilty of an higher presumption than doth lie in this despair; for it is for you to take upon you to limit God, to measure God; you take upon you hereby to determine what infiniteness can do, and what it cannot do. This is very bold presumption. This is most uncreaturely arrogance; for you to take upon you to set God his limits and bounds. No; say I will always wait, and always hope, let him defer as long as he pleaseth; but let me lie a prostrate creature at his foot, still in fears, and tears, and tremblings; though it be till I perish, I will perish in this posture, rather than ever to say he cannot help me, he will not save me; it will not consist with the limits of his patience and bounty towards a poor wretch to save me. Take heed of saying so. There is high presumption in this despair.

There are many other things behind.

SERMON XII.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 3.

But if our Gospel be hid.

WE have the use in hand of this terrible word; sundry inferences of truth we recommended to you from it; and proceeded to other uses, wherein the design was to speak suitably to the case of awakened souls among us, that have made known their case, and their solicitous sad thoughts. We have had regard to this great inquiry, What shall we do that we may understand our own case, and how matters are like finally to issue with us?—Shall we be saved, or shall we be lost? And several things were spoken to that which we stated as a sober question; which answers were general, and more fundamental to what was to ensue.

* Preached April 26, 1691.

And those things being forelaid, we shall now go on to give some characters that may be distinguishing somewhat of the state of persons under the gospel; so as that, if they be found, will give ground of hope; if they be not found, it will administer much ground of fear.

But here you must take the matter thus: that, for such characters as those which I shall mention, the discerning of them actually upon yourselves is never intended so to encourage your hope as if no apprehension of danger should still remain; you are not to hope without apprehension of danger; and if such characters are not found, you are not to fear without apprehension of remedy; because (as hath been told you) the design is not to tell you who shall certainly be saved, or who certainly lost; but only to shew what cause there is, or may be, of more or less hope or fear, in reference to the final issue of things with you. And so,

1. It gives much ground of hope when any do find in themselves a formed desire of understanding distinctly the terms of life and death; when any would fain know upon what terms they may expect to be saved or perish in the final issue of things; when they do not desire to be unacquainted with the true tenor of the gospel as touching these matters; but accurately to know what is required, that they may live, and escape the wrath that is to come. That hiddenness of the gospel that is in connection with the being lost, is with those with whom it hath this fatal event, a chosen thing, a voluntary thing; it is hid by an affected blindness of heart. Men are blind, as being unwilling to see. (Ephes. iv. 18.) "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes." If thou hadst known; it is plain, that that not knowing was faulty, inasmuch as their being afterwards hid was penal; and it could not be faulty but as being voluntary,—that they did not desire to know the things of their peace; whoever of you can avow it before the great Searcher of hearts, and speak it to him as the sense of your souls, "Lord, thou that knoweth all things, knowest that I do desire to understand what the tenor and import of that rule is by which souls are to live or die for ever; I desire to understand it as it is,—not to have it disguised to me,—not to have it misrepresented, according as the foregoing expressions are; wherein the apostle protests against the disguising of the word, and clothing of things with specious false colours; but approving and commending them—

selves in the manifestation of the very truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 2 Cor. iv. 1, 2. They (I say) that can avow this have ground of hope; and they that would not have it so, they are persons to whom the gospel is hid, and are lost, as the series of discourse shews. You have much cause to hope God will drive things to a good issue with you at length, if you do seriously desire to understand his mind in the gospel, what it doth determine concerning the way of saving sinners; which, if they take, they are saved; if they do not, they are lost. When this is your sense, "For thy name's sake lead me and guide me; Shew me thy way, I would fain walk in thy truth!" But for such as desire only to have smooth things said unto them; and if the true doctrine of the gospel will be terrible; if it will look with an unfavourable aspect upon my vicious inclinations,—Let me never hear it. If any say to God, "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" (Job xxi. 14.) "Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from among us." Isaiah xxx. 11. They say to the prophets, Prophecy not; we do not desire to have that bright light stand so directly in view before our eyes; Oh, might it cease! Oh, might it disappear! This is a dreadful token; a very dreadful token; and if any, more than others, are in danger of being lost under the gospel, these are the men. They that receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved, (their spirits could by no means comport with the truth,) are given up that they might perish,—that they "might be damned." 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. And,

2. It is very hopeful where there is a great sense of remaining ignorance; when any do think very meanly of the knowledge that they have of those great and important things of God, that do concern souls so very nearly. Agur is brought in saying, "I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man;" (Prov. xxx. 2.) when there is a very humble, self-abasing opinion taken up and maintained of our own meanness, blindness, and darkness, the great imperfection and defectiveness of our knowledge in the most needful things. This looks very hopefully; and on the other hand it is a very dreadful token, when any think themselves so wise that they need be taught no more. There is more hope of a fool than of such an one, that is wise in his own conceit; he seems marked out for destruction, that thinks he is so well acquainted with all the great secrets and mysteries of godliness that he

needs no further instruction; and thereupon despises and hates it. "He that hateth instruction shall die." They are plain, peremptory words; and nothing is in the nature of the thing of a more destructive tendency. As the moralist said, *Multi pervenissent ad sapientiam, &c.* many might have attained to wisdom if they had not thought they had attained to it already. So many might have attained to the saving knowledge of God in Christ, if they had not thought they had already attained. Again,

3. It is a very hopeful token, when there is any perception of knowledge growing in these great things; when we can apprehend that light doth come in by the appointed means; that God hath shined into our hearts, as it follows in this context: "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, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them:" but "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts." 2 Cor. iv. 5, 6. That is a sign then the gospel is not quite hid, if some beams of light be darted in, be injected. If you find there is an increase, it is to be increased with the increase of God," as the apostle's expression is, (Coloss. ii. 19;) for this is divine knowledge that we are speaking of, the "knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And it is to them that do observe themselves a perceptible thing, and a thing to be perceived with pleasure, when there is an increase. How grateful is the impulse, the first arrival of any new beam of light, any new thought; when the mind comes to be more and more opened, and things let in upon it, which it is of concernment to it to understand and know. And do but consider, such of you as are more solicitous about the state of your case and what is like to be the final issue of things with you: You have lived a considerable time under the gospel; and, What, have you gained no acquaintance with the great contents thereof? There are many things discovered concerning the state of man by nature, Do you understand nothing of them? Do you not know that he is a degenerate creature, that he hath a blind mind, a corrupt, depraved heart? That he is wrapped up in guilt, and exposed thereupon to divine displeasure? It reveals much of a Redeemer; Do you understand nothing of that?—who this Redeemer is, the eternal Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory, the heir of all things; that he came

into this world, took human flesh, and died a sacrifice for sin? Do not you understand this? and that hereupon God is well pleased with him for his righteousness sake, that divine justice acquiesceth, expects no higher, no other sacrifice?—that, whereas there must be a great change wrought in the temper of men's spirits to make them capable of the duty of time, and the felicity of eternity; an Almighty Spirit is obtained by the blood of that sacrifice, that it should go forth to do this great work upon the souls of men; so that you are not to be left hopeless, struggling in your own impotence to attempt and undertake (as it were) a new creation in your own souls; but that Spirit will be given to them that ask it, and you may draw in its influences as so much vital breath. These things the gospel acquaints you with; and do you understand nothing of them? Hath no light come in by all this discovery all this while? Indeed it is a fearful token, where there is no knowledge by long-sitting under the gospel; when any man's case doth admit it to be said of them, they are "ever learning, and never come to the knowledge of the truth;" a sort of persons marked out for separation from God and all good men; from such turn aside; such as have a form of godliness, but deny the power of it; (2 Tim. iii. 7.) and are "ever learning, but never come to the knowledge of the truth;" it is a people of no understanding, "therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour;" (Isaiah xxvii. 11.) for, (as hath been said,) ignorance under the gospel, of that it hath made necessary to be understood, and done in order to salvation; it is most voluntary, and therefore comes to be punished by the gospel's being hid, and their being lost, if they finally prove to be so. And again,

4. It yet will look well and hopefully, if you find that you have a real value for the gospel; if you esteem highly of it; if you consider it as the "word of life," as the gospel of your salvation; and if such notions as are given you of it, and under which you are taught to conceive of it, have recommended it to you, and you look upon it as a sacred and venerable thing; if you do not come to hear a sermon as if you were to hear a story told you; to hear the word of God as a tale that is told; but the word of it recommends itself to you as a majestic thing, as carrying a divine stamp and impress upon it; if you be in any measure awed by it, so as to tremble at the divine word,—this is a most comfortable character where it can be found. It is

towards such that God is looking with favour, when any come and sit trembling under his word. He will not look with slight and despising eyes upon such; he looks upon them with indulgence and a favourable regard. (Isaiah lxvi. 2.) and you may look upon it, that he is in the way with you, while you find that disposition in your own spirits towards his word. That he may reckon, I will speak to such, and not be disregarded in what I say. If there be not so pleasant a relish of divine truths; if yet there be an awe of them: though they do not appear amiable to you, if yet they appear awful and majestic; and you consider, when you attend upon gospel dispensations, you have to do with divine things; and you consider the word that you do hear, not as the words of men, but as they are, indeed, the words of God; there is hope in this case: this hath a good aspect, looks promisingly towards a good issue. But when the gospel itself is looked upon as a contemptible thing, as much regard would be shewed to a fable; this is of most dreadful import; when the very means of our salvation is come into contempt with us, as they that in a dangerous sickness are brought to despise the only proper remedies that can be thought of, as capable for recovering them, and saving their lives, this is a dangerous token. Again,

5. It looks hopefully, if you find that the intention of your mind is much engaged in hearing the word; it is a natural consequent of your having awful thoughts of it, of your esteeming highly of it as a divine revelation; that which should be immediately consequent hereupon must be a very earnest intention of spirit in hearing of it, to attend it as that wherein my very life is concerned; the word saith, "Hear, and your souls shall live." (Isaiah lv. 3.) Thereupon you must say, I will hear, that my soul may live. If this be your design in hearing, it is very hopeful indeed, that you are not likely to be lost under the gospel. If this be the temper of your minds, I come to hear that my soul may live; and so you watch every word; you observe and bend the strength of your minds, as much as in you is, to attend and listen to what you hear; as the eyes of the assembly are said to be fastened on our Lord when he took the book of God, and expounded and opened it to them. Luke iv. 20. But if there be no attention in hearing; if persons come to such assemblies as these to see, or help to make a shew only, to see a reed shaken with the wind. If this be your errand, you come to please your fancy, or you come because you do not else know what to do with

so much time; you do not know how to employ an otherwise waste hour, and therefore go to this or that church or meeting, (as it happens,) throw yourself in here or there; this is of very threatening import. If this temper of mind should continue with you, it looks as fatally as any can be thought; that a man will be lost under that gospel at last which he never regards, to which he gives no attention. It may be, you are not at leisure, your thoughts are otherwise taken up; as it was with Ezekiel's hearers, "They sit before thee as my people," (Ezek. xxxiii. 31.) and with their mouths they shew much love, (with their countenances they do, they carry the appearance and shew of those that come out of love to my worship, and to exercise devotedness to me;) but their hearts go after their covetousness; their heart was wandering all the while. I do not speak, in this case, of the incursion, the surprising incursion of vain and unsuitable thoughts, the wanderings which we sincerely bind and set ourselves against, and cannot totally hinder; but I speak of letting our spirits at liberty to wander, keeping them under no restraint, letting our thoughts rove for such an hour or two together, when we are to be attending to things that concern the life and death of our souls. This is a very dismal token, where-soever it is to be found. If it be thus usually with any, none more likely to be lost under the gospel than such. And again,

6. It looks hopefully, if, so far as you have understood, and, by earnest attention from time to time, come to know the true meaning and import of the gospel, and what the terms of life and death for souls really are; you do there-upon desire to have your hearts wrought up to those terms; and there is no wish entertained with you, that you give harbour to, that the tenor of the whole gospel were otherwise than it is; you do not desire that the terms of life and death should be brought down to a compliance with your inclinations; but you desire your hearts may be wrought up to them; and say, Do not make me a gospel like myself, but make me like the gospel. Is that your sense? It looks very encouragingly; I would take this gospel just as it is; I find it requires the receiving Christ Jesus as a Saviour and as a Lord; I am willing it should be thus; I do not desire there should be any change to gratify any ill inclination of mine in this tenor of the gospel. I find it forbids all manner of sin; and reigning sin, under the severest penalty; that wherever it reigns it dooms too. I

submit to this state of the case; I desire to have every thing of sin down, not to be in dominion. It may be, there are some fainter desires of this kind having place where a real thorough work is not yet wrought. But it is well there is so far a tendency towards it; that you are right in your aims and designs, and that you have the true mark before your eye; that is, to have the great and proper impression of the gospel inwrought into your souls, and they made agreeable to it; and that you do not wish to have a gospel formed on purpose to be more agreeable to you. When once a soul is transformed into the likeness and image of the gospel; this is it that doth most certainly characterize it for heaven and eternal glory. You have "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you," (or into which you have been delivered, as that may be read. Rom. vi. 17.) this is to have that "fruit unto holiness" habitually first, the end whereof will be "eternal life," as it follows in the same chapter; and while you are aiming at this, and tending to this, the matter carries a very hopeful aspect with it. As on the other hand, it is very dreadful, when that, whatsoever wit and skill any have more than others is all employed this way, to wrest and torture, and mis-shape the rule by which their present practice is to be measured, and by which God's final judgment is to be measured concerning them. When the gospel is not to transform you, but you to transform the gospel; you would not be shapen according to it, but you will fain shape it according to yourselves, according to your own hearts; nothing doth look more like one to be lost and perish under the gospel than this. And,

7. Whereas, that gospel by which you are to be saved, (if ever you be saved,) is a gospel of reconciliation; it is a very hopeful character if you do really desire and value friendship with God; if his love and favour be of real value with you; when you can speak this as the sense of your souls, "In his favour is life;" (Psalm xxx. 5.) which you must understand did not only hold forth the truth of the thing, but the sense of a good man, a well-minded man concerning that truth. It is very true, indeed, that, if you consider the thing itself, objectively taken, in the favour of God stands the life of every one; but this doth not only speak the truth of the thing, but it speaks the sense of a good and honest heart; that he accounts that in the favour of God stands his very life. And, do you really account so?—so as whatever you have to enjoy in the world

besides that, cannot satisfy you, if your hearts yet hang in doubt within you concerning your state God-ward. It is not corn, and wine, and oil, that you wish for, and can satisfy yourselves with ; but, “ Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance, and that will put more joy into our hearts than when corn, and wine, and oil increase !” Oh, there can be no worse character, than when it is a matter of indifference with any, whether God have a favour for them, or no favour ! His friendship and his enmity is all one to them. Under a gospel of reconciliation, how likely are such to be lost, when the very end of this gospel of reconciliation between God and them is a disregarded, despised thing ; when men can go all the day long through the hurry of their affairs and businesses, and their thoughts are filled and taken up with vanity and with impertinences, in comparison, but no room is left for one such thought throughout a whole day, How stand things between me and heaven ? Am I under the divine favour, or disfavour ? How fearful was the case of those Israelites, when they had, at the same time, meat in their mouths and wrath upon their heads ? God “ gave them quails for their use, and they did eat, and the wrath of God came upon them while they were eating ;” (Psalm lxxviii. 30, 31.) “ On the wicked he rains snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest ;” (Psalm xi. 6.) “ He is angry with the wicked every day.” (Psalm vii. 11.) They that concern not themselves about any such matters, it is all one to them, Give me what will please my appetite, sense, or flesh, and let God be pleased or displeased. I am willing to run the hazard of that. This looks very fatally, when it is so.

And then again, as consequent to this,

8. Truly, fear itself doth give much ground of hope. It is a very hopeful character upon you, when you are really afraid lest a controversy should still depend, and not be taken up between God and you : “ Blessed is he that (thus) feareth always.” Prov. xxviii. 14. And so it is, on the other hand, a very black character, where there is no such thing. He that hardeneth his heart against such fear shall fall into mischief. And again,

9. Where there is much consideration about the affairs of your souls, and your hearts are much taken up in musing and meditating on these matters, it is an hopeful sign. An unconsidering soul is a perishing soul,—hath the character upon it of a lost soul. But if your mind be full of thoughts from time to time ; or, if there be many times when you

can set yourselves on purpose to consider the state of your souls, and your case God-ward, this looks very hopefully; that is, that God is at work with you, that he is dealing with your spirits; for you are not to assume it to yourselves that there are any such good thoughts, any which have that [tendency, which have that look. "We are not sufficient to think any thing as of ourselves;" (2 Cor. iii. 5.) that is, which is good. Indeed, one ground why many are so apt excessively to torture and disquiet their spirits with the apprehension of an irrecoverable lost state, is from too much arrogance; that is, they are apt to arrogate to themselves such things, which, upon reflection, they cannot deny are in them; for you must know there is common grace that leads to special. If it hath not reached up to special, it hath a tendency and leadingness thitherward. If God be dealing with spirits by his common grace, it looks hopefully if it be comported with; and when thoughts do throng in from time to time with you, that you cannot do as the most do, that is, throw away all concern about your souls, as it may be the generality, so far as you have opportunity to observe, trouble not themselves (as you can discern) with any thoughts at all, what shall become of them hereafter. But there have been such thoughts which have been struck in as so many darts and arrows into your hearts. You are not to think that you have been the authors of them to yourselves, but that God is at work with you, is dealing with you, is in the way with you; and this (I say) looks hopefully, if it be duly comported with. And yet, again,

10. It is a very hopeful, encouraging character, if you should find upon consideration that you have arrived no farther, and that you have not gotten to a firmer, more settled state in holiness and walking with God, yet you do also find a great disposition in yourself to self-accusing; that you are apt to criminate yourself, to find fault with yourself, and to lay load on yourself with blame; to wrap up yourself (as it were) with shame; that your proficiency hath been so slow and little all this while. This looks very hopefully; when this is the sense of your souls, looking in, and looking up at the same time, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" The publican's character was a good character, and an hopeful one, compared with the opposite one of the Pharisee. Luke xviii. 13. The Pharisee and the Publican both go up together to the temple to pray; the Pharisee hath nothing to take notice of in

himself but his good deeds, (and very pitiful ones they were;) "I fast twice in the week; I give alms of all I possess;" I pay "tithes, mint, anise, and cummin;" (we are told elsewhere they punctually paid these tithes;) "I am not as other men, nor as this Publican." The Publican hath nothing to say; but, standing at awful distance, cries out, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" And the Publican (it is said) "went home to his house justified rather than the other." Such as are full of self-accusing thought, they live with perhaps too tormenting fears concerning their state Godward, yet there is that of intermingled good with it that leads towards a good issue at length, and which carries a plain indication, that they are not to look upon their state as a lost state. And, especially,

11. If there be any relentings towards God, any tender relenting and self-bemoaning. There may be self-accusing without these kindly genuine touches of remorse that there should be; and there may be of them too, and in too low a degree, and in too transient a manner. But while there is any thing of them, there is real ground of hope that God is dealing with you, and is likely to carry on the work further, according as you duly comport with him in what he hath began, and is yet doing. "I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself." Jer. xxxi. 18. Refer that to what goes before, and you will see there is "hope in their end." "I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself;"—things are like to have a good issue yet, though he hath been wayward, cross, perverse, and rebellious; yet, let me listen to him; Do not I hear him bemoaning himself?—"I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, and secretly saying, Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God." There is hope in the end, as to this case. It looks as if it would have a good end at last. A heart hard as a rock under the gospel, is a dreadful thing; the impenitent heart, the heart that cannot repent. And I add, lastly,

12. If there be yet a resolution to persist, to go on in the way that leads towards life, this looks well; you have not yet attained; you are not yet at a certainty; but yet you are resolved to go on, to hold on your course according to that warning given by good Sannuel to the people of Israel, that were now set a trembling, and in a most dreadful consternation, what would become of them; they dreamed of nothing, when God thundered upon them, and when the lightning from heaven testified divine displea-

sure; they, I say, thought of nothing but destruction. Well, (saith Samuel,) do not you, for your part, "turn aside from following the Lord;" he will not cast you off if you persevere in your way, and turn not aside from following him. He will not cast off his people, because it hath pleased the Lord to make them his people; he will cast off none that do not first cast off him. And many such, too, he may recall and recover; but while there is a resolution with you, come of it what will, I will never forsake the holy way; I will spend my days in prayers and tears: I will never give over waiting and seeking, whatever comes of it. Oh! what an emphatical benediction is that we find pronounced in this case! "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors; for whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord." Prov. viii. 34, 35. There is a blessing upon all waiting ones. Pray, take that blessing home, whosoever of you are yet trembling ones, suspenseful ones,—you that have hearts full of doubt, you know not what will become of things with you; if there be that resolution to wait and persist in a known prescribed way of duty, he that so doth, hath a blessing pronounced from the God of his salvation; there is a blessing over his head from the God of his salvation, to shew you how little liable he is to the heavy doom of being irrecoverably lost. That God, who glories in the title of the God of our salvation, he is breathing down a blessing upon you all, while that you are resolved upon a course of waiting; I will wait till I die; "I will call upon him as long as I live;" I will never give over following him, let him do what he will with me. This is the course that is never likely to have an ill end.

SERMON XIII.*

2 CORINTHIANS, IV. 3.

But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.

WE are, upon the use of this, and the last we insisted upon was of inquiry; or, we intended therein to assist their inquiry who may be solicitous touching the state of their own case, whether they are not lost irrecoverably while they live under a gospel that aims at the saving of souls, but which they apprehend doth them no good, and they fear never will. I have in reference to such, the last time, given sundry characters that will bespeak their state upon whom they are found, not to be hopeless; that it is such, as concerning which they ought by no means to conclude that they are lost, that they are out of the reach of mercy.

And, as to what thereupon remains, I have only this further to do, that is, to lay down two conclusions, in which I shall sum up much of the meaning of what hath been said; that is,

1. That there can be no hope that their state shall be good and safe at last, who continually live in the neglect of those methods which the gospel they live under prescribes in order to their salvation. And,

2. That there can be no ground for them to fear they shall be finally lost, who, with dependence on the grace of the Spirit of Christ, are resolved, to their uttermost, to use the methods which the gospel doth prescribe in order to salvation. The one sort have, in their present state, no reasonable ground to hope; the other, in their present posture, have no reasonable ground of despairing fear. These two conclusions sum up what I would leave with you upon this subject. And thereupon I shall say somewhat: 1. By way of warning; and (if that will not do) by way of lamentation to the former sort. And, 2dly, somewhat by way of exhortation and encouragement to the latter.

1. As to the former, I must repeat it to them, that they have no ground for a present hope that they shall be saved,

* Preached, May 10, 1691.

in the continued neglect of those means and methods which the gospel hath prescribed for salvation. And I would recommend to such, for their warning, those plain and awful words, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God worketh in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure." Phil. ii. 12, 13. There is an injunction with the reason of it, and both the injunction and the reason have their distinct parts. As to the injunction, there is the substance of it, with its modification. And the enforcing reason thereof hath in it considerable too of the substance thereof, and its modification, each of the latter corresponding with each of the former: Work you, why? for God works; do you work with fear and trembling, for God works at will and pleasure. You have reason to work, because God works. You have reason to work "with fear and trembling," because he works under no obligation, but at absolute liberty, so that he may desist when he will. If you resist, if you withstand, if you work not in subserviency, in subordination to his gracious work, he may retire and leave you to perish when he will; he works at will and pleasure, therefore do you work with "fear and trembling." And since we find the Scripture doth speak after this tenor, here and in many other places, "Strive to enter in at the straight gate,"—"Give diligence to make your calling and election sure,"—"They that run in a race, run all, but one obtains the prize; so run that you may obtain:" as if he should say, Do you so run as if you were the only person in all the world that should be saved, and you might be that one; that is, as if you did know, that but one person in all the world should be saved, and you might be that one. "But one obtains the prize;" run as though there were but one that should be saved, and that you may be that one. Since, (I say,) this is the tenor of Scripture in reference to the great affairs of our salvation, or that we may not be finally lost under this gospel; there can be no present hope, no ground for a present rational hope for them that do counterwork these stated methods that God hath prescribed for the saving of souls. I will not say, that God will never reclaim you; we know not what boundless immense goodness, and the riches of mercy, that are with him, may do;—but, I say, you have not a ground for a present rational hope; the way you are in takes hold of hell, and leads down to the chambers of death. You are in the way to perish. Such as have determined within themselves they will continue in a

sinful endeavour of pleasing their flesh, and in a sinful neglect of saving their souls, and will admit no thought that tends to their disquiet, and to cross them in their sinful course; but they live under the gospel. They (I say) that do so conjoin with the profession of the gospel the contempt of it, are never to expect that they are to be saved by the gospel they despise; or that the grace of it shall save them, while the authority of it doth not rule them. They have no reason to expect that. Therefore, if this should be the continued resolution of any, (I hope better things as to you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak;) but if this should be the continuing resolution and posture of any soul, nothing remains but to lament their case.

I would take up a lamentation for such, and invite all that are serious to join with me in lamenting the wretched forlorn state of such as are perishing upon these terms. Sundry things concur to give us here the representation and prospect of a most dismal and deplorable condition; a stake that doth even claim and challenge from us to be lamented; that we lament, while all endeavours of remedying it seem still frustrate and in vain. Why,

(1.) Such are perishing under the gospel; that is, they are benighted at noon; they have created to themselves an horrid darkness in the midst of a bright and clear day;—they are lost in a day of salvation. This is the day of salvation; it is so (it is to be hoped) to many others; and, oh, what a fearful thing it is to be lost, and perish amidst a company that are taking hold of salvation, or of whom salvation is taking hold? And,

(2.) They are the more fearfully lost, not only under the means of salvation, but by them; gospel light strikes them blind: “this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light;” the sweet vital savours of the gospel strike them dead; become to them the “savour of death unto death.” They are so much the more miserably lost, by how the more there is of apt and suitable endeavours used in vain for the saving of them. The blessed God opens to them the design he hath in hand of saving sinners; he hath sent his Son with direct application to them, “to seek and to save them that are lost;” his Spirit strives with them, and against all its motions, all its convictions, they are breaking their own way to eternal ruin. How dismal is the case, to think that they are so often invited, yet are lost; warned, and yet

lost! lost! Exhorted, and yet lost! Besought, and yet lost! Wept over, and yet lost! They descend, and go down and perish under the intreaties, and against the prayers and cries of friends and relations, and of such to whom their souls are dear even as their own souls. And again,

(3.) It is to be considered that it is their souls that are lost. This is the subject of the loss. Ah, poor wretch! if thou hadst only lost an estate; if thou hadst only lost an eye; if thou hadst only lost a limb, a hand, a foot, a leg, an arm, here had been either some remedy, or some relief for this loss; but to lose a soul, an immortal spirit; to have that precipitated and plunged into an eternal ruin,—what reparation, what remedy for this loss? And,

(4.) Such are lost when they never thought of it, or, it may be, when they had the positive thought all the while of being saved; when they speak peace, peace, to themselves, sudden destruction, a surprising destruction, comes upon them. Wast thou not wont to say, I shall be safe in my neglect of God? I shall live a prayerless life, and be safe? I shall live a vicious life, and be safe? I may please my flesh, and gratify my sense all my days, and be safe? Are they not wont to think so? They perish when they think not of it; they are ingulphed and swallowed up in an unfeared ruin; sunk the worse, and so much the more dreadfully by much the less it was dreaded, the more fearfully the less it was feared. And,

(5.) It is very deplorable, in their case, to think of the companions that they have been formerly associated with, and that they are associated with now. Such as have been companions with them in exercises of religion, such as have been companions with them in acts of wickedness, and such as are now companions with them in torments, fearful aggravations of their being thus lost, arise from such. Those that they have been wont to hear sermons with, and that they have been associated with in the drunken debauches that have drowned all the remembrance of them. Those that they have been with (it may be) under convictions, under some good impressions; and with them in those acts of wickedness that have stupified their souls, and bereft them of sense, and abolished and obliterated all the impressions that were made on them before. What heightenings will here be of the woe!—what inforcement of the torment of that state, when the wretched partakers therein together shall fall to mutual upbraidings, criminations, and recriminations of one ano-

ther!—when one shall say, Oh, cursed be the day that ever I saw thy face; and the other shall retort, and say, Oh, cursed be the day that ever I saw thine!—that we who did sometimes pray together, and sat under the word of God together, could encourage and heighten one another to that pitch of wickedness, to be sensual together, debauched together, vain together, drunken together, wicked together, in affront to all that light that shone in our faces, and that shone in our very consciences? And,

(6.) What a mighty addition will it make to be perpetually reflecting, in that state wherein thou canst not chuse, canst not cease to be an everlasting companion to thyself?—when one is to be but his own companion, as he hath made himself very ill company to himself, he cannot but be much worse in the infernal state, when there shall be an everlasting self-consciousness of former wickedness and present resentments that cannot be avoided, and against which it is impossible his soul should now be able to fortify itself. Oh, the pitiable state of going down to perdition with an enlightened mind! Consider that. Think of it over again. The pitiable state (I say) of going down to perdition with an enlightened mind! To descend with rational principles in a man's soul, which by how much the less heretofore they did serve for government, do so much the more effectually now serve for torment;—that light that did not govern, did then condemn, and doth now torment. The clearer the light the more fervent the fire, when that light turns all into flames, and tormenting flames; so much the more light, so much the more the fervour of that flame. To reflect in that cursed society, that every man shall be to himself his own cursed companion in the place of torment, upon the rational principles that he had admitted, understood, and assented to before; and to think then how very reasonable, (oh, how very reasonable!) were such sentiments as these, often inculcated on me in my former state, that a creature can never have been made to be his own end; that it could never be supposed that a reasonable, intelligent, immortal spirit was principally designed to serve a piece of clay; that a religion, that could never suffice to govern a man, would never suffice to save him; that that which doth not sufficiently distinguish one from a wicked world, shall never distinguish him from a perishing world. How often have such things as these been inculcated! and who sees not the reason of them now? But when they shall be

revived in the future state, in that state wherein the wretched creature finds himself finally and irrecoverably lost, how will the light of all these rational principles glare in his face! Then what a stupid foolish creature was I that could not consider these plain things before, when I saw how plain they were! When one shall reflect and bethink himself, How often was I told that that religion, which should end in felicity, must begin in transformation! If it shall make my soul happy hereafter it must change me now, it must have changed it in the former state; it must have implanted the love of God in it,—it must have inwrought into it the præmordial principles of the divine likeness, otherwise the temper of my own soul must banish me from the divine presence, and associate me with devils and damned spirits, throughout a long eternity. How often did I hear these things! How plain were they, and unanswerable! How impossible to oppose any thing to the light and evidence of them! These are things wherein the gospel doth recommend itself to the very consciences of men that sit under it, as the foregoing words speak, “we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” They have done so, who have spoken to you at this rate, and about such things as these. If such a gospel be hid; if the things contained in it, that carry so convictive cogent light and evidence in them; if these things (I say) be hid, what can the issue be but to be lost? And how terrible will that be! How dreadful must the case be, when any find themselves finally lost, and to have nothing to do in a vast immense eternity, but to revolve these plain convictive thoughts in their own wretched minds! And again, it may be added,

(7.) What an additional weight of misery will there be from reflecting upon those that were companions with many such in their former state, and did take the right and safe way, and persisted and persevered in it to the end! What tormenting resentments will arise from the thoughts of such! To think of such and such an one, we have gone to the assemblies together, we have sat together under the same sermons. It may be such an one was convinced, and so was I; perhaps we compared thoughts with one another; the convictions with such and such issued in a thorough work. Such and such an one being convinced did shut up himself in secret; he wrought out the matter in prayer with the blessed God. The thing issued at length in a solemn covenant between him and the Redeemer; he

gave up his soul, infolded in the bonds of an everlasting covenant, into his hands who is the great and only Saviour of souls. And why did not I do so too? We have had the same warning; "My son, when sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Prov. i. 10. Oh, why did he take warning, and why did not I? Why did he pray, and why did not I? Why did he covenant with God, and why did not I? Why did he say, God should be his God, and I would never be brought to say it? And why was he true and stedfast to that covenant, but I was false and unsteady? And,

(8.) How will it wound to think how near the matter was to a determination the other way, at some particular juncture of time; sometimes, when I was deliberating, the balances seemed to hang even, and I was just upon resolving the safe and happy way! O wretched creature that I was! what came into my mind that I should recede and revolt, and fly back when I was urged to it, to come just now to a closure with God in Christ: Accept and resign; take him, and give up myself? What madness possessed me, that, when I was just going to do it, I did it not? What plucked me back? Oh, to think how very light matters turned the scale! the other season of sensual delights; this and that vainly to be tried once again; less than a feather cast the balance against my God and my soul, and my eternal well-being; what will these things do in an eternity, when a man hath no other employment for his thoughts? And, lastly, to think,

(9.) That I took him for my adviser whom I might easily have known to be the destroyer of souls, and against whom I know to be the Saviour of them. The counsels that come from our blessed Lord and Redeemer, and the temptations of the wicked one, they carry their own differences so manifestly along with them, that nothing could have been easier than to have discerned and perceived the difference; whose was the voice in the one, and whose in the other; whose language was now spoke, and whose language then. How easy is it to discern the difference when there are suggestions thrown into the mind, "Soul, take thine ease," pursue thy pleasures, admit of no disturbing disquieting thoughts; what were thy faculties made for but to be gratified and indulged? And when it is on the other hand said, Thou dost not know how long thou shalt live; thou hast no command of another breath; thou art to make no boast of to-morrow, for thou dost not know whe-

ther ever thou shalt see a to-morrow. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is nigh;" turn to him while he invites thee to turn, and while thou mayest turn and be accepted. How easily are these voices distinguishable! But for a man to have given himself up to be led captive by Satan at his will, so as he hath no other will but the devil's will; it is the devil's will I should neglect God, I should forfeit my soul, and throw off all thoughts and cares about my eternal concerns; and he hath signified his will in such and such temptations. Oh, that a man should be so infatuated as to comply with the known will of the devil, who is a murderer from the beginning; a liar, and a destroyer of souls; and that against him who is love, and kindness, and goodness itself, and the Redeemer and Saviour of souls! If there be reason to apprehend there are any sitting under the gospel; under its daily teachings, solicitations, warnings, and counsels; that will yet perish in their own way, till they finally perish, if they will perish unreclaimed, let them not perish unlamented; let us throw tears over ruining and perishing souls; follow them with lamentations to the brink of the pit, though we cannot save them from precipitating themselves into it.

2. But I must change my voice, somewhat turn my style, and apply myself a little to that other sort, such as are full of solicitude lest they should at length perish and be lost under this gospel, as having it still an hidden gospel to them that hath never done them good, and that they are afraid they never shall be the better for. I must repeat to such, that, in the way of your duty, and while with dependance on the grace and Spirit of Christ you are resolved to comply with the prescribed methods of the gospel, you have no cause to fear you shall be lost; you have as little cause for that fear as the others have for their mad presumptuous hopes. I must leave some things with such, the more fully to convince them of this. As,

(1.) You are in the present way of salvation; the way you are in hath a good tendency; it looks well: it looks towards a good end; it hath a pleasing aspect with it: never fear you shall miscarry while you are in this way; it is the way of life, and the way that tends to life; that is, there is life in the beginning of it, and the further any one makes progress in it, the more and more he penetrates into the regions of life. There is a continual tendency to life in that way; that is, as any do persist and go on further, they

do come into fuller and fuller vitality, till they arrive to the present fulness thereof, for eternal life; and the inchoate life of this present state, are both of a-piece. There are some previous essays tending to life that you are under the present seizure of, even now, while you are looking heaven-ward, looking God-ward; it is somewhat of life, or of preparatory workings that have that tendency, and that cognation have taken hold of you, because that it is plain such thoughts are internal, and so are the springs of an internal motion; and there is no internal motion, or from within, which is not to be looked upon as a kind of vital motion; though it is true, indeed, there are fainter beginnings that are extinguishable, yet there is a great matter to have some beginnings; for if they are yet such as are extinguishable, they are yet also such as are improveable, and may rise and come higher, till they come beyond the sphere and verge of common grace, into the verge of special grace, which two spheres do very closely border and touch upon one another; and he that is upon the extremity, the extreme verge (as I may speak) of common grace, is often upon the very verge and brink of special grace. And,

(2.) As you are in the way of God, a way that hath a good look and tendency, God is in the way with you, it cannot but be; but that he is with you, and will be with you, while you are with him; you find him with you; you are to impute it to his being with you, to his presence with you, that there are inclinations and dispositions that tend heavenward, that tend towards that good and blessed state. You are to take heed of arrogating any thing in this kind to yourselves. Suppose it be yet but common grace,—common grace is grace; and if it be grace, it is not nature; it is not to be attributed to you,—you are not to arrogate and claim it to yourselves; This is of me. The thinking of a good thought, we have not a sufficiency for, as of ourselves; we are not to claim that: and there is many a good thought that may be short of saving grace; but we should take heed of assuming it to ourselves; and therefore, if there be inclinations and dispositions towards that way, and towards that state which you are to design for, and professedly bending your thoughts towards, yet say, you have a divine presence with you; for these things are to be ascribed to him. All such previous workings and dispositions, you must say, they do all lay claim to a divine author; such a wretch as I must lay claim to nothing that hath any the least appearance of good in it. And,

(3.) You are to consider for excitation and encouragement jointly, that this is the proper state of conflict wherein now you are; your present state is a conflicting state. You are with great and earnest contention of spirit to make your way to heaven and eternal life; it is the business of the state wherein you are; a state of probation, and a state of preparation for a final eternal state. Resolve upon doing suitable to your state. And consider,

(4.) That it will not last long. The time of trial will soon be over; rest, and enjoyment, and rejoicing, and triumph, will ensue. Conflict and fidelity therein to the death. Entertain yourselves with such pleasant words as those which have come from that mouth into which, and by which all grace is poured, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." Matt. xxiv. 13. "To him that overcometh shall be given to sit on my throne, as I have overcome, and am sat down with my Father on his throne." Rev. iii. 21. "He that overcometh shall be a pillar in the house of my God, and shall go no more out." Rev. iii. 12. "To him that overcometh shall be given the new name in the white stone, which none knoweth but he that hath it." Rev. iii. 17. "He that overcometh shall be fed with the heavenly manna. And he that overcometh shall inherit all things." Rev. ii. 17. Strive and labour now as one that designs and expects to overcome; and never fear you can be lost in so doing. It is unreasonable to fear a being lost in that only method which is prescribed for salvation. For, what? Do we think the blessed God hath prescribed inaptly, unsuitably, vainly, and with no accommodation or subserviency to the design for which he hath professedly prescribed it? And again,

(5.) As that which should excite you greatly, consider that the contest is for your souls; it is for eternal life; there is no giving out so long as you can say I am on this side eternity, my life is yet whole in me; I have this spirit, this soul, that was infused by the Almighty, yet in me; I am never to throw away this soul so long as I have it; so long as I find this spirit is in me, that inspiration of the Almighty that first gave me understanding. I am never to abandon this soul; and it is abandoned if you should throw away all hope; you can do nothing for your souls if there be no hope; despair binds up all rational endeavours. There is not one step more ever made, in order to salvation, after it becomes totally despaired of; that is an actual participation of hell. You put yourself into the infernal state

too soon, and without warrant, while you have no pretence, no ground for it. Why should a man devilize himself, when God hath not done it? He doth distinguish your state from that of devils, why should you make it the same with them? There is no such thing as praying in hell; no such thing as supplication for mercy, or expectation of it; no possible expectation. Why should a man turn his present state into a final state, and that which is so accursedly final. Your present state is in order to another that admits of no change, and which can refer to none beyond it. And consider, too,

(6.) That your business lies with God, who is pleased to make himself known by most sweet and pleasant titles,—“The God of all grace,”—“God who is rich in mercy;”—and by such a name as, “The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, though he will by no means clear the guilty;” that is, those that will have none of his mercy; they that by impenitency and infidelity bind down their own guilt upon their own souls, he will never clear them; but he is most ready (even from what he saith to be his nature) to receive returning souls, complying souls, those that are willing to take his way, and fall in with his methods; otherwise he must forego his own name, and no longer be called gracious, merciful, abundant in goodness. Will you not believe him when he protests and swears by his own life? “As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of a sinner, but that he return and live. Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, oh, house of Israel?” Do you think that God trifles with men, when he bespeaks them at this rate? Do not these words carry a signification with them, the most pleasant, the most emphatical that can be thought, to any soul that is inclined to turn to him? They import nothing of encouragement to those that will not turn, or to them that securely and resolutely go on in the way of their own hearts, otherwise than as they do still invite their return: but supposing no returning disposition, there are other words that speak the mind of God towards that other sort of men. “He will wound the hairy scalp of them that go on still in their trespasses.” Psalm lxxviii. 21. “He is angry with the wicked every day.” Psalm vii. 11. “He rains snares upon them, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest. This is the portion of their cup.” Psalm xi. 6. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” So he re-

presents himself towards them who are resolved to continue the contest with him, and will rush upon the thick bosses of his buckler." Job xv. 21. But if any will take hold of his strength, and make peace with him, they shall make peace. Isa. xxvii. 4, 5. Fury is not in him, but though he can easily, as a devouring fire, burn up briars and thorns, yet if any will take hold of his strength, and make peace with him, they shall make peace. This is God-like, this is suitable to his present nature, every way suitable to the perfection of the Deity. Consider with what a God you have to do: you have no cause to fear having to do with such a God, as will not let you be lost and perish finally: you have no cause to fear that he will, when you find in your heart a disposition to comply with him, and a desire to do so; fain I would do so, fain I would be what he would have me be, and do what he would have me do. It is a blasphemy against the divine goodness, against the very nature of God, to suppose that he will throw away a soul that so inclines towards him. And,

7. It is against the express word of Christ to suppose that he will let such a soul be lost. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. xi. 28. "He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." John vi. 37. And what? Will you not believe him? What cause did he ever give you to disbelieve him? To whom did he ever shew himself guileful, or apt to deceive? He that came into this world, full of grace and truth, how horrid is it to take up a suspicious thought of him! And lastly consider,

8. That it is not only contrary to his word, but it is contrary to his nature and design to let such a soul miscarry, be lost and perish in his sight, and under his eye, that desires to comply with the methods that he hath prescribed in his gospel. It is against his nature, his nature is expressed by the divine name which is in him; "My name is in him," as we are told by God himself, concerning Christ, the great Angel of the covenant. Exod. xxiii. 21. "Provoke him not, for my name is in him." And what is God's name? The Lord, the Lord God, gracious,—as you heard before. My name is in him, that is, my very nature is in him, whereof that name is expressive.

And it is contrary to his design for what? Do you think he came on purpose into this world to save sinners, and yet to let them be lost, when they are willing to take his prescribed way, and comply with his methods? How can

it be so? What, is he not true to himself? Doth he not agree with himself? consist with himself? Hath he forgotten what he died for, what he took human nature for, and what he hung upon an ignominious cross for? All the difficulties he had to contend with for the saving of souls are all overcome and over already. He is to be scourged no more, buffeted no more, crucified no more, to be in travail for souls, and in agonies under the divine anger no more, he hath done all that was toilsome, laborious, and painful, borne all that was grievous and bitter; he hath nothing now to do but what is pleasant work, to emit the influences of life and grace to craving and desiring souls: and so he will do, if the desires of our souls be indeed towards him; he cannot forego himself, and quit his own design; he was so intent upon that design of saving, as to run through the greatest difficulties imaginable, all the terrors of death, and all the powers of hell and darkness could not stand in his way; no, he would make through them all to save souls. Will he then let yours be lost, when you are crying after him, and reaching towards him, to put yourselves into the hands and arms of his saving mercy? It cannot be.

And so as I have shewn how reasonable it is to hope, I shall (God willing) the next time take a text on purpose to shew you how necessary it is to hope, that as from what has been said, you may understand somewhat of the ground of hope in this case, (for you are not to hope without ground,) so you may understand somewhat of the great importance of hope in it too. I shall therefore next (God willing) make it my business to shew of how mighty influence hope is, towards bringing about that great work which is to be done upon souls, in order to their eternal well-being.