

SERMON XXXIV.

To wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and hath committed to us the word of reconciliation.—2 COR. v. 19.

THE apostle, having mentioned reconciliation in the former verse, doth now enforce, amplify, and explain it, and insist upon it in this and the following verses. Here you have three things—

1. The sum and substance of the gospel, or the way on God's part—*God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.*

2. The fruit of this reconciliation—*Not imputing their trespasses to them.*

3. The means of application, or bringing it about on man's part—*Θεμένος ἐν ἡμῖν, 'placed in us.'*

For the first clause, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself;' this is the sum of the whole gospel. There is more glory in this one line, than in the great volume of the whole creation; there we may read God infinite and glorious in his majesty and power, but here in his wisdom and grace. A God reconciled should be welcome news to the fallen creature. Reconciliation is good in any case. The misery of the world cometh from the differences and disappointments which are in the world. How happy were we, if all differences were taken up between man and man, much more between God and man; if heaven and earth were once at an agreement. We are at a loss how to make up our breaches with one another; it is easy to open the flood-gates, and let out the waters of strife; but to set things at rights again, and to reduce every stream into its proper channel, who hath the skill to do that? If we could once compose our own differences by compromise, yet to take up the quarrel between us and God is not so easy; though men and angels had joined in consultation about a way and project how to bring it to pass, we had still been to seek; but when man was at an utter loss, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.'

In the words observe—

[1.] A privilege—*Reconciliation*, which is a returning to grace and favour after a breach.

[2.] The author of the design—God the Father, who in the mystery of redemption is the highest judge and wronged party. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.'

[3.] The means—*In Christ*. Reconciliation is considerable either as to the purchase or application of it. As to the purchase, 'God was in Christ reconciling;' God hath used Christ as a means to make peace between him and us, Col. i. 20. The application, God is in Christ reconciling by virtue of our union with him; in Christ, God that was formerly far from us is come nigh to us, and in Christ we draw nigh to God; in him we meet, and we in him, and he is in us.

[4.] The parties interested—on the one hand, *the world*; on the other—*To himself*.

(1.) 'The world.' The expression is used indefinitely, though not

universally—First, the world, to show that men, and not angels, 2 Peter ii. 4; the sinning angels had no mediator nor reconciler. Secondly, to note which is the ground of the gospel tendry; John iii. 16, ‘God so loved the world, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.’ Thirdly, to represent the freeness of God’s grace: 1 John v. 19, ‘And, we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness;’—this world, that lay in sin was, God reconciling. In themselves, God’s elect differ nothing from the rest of the world till grace prevent them; they were as bad as any in the world, of the same race of cursed mankind, not only living in the world, but after the fashions of the world; ‘dead in trespasses and sins,’ and obnoxious to the curse and wrath of God. Fourthly, to show the amplitude of God’s grace, the greater and worse part of the world, the Gentiles as well as the Jews: Rom. xi. 15, ‘If the casting away of them be the reconciling the world;’ so 1 John ii. 2, ‘And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.’ Fifthly, to awaken all that are concerned to look after this privilege, which is common to all nations; the offer is made indifferently to all sorts of persons where the gospel cometh; and this grace is effectually applied to all the elect of all nations, and all sorts and conditions and ranks of persons in the world. If thou art a member of the world, thou shouldst not receive this grace in vain.

(2.) The other party concerned is the great God, ‘to himself.’ To be reconciled to one another, when we have smarted sufficiently under the fruits of our differences, will be found an especial blessing, much more to be reconciled to God. This is the comfort here propounded. ‘to himself,’ of whom we stand so much in dread, 1 Sam. ii. 15: ‘If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against God, who shall plead for him?’ A fit umpire and mediator may be found out in matters of difference and plea between man and man, but who shall arbitrate and take up the difference between us and God? Here, first, the greatness of the privilege, That God will reconcile us to himself.

Doct. There is a reconciliation made in and by Jesus Christ between God and man.

First. I shall premise three things in general—

First. That to reconcile is to bring into favour and friendship after some breach made and offence taken; as Luke xxiii. 12, ‘The same day Herod and Pilate were made friends, for before they were at enmity between themselves.’ So Joseph and his brethren were made friends; and the woman faulty is said to be reconciled to her husband, 1 Cor. vii. 11; so Mat. v. 23, 24, ‘If thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, go thy way and be reconciled to thy brother.’ All which places prove the natural notion of the word; and so it is fitly used for our recovery and returning into grace and favour with God after a breach.

Secondly. That the reconciliation is mutual; God is reconciled to us, and we to God. Many will not hear that God is reconciled to us, but only that we are reconciled to God; but certainly there must be both; God was angry with us, and we hated God; the alienation was mutual, and therefore the reconciliation must be so. The scripture

speakech not only of an enmity and hatred on man's part: Rom. v. 10, 'For when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son;' but also of wrath on God's part, not only against sin but the sinner: Eph. ii. 3, 'Being children of wrath by nature.' Certainly God doth not only hate sin, but is angry with the wicked because of it: Ps vii. 11, 'God is angry with the wicked every day.' And we must distinguish between the work of Christ in order to God, and the work of the minister, and Christ by the ministry, in order to men. The work of Christ in order to God, which is to appease the wrath of God; therefore it is said; Heb. ii. 17, 'That he is a merciful and faithful high priest, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people,' *ἰλάσκεσθαι*. Surely there God's being reconciled to us is intended by Christ's sacrifice and intercession; for Christ as an high priest hath to deal with us as God's apostle with men: Heb. iii. 1, 'We in Christ's stead pray you to be reconciled,' ver. 20; besides, our reconciliation is made the fruit of Christ's death, in contradiction to his life, Rom. v. 10. The death of Christ mainly respected the appeasing of the wrath of God; whereas, if it only implied the changing of our natures, it might as well be ascribed to his life in heaven as his death upon earth. Again, the scripture maketh this reconciliation to be a great instance of God's love to us. Now, if it did only consist in laying aside our enmity to God, it would rather be an instance of our love to God than his love to us. Once more, the text is plain that God's reconciling the world to himself did consist in not imputing our trespasses to us, his laying aside his suit and just plea he had against us; so that it relateth to him. Therefore upon the whole we may pronounce that God is reconciled to us, as well as we to God. Indeed, the scriptures do more generally insist upon our being reconciled to God than God's being reconciled to us; for two reasons—1. Because we are in a fault. It is the usual way of speaking amongst men; he that offendeth is said to be reconciled, because he was the cause of the breach; he needeth to reconcile himself and to appease him whom he hath offended, which the innocent party needeth not—he needeth only to forgive, and to lay aside his just anger. We offended God, not he us; therefore the scripture usually saith, We are reconciled to God. 2. We have the benefit. It is no profit to God that the creature enters into his peace; he is happy within himself without our love or service, only we are undone if we are not upon good terms with him. If any believe not, 'the wrath of God abideth upon him,' John iii. 36; and that is enough to make us eternally miserable.

Thirdly, That reconciliation in scripture is sometimes ascribed to God the Father, sometimes to Christ as mediator, sometimes to believers themselves—

1. To God the Father, as in the text, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself;' and in the verse before the text, 'Who hath reconciled us to himself;' and Col. i. 20, 'Having made peace by the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself,' to God the Father, as the primary cause of our reconciliation. He found out and appointed the means, as he decreed from everlasting to restore the elect fallen into sin unto grace and favour, and prepared whatever

was necessary to compose and take up the difference between him and sinners.

2. Christ is said to reconcile, Eph. ii. 16: 'That he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross;' and Col. i. 21, 'Yet now hath he reconciled;' not as the primary, but meritorious cause of reconciliation, which respects both God and us; chiefly God, as he was appeased by the merit of his sacrifice, as he procured the Spirit, that same Spirit whereby our enmity might be overcome, and we might yield up ourselves to God, to love and serve and please him, for we by his blood 'are purged from dead works, that we might serve the living God.' Heb. ix. 14.

3. Believers are said to reconcile themselves to God: 2 Cor. v. 20, 'We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God;' as they do embrace the offered benefit, and lay aside their enmity, and love God that loveth them, and devote themselves to his use and service.

Secondly, More particularly, I shall do three things—(1.) State the foregoing breach. (2.) Show you the nature of this reconciliation. (3.) Show you how Christ is concerned in it.

1. To state the foregoing breach, take these propositions.

[1.] God and man were once near friends. Adam was the Lord's favourite. You know till man was made, it is said of every rank and species of the creature, 'God saw that it was good.' But when man was made in his day: Gen. i. 31, 'God saw what he had made, and behold, it was very good.' An object of special love, God expressed more of his favour to him than to any other creature, except the angels—'Man was made after his image,' Gen. i. 26. When you make the image or picture of a man, you do not draw his feet or his hands, but his face; his tract or footprint may be found among the creatures, but his image and express resemblance with man; and so he was fitted to live in delightful communion with his creator. Man was his viceroy, Gen. i. 27. God entrusted him with the care, charge, and dominion over all the creatures; yea, he was capable of loving, knowing, or enjoying God. Other creatures were capable of glorifying God, of setting forth his power, wisdom, and goodness, objectively and passively; but man, of glorifying God actively, as being appointed to be the mouth of the creation.

[2.] Man gets out of God's favour by conspiring with God's grand enemy. His condition was happy but mutable, before Satan by insinuating with him draweth him into rebellion against God; and upon this rebellion he forfeiteth all his privileges, God's image, favour, and fellowship. God would deal with him in the way of a covenant: Gen. ii. 17, 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die;' do and live, sin and die. The comminatory part is only expressed, because that only took place; so that by this rebellion he lost the integrity of his nature, and all his happiness; he first ran away from God, and then God drove him away; he was first a fugitive, and then an exile.

[3.] Man fallen draweth all his posterity along with him; for God dealt not with him as a single but as a public person: Rom. v. 13, 'Whereas by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin,

and so death passed upon all, for that all have sinned;’ and 1 Cor. xv. 47, ‘The first man is of the earth, earthly; the second man is the Lord from heaven.’ There is a first man and a second man, *nos omnes eramus in illo unus homo*. Adam and Jesus are the two great institutions, the one consistent with the wisdom and justice of God, as the other with the wisdom and grace of God; so that Adam begets enemies to God: Gen. v. 3, ‘Adam begat a son in his own likeness;’ and 1 Cor. xv. 49, we read of the image of ‘the earthly one.’ Every man is born an enemy to God—his nature opposite, his ways contrary to God; and so is eternally lost and undone, unless God make some other provision for him.

[4.] The condition of every man by nature is to be a stranger and an enemy to God: Col. i. 21, ‘And you that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your minds.’ That double notion is to be considered. Strangers, there is no communion between God and us, we cannot delight in God nor God in us, till there be a greater suitableness, or a divine nature put into us. If that be too soft a notion, the next will help it—we are enemies. There is a perfect contrariety, we are perfectly opposite to God in nature and ways; we are enemies directly or formally, and in effect or by interpretation. Formally men are enemies, open or secret; open are those that bid open defiance to him, as pagans and infidels, and idolaters; secret, so are all sinners; their hopes and desires are ‘that there were no God;’ they would fain have God out of their way; rather than part with their lusts, they would part with their God: Ps. xiv. 1, ‘The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.’ It is a pleasing thought and supposition that there were no God. In effect and by interpretation, they do things or leave things undone, contrary to God’s will, and take part with their sins against him; as love is a love of duty and subjection, so hatred is a refusal of obedience—‘Love me and keep my commandments,’ Exod. xx. 6. They are angry with those who would plead God’s interests with them. But how can men hate God, who is *summum bonum et fons boni*? The schoolmen put the question. We hate him not as a creator and preserver, but as a law-giver and judge: as a law-giver, because we cannot enjoy our lusts with that freedom and security by reason of his restraint. God hath interposed by his law against our desires: Rom. viii. 7, ‘Because the carnal mind is enmity to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ As a judge and avenger of sin; not only desire of carnal liberty, but slavish fear is the cause of this enmity. Men hate those whom they fear. We have wronged God exceedingly, and we know that he will call us to an account; we are his debtors, and cannot answer the demands of his justice, and therefore we hate him. What comfort is it to a guilty prisoner to tell him that his judge is a discreet person, or of a staid judgment? he is one that will condemn him. A condemning God can never be loved by a guilty creature, as barely apprehended under that notion.

[5.] God hateth sinners as they hate him; for we are children of wrath from the womb, Eph. ii. 3; and that wrath abideth on us till we enter into God’s peace, John iii. 36; and the more wicked we are, the more we incur God’s wrath: Ps. vii. 11, ‘He is angry with the wicked

every day ; ' They are under his curse,' Gal. iii. 10. Whatever be the secret purposes of his grace, yet so they are by the sentence of his law, and according to that we must judge of our condition.

Secondly, The nature of this reconciliation.

1. As the enmity is mutual, so is the reconciliation ; God is reconciled to us, and we to God. On God's part, his wrath is appeased ; and our wicked disposition is taken away by regeneration, for there are the causes of the difference between him and us,—his justice and our sin. His justice is satisfied in Christ, so that he is willing to offer us a new covenant : Mat. iii. 17, ' This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' He is satisfied in Christ, that he is willing to forgive the offences done to him ; for the text saith, ' God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.' And our wicked disposition is done away, and our hearts are converted and turned to the Lord : Acts ix. 6, ' And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' and 2 Chron. xxx. 8, ' But yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever, and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may be turned from you.' And we are drawn to enter into covenant with the Lord, even that new covenant which is called the covenant of his peace, Isa. liv. 10 ; and so of enemies we are made friends, as Abraham, because of his covenant relation, is called ' The friend of God,' James ii. 23. In the new covenant God offereth pardon, and requireth repentance. When we accept the offer, the pardon procured for us by Christ, and submit to the conditions, lay down the weapons of our defiance, and give the hand to the Lord, to walk with him in all new obedience, then are we reconciled.

2. This reconciliation is as firm and strong as our estate in innocency, as if there had been no foregoing breach ; and in some considerations better, especially when we look to the full effect of it ; as good as if the first covenant had never been broken ; for God doth not only put away his anger, but loveth us as if we never had been in hatred ; he doth not only pardon sinners, but delight in them when they repent. Men may forgive a fault, but they do not forget it ; the person liveth in umbrage and suspicion with them still. Absalom was pardoned—' But not to see the king's face,' 2 Sam. xiv. 28. Shimei had a lease of his life, but lived always as a hated and a suspected man, 1 Kings ii. 8. But now it is otherwise here ; we find not only mercy with God, but are as firmly instated into his love as ever—' Our sins are cast into the depths of the sea,' Hosea vii. 19 ; and Hosea xiv. 4, ' I will love them freely ;' and Rom. ix. 25, ' And her beloved, which was not beloved.' He not only passeth by the injury, but calls her beloved. Breaches between man and man are like deep wounds ; though healed the scars remain, something sticketh, or like a vessel soldered, weak in the crack ; but here, beloved, delighted in—' The Lord delighteth in thee,' Isa. lxii. 4, and ' he will rest in his love.' In some sort it is more sure ; it is not committed to us and the freedom of our wills. A bone well set is strongest where broken. Adam was happy, but not established.

3. This active reconciliation draweth many blessings along with it.

[1.] Peace with God : Rom. v. 1, ' Being justified by faith, we have

peace with God.' To have God an enemy is to have a sharp sword always hanging over our heads by a slender thread. How can we look him in the face, lift up our heads to heaven, think of him without trembling? There is a God, but he is our enemy; how can we eat, drink, or sleep, while God is our enemy? Did we know what it is to have God our enemy, we should soon know that he cannot want instruments of revenge; death may waylay us in every place. If we eat, our meat may poison or choke us; if we go abroad, God may cast us into hell before we come home again; if we sleep, his wrath may take us napping—'For our damnation slumbereth not,' 2 Peter ii. 3. Surely it is such a dreadful thing to be at enmity with God, that we should not continue in that estate for a moment; but when once you are at peace with God, you stop all evil at the fountain-head.

[2.] Access to God with boldness and free trade into heaven: Rom. v. 2, 'By whom we have access by faith;' and Eph. ii. 18, 'For through him we have both access by one Spirit unto the Father.' When a peace is made between two warring nations, trading is revived; when you have occasion to make use of God, you may go to him as your reconciled Father; there is no flaming sword to keep you out of paradise.

[3.] Acceptance both of your persons and performances. Your persons are accepted: Eph. i. 6, 'He hath accepted us in the beloved, to the praise of his glorious grace.' You are looked upon as members of Christ, favourites of heaven; your duties and actions are accepted: Heb. xi. 4, 'By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.' The sinful failings of our best actions are hid and covered; they are not examined by a severe judge, but accepted by a loving Father.

[4.] All the graces of the Spirit are fruits of our reconciliation with God: Rom. v. 11, 'We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement;' jewels of the covenant, wherewith the spouse of Christ is decked. Christ prayed, that we might be loved as he was loved, John xvii., not for degree, but kind, John iii. 34. These are given as tokens and evidences of his love. The privilege is so great, that we cannot believe it without some real demonstration of God's heart towards us. When Jacob heard that Joseph was alive and governor of Egypt, he would not believe it; but when he saw the waggons which Joseph sent to carry him, Gen. xlv. 27, 28, 'Then his spirit revived within him;' so here, 1 Thes. i. 5, 'For our gospel came not to you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.'

[5.] All outward blessings are sanctified, especially the enjoyment of them, which we have by another right and tenure. Surely one that is reconciled to God cannot be miserable, 'for all things are his,' 1 Cor. iii. 23. Whatsoever falleth to his share, comfort and cross cometh with a blessing—'And all worketh for good,' Rom. viii. 28. God's enmity is declared by raiming snares, Ps. xi. 6. There is a secret war against the soul; but his love, that always worketh for good. Out of what corner soever the wind bloweth, it always bloweth for good to his people.

[6.] It is a pledge of heaven: Rom. v. 10, 'For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled by his death, much more, being reconciled,

we shall be saved by his life.' The glorifying of a saint is a more easy thing than the reconciling of a sinner; suppose the one, and you may suppose the other. If God would pardon us and take us with all our faults, he will much more glorify us when we are reconciled and sanctified.

[7.] Our right to this privilege beginneth as soon as we do believe in Christ, for upon these terms God hath set forth Christ: Rom. iii. 24, 'Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.' When our hearts are drawn to receive Christ upon these terms, we are legally capable of his favour. Now faith is nothing else but a broken-hearted and thankful acceptance of Christ, with a resolution to give up ourselves to God by him. The true notion of Christ's death is the sacrifice of atonement. Now in the sacrifices of atonement, they were to come with brokenness of heart, confessing sin over the head of the beast, Ps. li. 17, owning the Messiah to come, and a stipulation of obedience: Ps. l. 5, 'Gather my saints together, that make a covenant with me by sacrifice.' Well then, when in a broken-hearted manner we make our claim by Christ, thankfully acknowledging our Redeemer's grace, and sue out our release and discharge in his name, and devote ourselves to God, then our right is begun. The evidence of this right is when faith is made fruitful in holiness. God is a holy God, and Christ came not to make God less holy. He may be reconciled to our persons, but never to our sins. Sin ever was, and ever will be, the make-bate between God and us: Isa. lix. 2, 'Your sins have separated between you and me.' There must be a zealous renouncing of all things that have bred estrangement between us and God. Everything in this reconciliation implieth holiness; the party with whom we do reconcile, God; and he must not lightly be offended, but pleased: Col. i. 10, 'That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing'—tender of offending God. The nature of the reconciliation is mutual; we with God, as well as God with us. A real change goeth along with the relative, or else we are taken for enemies still, Ps. lxxviii. 21. The covenant is a league offensive and defensive. *Pax nostra bellum contra Satanam.* We cannot be at peace with God, till, fallen out with sin, we resolve to war against the devil, the world, and the flesh; you must not make him a patron and panderer to your lusts: Exod. xxiii. 20-22, 'Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.' We must carry ourselves with great reverence to the angel of the covenant, 1 Cor. x. 9. The sanctifying grace of the Spirit; for the application of the merit of Christ, and the gift of the Spirit, are inseparable. God will not pardon our sins while we remain in them; we must be sanctified and justified, and then we shall have peace and comfort. 'What! peace as long as the whoredom of thy mother Jezebel remaineth?' Men that sin freely know not what peace with God meaneth. This holy friendship, which resulteth from the covenant, implieth an indignation against sin: Hosea xiv. 8, 'What

have I any more to do with idols?' and Isa. xxx. 22, 'Thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get ye hence.'

Thirdly, How far Christ is concerned in it, and why.

1. God was resolved to lose no honour by the fall of man, but to keep up a sense of his justice, goodness, and truth.

[1.] His justice. It was not fit that any of his attributes should fall to the ground, especially his justice, the sense of which is so necessary for the government of the world: Rom. iii. 5, 6, 'Is God unrighteous that taketh vengeance? God forbid. How then shall God judge the world?' If God be not known for a just God, we cannot know him for the governor of the world. Well then, there was a condescendency in it, that mercy should be dispensed, so that justice should be no loser. Now, God saw that men could not keep up the honour of his justice; our prayers, tears, repentance, will not do the deed without something else. If the devils were supposed to be sorrowful for their sins, they would not be reconciled, because they had no surety to die for them and repair the honour of God's justice. In pity, God would not destroy all mankind, therefore findeth out a surety; if they had suffered, they would only be satisfying, rather than to satisfy and have satisfied. 'But now Christ hath declared his righteousness,' Rom. iii. 24, 25, 'for the remission of sins.'

[2.] His holiness, which is the pattern of the creature's perfection. Such was God's hatred of sin that he would not let it go without a mark or brand; he would be known to be an holy God, and that it is not an easy thing to regain his favour if we yield to sin. People are apt to look upon it as a matter of nothing. It is an easy matter to sin; every fool can do that; but when the breach is made, it is not easy to reconcile again; none but the Son of God can do that. God stood upon a valuable compensation: 1 Peter. i. 18, 'We are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold; but by the precious blood of the Son of God.' The Son of God, by the highest act of obedience and self-denial, must bring it about for a caution to us, that we might not lightly break the law, or have favourable thoughts of sin any more.

[3.] His truth. God made a covenant with Adam—'In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' Adam's sin was mainly the sin of unbelief, and presumption of impunity is very natural to us all; therefore the law must have death to keep up its authority, lest the threatening should seem a vain scarecrow, either from the sinner himself, or from his surety.

2. Christ was a fit mediator.

[1.] Because of his mutual interest in God and us, Job ix. 33. He is beloved of the Father, and hath a brotherly compassion to us. He did partake of the nature of both parties; he was man to undertake it in our name, God to perform it in his own strength.

[2.] He is able to satisfy. All the angels in heaven could not lay down a valuable consideration, but 'he is able to save to the uttermost,' Heb. vii. 26. Christ undertaketh to pacify God's wrath, and to take away our enmity also, and so to bring us to God.

Use 1. Let us admire the mercy and grace of God—'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.' To this end consider—

1. This is an ancient mercy of an old standing: Eph. i. 4, 'He hath

chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world ;' and 1 Peter i. 20, ' Who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but manifested in these last times for you.' And who are we, that the thoughts of God should be taken up about us so long ago? Nothing went before creation, but mere and naked eternity ; then was this business transacted between the Father and the Son, the result of God's eternal thoughts.

2. God is first in the design, he who is the wronged party, the highest judge, of whose vengeance we stand in dread, of whom we beg pardon ; we were first in the breach, but God in the design of love. The motion of sending a saviour and redeemer into the world was first bred in God's heart : 1 John iv. 19, ' We love him, because he loved us first.'

3. This love is the more amplified by the worthlessness of the persons for whom all this is done ; the world that lay in wickedness and rebellion against God, the sinful race of apostatised Adam. At our best, how little service and honour can we bring to him. But he considered us as lying in the corrupt mass of polluted mankind ; yet this world would God reconcile to himself, and not angels. God would not so much as enter into a parley with them ; as if a king should take rustics and scullions into his favour, and pass by nobles and princes. There lay no bond at all to show mercy to us, more than to them ; we had cast him off and rebelled against him as well as they.

4. And this done by Jesus Christ, that so costly a remedy should be provided for us : Rom viii. 32, ' God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.' God may be said to spare, either in a way of impartial justice, or in a way of bountiful and condescending love ; the first hath its use, this latter is the case there. We are sparing of what is precious, of what we value ; but though Christ was his dear Son, yet he spared not him : it is the folly of man to part with things of worth and value for trifles.

5. The benefit itself, that he would reconcile us to himself. (1.) In laying aside his own just wrath, which is our great terror : Isa. xxvii. 4, ' Fury is not in me,' he being pacified in Christ. (2.) That he would take away the enmity that is in the hearts of men by his converting and healing grace, which is our great burden : Ps. cx. 3, ' Thy people shall be a willing people in the day of thy power.' (3.) That he will enter into league and covenant with us, God with us and we with God : Heb. viii. 10, ' I will put my laws into their minds, and write them upon their hearts ; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.' (4.) That from hence there floweth an entire friendship : John xv. 15, ' Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends ; for all that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.' (5.) This friendship produceth most gracious fruits and effects, especially free commerce with him here, till we are admitted into his immediate presence : Heb. x. 22, ' Let us draw nigh with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.'

Use 2. Let us consider seriously the mystery of Christ's death, which is the sacrifice of our atonement ; it is full of riddles, it is a spectacle which represents to you the highest mercy in God's sparing sinners, and

calling out his own Son to die in our stead ; and the highest justice in punishing sin, though transacted upon Christ. ‘ If this be done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry ? ’ Here you have Christ made sin, and yet at the same time the fountain of holiness, 2 Cor. v. 21, and John i. 16, ‘ Out of his fulness we receive grace for grace ; ’ so again, the fountain of blessedness made a curse for all the world, Gal. iii. 13. In man’s account, never more weakness and foolishness shown, yet never more wisdom and power : 1 Cor. i. 25, ‘ The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men.’ He had said before that Christ was the ‘ wisdom of God, and the power of God.’ The devil never seemed to triumph more, yet never more foiled, Luke xxii. 53 (compare with Col. ii. 15 ;) Christ is the true Samson, destroyed more at his death than in all his life. The cross was not a gibbet of shame and infamy, but a chariot of triumph. This was the holiest work and the greatest act of obedience that ever was, or can, or will be, performed, and yet the wickedest work that ever the sun beheld ; on Christ’s part, an high act of obedience and self-denial, Phil. ii. 7 ; on man’s part, the greatest act of villany and wickedness : Acts ii. 23, ‘ Who by wicked hands have crucified and slain,’ the highest act of meekness and violence ; the truest glass wherein we see the greatness and smallness of sin. The heinousness of sin is seen in his agonies and bloody sufferings ; the nothingness of it in the merit of them. Christ’s death is the reason of the great judgment fallen upon the Jews, 1 Thes. ii. 15, 16, and yet the ground upon which we expect mercy, both for ourselves and them, Eph. ii. 16. In short, here is life rising out of death, glory out of ignominy, blessedness out of the curse ; from the abasement of the Son of God, joy, liberty, and confidence to us.

SERMON XXXV.

Not imputing their trespasses to them.—2 Cor. v. 19.

Doct. One great branch or fruit of our reconciliation with God through Christ is the pardon or non-imputation of sin.

Here I shall show—(1.) The nature and worth of the privilege ; (2.) The manner, how it is brought about ; (3.) That it is a branch or fruit of our reconciliation with God.

First. The nature and worth of the privilege, *not imputing.* The phrase is elsewhere used : Rom. iv. 8, ‘ Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin ; ’ so 2 Tim. iv. 16, *μη λογισθειη*, ‘ All men forsook me ; I pray God it be not laid to their charge,’ or reckoned to their account. It is a metaphor taken from those who cast up their accounts ; and so—

1. It supposeth that sin is a debt, Mat. vi. 12,—*Αφες ημων τα οφειληματα ημων*, ‘ and forgive us our debts.’

2. That God will one day call sinners to an account, and charge such and such debts upon them : Mat. xxv. 19, ‘ After a long time the lord

of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.' For a while men live jollily and in great security, care for nothing; but a day of reckoning will come.

3. In this day of accounts, God will not impute the trespasses of those who are reconciled to him by Christ, and have taken sanctuary at the grace of the new covenant, to their condemnation, nor use them as they deserve. Every one deserves wrath and eternal death, and sin obligeth us thereunto, but God will not lay it to our charge; and so it is said: Ps. xxxii. 2, 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.' Now this is an act of great grace on God's part, and of great privilege and blessedness to the creature.

[1.] An act of great grace and favour on God's part. (1.) Partly because every one is become 'guilty before God,' and obnoxious to the process of his righteous judgment: Rom. iii. 19—*ὁπίδοκος τῷ Θεῷ*, 'and all the world may become guilty before God.' There is sin enough to impute; and the reason of this non-imputation is not our innocency, but God's mercy. Among men imputations are often unjust and slanderous, as David complaineth that they imputed and 'laid things to his charge that he was not guilty of,' or never did; but we are all guilty. (2.) Partly that he would not prosecute his right against us as a revenging and just judge, calling us to a strict account, and punishing us according to our demerits, which would have been our utter undoing: Ps. cxxx. 3, 'If thou shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand?' Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no flesh be justified.' There is not a man found which hath not faults and failings enough, and if God should proceed with him in his just severity, he would be utterly incapable of any favour. (3.) Partly, because he found out the way how to recompense the wrong done by sin unto his majesty, and sent his Son to make this recompense for us, 'who was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.' 'Our iniquities were laid on him,' Isa. liii. 4; 'and his righteousness imputed to us,' Rom. iv. 11. (4.) And partly, that he did this out of his mere love, which set a-work all the causes which concurred in the business of our redemption: John iii. 16, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' The external moving cause was only our misery; the internal moving cause was his own grace and mercy. And this love was not excited by any love on our parts: Rom. iii. 24, 'Justified freely by his grace;' that is, by his grace working of its own accord. (5.) And partly, that this negative or non-imputation is heightened by the positive imputation—there is a non-imputing of sin and an acceptance of us as righteous in Christ; his merits are reckoned and adjudged to us; that is, we have the effect of his sufferings—as if we had suffered in person: Christ is become to us 'the end of the law for righteousness,' Rom. x. 4.

[2.] It is matter of great privilege and blessedness to the creature, if so be the Lord will not impute our sins to us, and account them to our score. This will appear,—

(1.) If we consider the evil we are freed from; guilt is an obligation to punishment, and pardon is the dissolving and loosening this obliga-

tion. Now the punishment of sin is exceeding great; what maketh hell and damnation, but not-forgiveness? Hell is not a mere scarecrow, nor heaven a May-game; it is eternity maketh every thing truly great, an everlasting exile and separation from the comfortable presence of the Lord, which is the *pæna damni*: Mat. xxv. 41, 'Go, ye cursed;' and Luke xiii. 27, 'Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity;' they are shut out, and thrust out from the presence of the Lord. When God turned Adam out of paradise, his case was very sad, but nothing comparable to this; God took care of him in his exile, and made coats of skins for him. God gave him a day of patience afterwards, promised the seed of the woman, intimated hopes of a better paradise; but instead of all comforts, how sad is it to be sent into an endless state of misery! which is the *pæna sensus*: Mark ix. 44, 'The worm that never dieth, and the fire that shall never be quenched'—the worm of conscience, when we think of our folly, imprudence, disobedience to God. A man may run away from his conscience now, by sleeping, running, riding, walking, working, drinking, distract his mind by a clatter of business, but then not a thought free. The soul will be always thinking of slighted means, abused comforts, wasted time, and of the course wherein we have involved ourselves. Then our repentance will be fruitless. Our sorrows now are curing, then tormenting, when under the wrath of God; you coldly now entertain the offer of a pardon; then, oh for a little mitigation, a drop to cool your tongue!

(2.) Because of the good depending upon it in this life and the next.

(1st.) In this life—Partly, because we are not fitted to serve God till sin be pardoned: Heb. ix. 14, 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works, to serve the living God?' God pardoneth, that he may further sanctify us and fit us for his own use. The end of forgiveness is, that God may have his own again which was lost, and we might be engaged to love him and live to him. Forgiveness tends to holiness, as the means to the end; and so there is way made for our thankfulness and love to our Redeemer, which is the predominant ruling affection in the kingdom of grace, and the main motive of obedience. Partly, because we cannot please God till sin be pardoned; for God will not accept our actual service, till our guilt be removed—till pardoning grace cover our defects. Whence should we hope for acceptance? From the worth of our persons? that is none at all. From the integrity of the work? Alas, after grace received, we are maimed in our principles and operations; much more before: Heb. xi. 6, 'Without faith no man can please God:' Rom. viii. 8, 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God.' Till we are adopted, reconciled, absolved, neither our persons nor our actions can find acceptance with him. And partly, because we have no sound comfort and rejoicing in ourselves till we obtain the pardon of our sins, and be in such an estate that God will not impute our trespasses to us; for while sin remaineth unpardoned, and the sentence of the law not reversed, the soul is still in doubt or fear; if not, it proceedeth from our security and forgetfulness, which will do us no good; for we do but put off the evil, rather than put it away, and deal as a

malefactor that keepeth himself drunk till he cometh to execution. In scripture a pardon is made the solid ground of comfort: Isa. xl. 1, 2, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.' When God's wrath is pacified and appeased, then there is ground of comfort indeed; when God for Christ's sake hath forgiven and forgotten all our transgressions, and accepted a ransom for us; so Mat. ix. 2, 'Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.' Aye, then misery is stopped at the fountain-head, our great trouble is over; but till then all our comforts are soured by our fears: when the sun by its bright beams appeareth, it dispelleth mists and clouds.

(2dly.) In the next life we are not capable of enjoying God, and being made happy for evermore in his love, till we be in such an estate that God will not impute our trespasses to us; for till we escape wrath we cannot enjoy happiness, nor till his anger be pacified can we have any interest in his love: Rom. v. 18, 'The free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.' Now our right beginneth when sin is taken out of the way; and hereafter our impunity in heaven is a means to our perfect enjoying, pleasing, and glorifying of God, Acts xxvi. 18, when we are made capable of the blessed inheritance.

Secondly. The manner how this privilege is brought about and applied to us by these steps.

1. The first stone in this building was laid in God's eternal decree and purpose to reconcile sinners to himself by Christ, not imputing their trespasses to them. I cannot pass over this consideration, because it is of principal importance in this place: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.' Then he was thinking of a sufficient sacrifice, ransom, and satisfaction for all the world of sinners, and that he would not deal with them according to the desert of their sin, but in mercy, and provided a sufficient remedy for the pardon of sin for all those who would or should accept of it in time. The covenant of grace is founded upon the covenant of redemption, Isa. liii. 10, 11; and the plot and design for our reconciliation, pardon, and adoption, was then laid according to the terms agreed upon between the Father and the Son—what the Redeemer should do for the satisfying of his wrath, what sinners should do that they may have pardon in the method which God hath appointed; and so God should be actually reconciled to us, and sinners actually pardoned in time when we submit to the terms.

2. The second step towards this blessed effect was, when Christ was actually exhibited in the flesh, and paid our ransom for us; for then he came to take away sin: 1 Johu iii. 5, 'The Son of God was manifested to take away sin, and in him was no sin;' so John i. 29, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world;' and it is said, Heb. i. 3, 'When he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of majesty;' and Heb. x. 14, 'By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' There needed no more to be done by way of merit, and satisfaction, and sacrifice. We must carefully distinguish between impetration and application, Christ's acquiring and our applying; as also between God's purposing

and our enjoying pardon, or actual interest in it. God purposed it from all eternity, but we are not actually reconciled and pardoned from all eternity, no more than we were actually created, sanctified, and glorified from all eternity. So Christ purchased it, when he died; and therefore the apostle saith, 'we were reconciled by the death of his Son,' Rom. v. 10; then all was done on Christ's part which was necessary to our reconciliation and pardon; by virtue of the satisfaction made by Christ, he was pleased to profess to us free and easy conditions of mercy in the gospel, by which it might be actually applied to us.

3. The next step was, when Christ rose from the dead; for then we had a visible evidence of the sufficiency of the ransom, sacrifice, and satisfaction which he made for us; therefore it is said, Rom. v. 25, 'That he died for our offences, and rose again for our justification.' As he died for our release and pardon, and to make expiation for our sins, so he rose again to convince the unbelieving world by that supreme act of his power, that all was finished which was necessary to our pardon and reconciliation with God; for Christ's resurrection was the acquittance of our surety, Rom. viii. 34, 'Yea rather that is risen again.' God hath received a sufficient ransom for sins, and all that believe in him shall find the benefit and comfort of it.

4. We are actually justified, pardoned, and reconciled, when we repent and believe. Whatever thoughts and purposes of grace God in Christ may have towards us from all eternity, yet we are under the fruits of sin, till we become penitent believers; for we must distinguish between God's looking upon the elect in the purposes of his grace, and in the sentence of his law; in the purposes of his grace, so he loved the elect with the love of good-will; in the sentence of his law, so we were under wrath, Eph. ii. 3, and John iii. 18, 'Condemned already,' and wrath remaineth on us, till believing and repenting. That these are conditions which only make us capable of pardon is evident.

[1.] Repentance: Acts v. 31, 'Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins.' Christ purchased pardon and absolution into his own hands, as king and judge, or head of the renewed state, to be dispensed according to the laws of his mediatorial kingdom; and so he giveth both these together. So he grants pardon by his new law, by which he requireth and giveth repentance and remission of sin; so he sent forth his messengers into the world: Luke xxiv. 47, 'And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.' Well then, none but the penitent are capable.

[2.] Faith: Acts x. 43, 'To him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins;' and Acts xiii. 38, 39, 'Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins;' and, 'by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.' It belongeth to the power and office of our Lord Jesus to forgive sin; and it must be forgiven according to the terms of his new covenant or law; and that is, when men obediently receive his doctrine, and by their prayers offered in his name, do in a broken-hearted manner sue

out their pardon, and remission of their sins, they are justified and accepted with God, and freed from his wrath and punishment which attend sin in another world. Well then, none are actually and personally pardoned, but penitent believers. This benefit is bestowed upon sinners, but sinners repenting and believing; a person abiding in his sins and persisting in his rebellion, cannot be made partaker of this privilege; repentance qualifyeth the subject, faith immediately receiveth it, as having a special aptitude that way. That I may not nakedly assert this truth, but explain it for your edification, I shall suggest two things.

(1.) As to the nature of these graces, that the reference of repentance is towards God, and faith doth especially respect the mediator; so I find them distinguished: Acts xx. 21, 'Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' All christianity is a coming to God by him, Heb. vii. 25. Repentance towards God noteth a willingness to return to the duty, love, and service, which we owe to our Creator, from whence we have fallen by our folly and sin. This must be, for Christ died not to reconcile God to our sins, or, which is all one, to pardon our sins while we remain in them; but to bring us back again to the service, love, and enjoyment of God. Faith respects the Redeemer; for by dependence upon his merit, and the sufficiency of his sacrifice, and the power of his Spirit, we come to God, and by a thankful sense of his love, we are encouraged and enabled to do our duty. Well then, when in a broken-hearted manner we confess our sins, and own our Redeemer, and devote ourselves to God, and resolve to walk in Christ's prescribed way, then are sins pardoned, and we accepted with God.

(2.) This faith and repentance is wrought in us by the word, and mainly acted in prayer. First, It is wrought in us by the word, wherein God is pleased to propound free and easy conditions of pardon and mercy, praying us to be reconciled, and to cast away the weapons of our rebellion, and submit to the law of grace; for here in verses 18-20, he doth not only reveal the mystery, but beseecheth us to enter into covenant with him, and to yield up ourselves to his service. Secondly, Prayer, by which in the name of Christ we sue out this benefit. This is the means appointed both for regenerate and unregenerate; the unregenerate: Acts viii. 22, 'Repent therefore of thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart be forgiven thee;' the regenerate: 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess our sins, he is just and faithful to forgive us our sins.' Believing, broken-hearted prayer doth notably prevail; the publican had no other suit but, 'Lord, be merciful to me a sinner,' Luke xviii. 13. The Lord describeth the poor sinners that came to him for pardon, Jer. xxxi. 9, 'They shall come with weeping and supplications.'

5. We are sensibly pardoned, as well as actually, when the Lord giveth peace and joy in believing, 'and sheddeth abroad his love in our hearts by the Spirit.' We must distinguish between the grant and the sense; sometimes a pardon may be granted, when we have not the sense and comfort of it. We may hold a precious jewel with a trembling hand, as the waves roll after a storm when the wind is ceased. God may keep his people humble, as a prince may grant a

pardon to a condemned malefactor, but he will not have him know so much till he come even to the place of execution. David's heart was to Absalom, yet he would not let him see his face. There are two courts, the court of heaven and the court of conscience. The pardon may be passed in the one, and not in the other; and a man may have peace with God, when he hath not peace of conscience. To assure our hearts before him, and know our sincerity, 1 John iii. 9, is a thing distinct from being sincere; and a man may be safe, though not comfortable. Every one that believeth cannot make the bold challenge of faith, and say, 'Who shall condemn?' Rom. viii. 33.

6. The last step is when we have a complete and full absolution of sin—that is, at the day of judgment: Acts iii. 19, 'Your sins shall be blotted out when days of refreshment shall come from the presence of the Lord;' when the judge, *pro tribunali*, shall sententionally, and in the audience of all the world, pronounce our pardon. To make title to pardon by law is comfortable, but then we shall have it from our Judge's own mouth. Here we are continually subject to new guilt, and so to new sins, whereby arise new fears; so till our final absolution we are not fully perfect, not till the day of redemption, Eph. iv. 30. When the evils of sin do fully cease, then is our adoption full, Rom. viii. 23; then will our regeneration be full, Mat. xix. 28; then all the effects of sin will cease. Death upon the body will be no interruption of pardon; we shall be fully acquitted, and never sin more.

Thirdly. That it is a branch and fruit of our reconciliation with God; the other is the gift of the Spirit, or all things that belong to the new nature; for God giveth sanctifying grace as the God of peace. But this also is a notable branch and fruit of reconciliation.

1. Because when God releaseth us from the punishment of sin, it is a sign his anger and wrath is appeased and now over: Isa. xxiv. 7, 'Fury is not in me.' God hath been angry for a little moment, but when he pardoneth sin then he is pacified, for sin is the make-bate between us and God.

2. That which is the ground of reconciliation is the ground of pardon of sin: Eph. i. 7, 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;' viz. the price paid by the mediator to his father's justice; and therefore a principal part of our reconciliation and redemption is remission of sins in justification.

3. That which is the fruit of reconciliation is obtained and promoted by pardon of sin, and that is fellowship with God and delightful communion with him in a course of obedience and subjection to him: Heb. x. 22, 'Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.' Our general pardon at first is to put us into a state of new obedience, our particular pardon engageth us to continue in a course of acceptable obedience, that we may maintain a holy commerce with God: 1 John i. 7, 'If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.'

Use 1. Is to inform us, that all those that seek after reconciliation with God, or would take themselves to be reconciled to him, should be

dealing with God about the pardon of sins, and suing out this privilege, which is of such use in their commerce with God.

But here ariseth a doubt; what need have those that are reconciled to God to beg pardon?

Ans. Very great, Mat. vi. 12. Our Lord hath taught us so; we pray for daily pardon and daily grace against temptations, as well as for daily bread. I prove it,—

1. From the condition of God's people here in the world. We are not so fully sanctified here in the world, but there is some sin found in us; original sin remaineth with us to the last, and we have our actual slips. Paul complaineth of the body of death, Rom. vii. 23; and the apostle telleth us: 1 John i. 8, 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;' and ver. 10, 'If we say, that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us;' and Eccl. vii. 20, 'There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not;' either omitting good or committing evil. They do not love God with that purity and fervency, nor serve him with that liberty, delight, and reverence, that he hath required. It is the happiness of the church triumphant, that they have no sin; of the church militant, that their sin is forgiven. Sometimes we sin out of ignorance; sometimes out of imprudence and inconsideration; sometimes we are overtaken, and sometimes overborne; now these things must be heartily bewailed to God. While a ship is leaking water we must use the pump; and the room that is continually gathering soil must be daily swept; the stomach that is still breeding ill humours must have new physic. We still make work for pardoning mercy, and therefore for repentance and faith.

2. From the several things which we ask in asking a pardon.

[1.] For the grant, that God would accept of the satisfaction of Christ for our sins, and of us for his sake. Christ was to ask and sue out the fruits of his mediation, Ps. ii. 8. And we are humbly to sue out our right; for notwithstanding the condescensions of his grace, God dealeth with us as a sovereign, and doth require submission on our part: Jer. iii. 13, 'Only acknowledge thine iniquities, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God.' The debt is humbly to be acknowledged by the creature, though God hath found out a means to pardon it.

[2.] We beg the continuance of a pardon; as in daily bread, though we have it by us, we beg the continuance and use of it; so in sanctification, we beg the continuance of sanctification, as well as the increase, because of the relics of corruption. God may for our exercise make us feel the smart of old sins, as an old bruise, though it be healed, yet ever and anon we feel it upon change of weather; accusations of conscience may return for sins already pardoned: Job. xiii. 26, 'Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me possess the sins of my youth.' Sins of youth may trouble a man that is reconciled to God, and hath obtained pardon of them. God's children may have their guilt raked out of its grave, and the appearance of it may be as frightful, as a ghost or one risen from the dead; the wounds of an healed conscience may bleed afresh. Therefore we need beg as David: Ps. xxv. 6, 7, 'Remember thy mercies which have been of old; re-

member not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions.' When we are unthankful, unwatchful, or negligent, God may permit it for our humiliation.

[3.] The sense and manifestation. Few believers have assurance of their own sincerity; God may blot sins out of his book, when he doth not blot them out of our consciences; God blotteth them out of the book of his remembrance, as soon as we repent and believe; but he blotteth them out of our consciences, when the worm of conscience is killed by the application of the blood of Christ through the Spirit: Heb. x. 22, 'Sprinkled from an evil conscience.' David beggeth the sense, when Nathan had told him of the grant: Ps. li. 12, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, forgive it in our sense and feeling.'

[4.] The increase of our sense; for it is not given out in such a degree, as to shut out all fear and doubt: 1 John iv. 18, 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment; he that feareth is not made perfect in love.'

[5.] The effects of pardon, or freedom from those evils, which are the fruits of sin. We would have God to pardon us, as we pardon others, fully and entirely; forgive, and forget; that he would not execute upon us the temporal punishment, farther than is necessary for our good; compare 2 Kings xxiii. 26, with Ezek. xxxiii. 12-14. Either he will not chastise us, or, if he doth, he will sanctify our afflictions. When God remits the eternal punishment, yet he inflicteth temporal evil, not to complete our justification, but to further our sanctification. If we knew only the sweetness of sin and not the bitterness, we would not be so shy of it: Jer. ii. 19, 'Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts;' 1 Cor. xi. 32, 'Chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned.'

[6.] A renewed pardon for every renewed sin which we commit: 1 John ii. 1, 'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;' and 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' As soon as we repent and believe there is a general pardon, the state of the person is changed, he is made a child of God: John i. 12, 'To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe in his name;' John xiii. 10, 'He that is washed needeth not to wash, save his feet;' because by going up and down in the world we contract new defilement. He is translated from a state of wrath to a state of grace; all sins past are remitted. God doth not pardon some, and leave others, though God's pardon be not antedated: Rom. iii. 25, 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past.' And such an one hath free leave to sue out pardon for future sins, and so have a greater holdfast upon God; they have a present certain effectual remedy at hand for their pardon, that is, the merit of Christ's blood, the covenant of grace in which they have an interest, Christ's intercession and the Spirit to excite them to faith and repentance. Well then, let us fly to Christ for daily pardon; as under the

law there were daily sacrifices to be offered up, Num. xxviii. 3. God came to Adam in the cool of the day, Gen. iii. 8. Reconciliation with man is to be sought speedily: Eph. iv. 26, 'Let not the sun go down on your wrath.' The unclean person was to wash his clothes before the evening. Our hearts should be humbled within us to think that God is displeas'd.

[7.] We pray for our pardon and acceptance with Christ at the last day of general judgment: Luke xxi. 36, 'Watch and pray, that ye may be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of man.' Some effect of sin remaineth till then, as death on the body; so that whilst any penal evil introduced by sin remaineth, we pray that God will not repent of his mercy.

Use 2. It showeth how much we should prize pardon, as a special fruit of the love of God and Christ: Rev. i. 5, 'To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood;' 1 John iv. 9, 10, 'In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' If we be serious we will do so. Those that have felt anything of the burden of sin will entertain the offer of pardon with great thankfulness; it is a privilege welcome to distressed consciences. What man in chains would not be glad of liberty? what debtor would not be discharged? how glad is an honest man to be out of debt? what guilty malefactor would not be acquitted? Oh, let it not seem a light thing in your eye! we have lost our spiritual relish if it do. Oh, prize a pardon, apprehend it as a great benefit, sweeter than the honey and honeycomb.

Use 3. It should engage us to love God: Luke vii. 47, 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'

SERMON XXXVI.

Not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed to us the word of reconciliation.—2 COR. v. 19.

Doct. One great branch and fruit of our reconciliation with God is the pardon of sins.

Reasons—

First. Because reconciliation implieth in its own nature a release of the punishment of sin, or, on God's part, a laying aside of his wrath and anger; as on ours a laying aside of our enmity and disobedience: Isa. xxvii. 4, 'Fury is not in me.' Anger in God is nothing else but his justice appointing the punishment of sin; and he is said to be reconciled or pacified, when he hath no will to punish, or doth not purpose to punish, and therefore fitly is this part of the reconciliation expressed by not imputing our trespasses; especially because our

reconciliation with God is not the reconciliation of private persons or of equals, but such as is between superiors and inferiors, a prince and his rebellious subjects, parents and their disobedient children, the governor and judge of the world and sinning mankind, and therefore not to be ended by way of agreement and composition, but by way of satisfaction, humiliation, and pardon; satisfaction on Christ's part, humiliation on our part, pardon on God's. When persons fall out that are in a private capacity, the difference may be ended by composition; they may quit the sense of the wrong done to them, but the case is different here; God is not reconciled to us merely as the party offended, but as the governor of the world. A private man, as the party offended, may easily remit a wrong done to him without requiring satisfaction or submission, according to his own pleasure, as Joseph was reconciled to his brethren; but here God is not considered as the party offended merely, but as the supreme judge, who is to proceed according to law. When the magistrate forgiveth, there must be a stated pardon; and so God is to find out a way how the law is to be satisfied, and the offender saved, by releasing the punishment in such a way as the law may not fall to the ground, and that is not without the satisfaction of Christ, and the submission of the sinner, and the solemn grant of a pardon. A private man may do in his own case as pleaseth him, but there is a difference in a public person. The right of passing by a wrong, and the right of releasing a punishment, are different things, because punishment is a common interest, and is referred to the common good, to preserve order and for an example to others.

Secondly. This branch is mentioned, because this was the most inviting motive to bring the creature to submission, and to comply with God's other ends. To understand this reason, consider—

1. Among the benefits which we have by Christ, some concern our felicity, others our duty; some concern our privileges, others our service, qualities, rights. The internal qualities and graces are conveyed and wrought in us by the sanctifying Spirit; the rights and privileges are conveyed to us by deed of gift, by the covenant of grace, or new testament charter or gospel grant. As the one frees us from a moral evil, which is sin; the other from a natural evil, which is misery. Of the one sort is holiness, and all those divine qualities which constitute the new nature, inherent graces; of the other sort are pardon of sins, adoption, right to glory, adherent rights and privileges. Now God offereth the one to invite us to the other by the gospel as a deed of gift, or special act of grace; God offereth the one upon condition we will seek after the other, which deed of gift cannot take effect till we fulfil the condition; we cannot have remission of sins till we have repentance. It is true he giveth the qualification as well as the privilege, repentance as well as remission of sins, Acts v. 31; but he giveth it this way; he giveth repentance offering remission; that is the natural way of God's working, the appointed means to draw man's heart to the performance of the condition. As the Spirit doth work powerfully within, so he useth the word without. Well then, if we would have the benefits by Christ, we must have all or none—repentance as well as remission, faith as well as adoption, and justification and holiness as well as a right to glory; for Christ in all the dispensations of his grace

looketh at God's glory, as well as our interest; therefore if we come rightly to the covenant, and expect grace by our Redeemer, we must 'come with a true heart, in full assurance of faith,' Heb. x. 22.

2. The one is the first inviting and powerful motive to the other. Partly, our desires of happiness, which even corrupt nature is not against, are made use of, and apt to gain upon us to a desire of happiness. God would leave some inclination and desires to happiness in the heart of man, that might direct us in some sort to seek after himself: Acts xvii. 27, 'That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.' Nature catcheth at felicity; we would have impunity, peace, comfort, glory; we are willing as to our own benefit to be pardoned and freed from the curse of the law, and the flames of hell; we are naturally willing of justification, but naturally unwilling to deny the flesh, and to renounce the credit, profit, or pleasure of sin, and to grow dead to the world and worldly things; but these other suit with our desires of happiness; therefore God would, in reconciling the creature, go to work this way; promise that which we desire, on condition that we will submit to those things which we are against. As we sweeten pills to children, that they may swallow them down the better; they love the sugar, though they loathe the aloes; so here, God would invite us to our duty by our interest, and therefore in reconciling the world to himself, he would first be discovered as not imputing their trespasses to them. Partly, because of our fears, as well as our desires of happiness, God taketh this way. The grand scruple which haunteth the creature is, how God shall be appeased, and quit his controversy against us by reason of sin: Micah v. 6, 'Wherewith will he be appeased, and what shall I give for the sin of my soul?' There is a fear of death and punishment, which ariseth from these natural sentiments which we have of God: Rom. i. 32, 'Knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death.' The dread of a God angry for sin is natural to us, and the ground of all our trouble. Man is afraid of death, and some misery after death which is likely to come upon him, Heb. ii. 14; and till the forgiveness of sin be procured for us, this bondage sticketh close to us, and we know not how to get off it. God is an holy God, and cannot endure iniquity, and by his law will not suffer the guilty to go free. The justice of the supreme governor of all the world requireth that sin should be punished; all mankind have a general presumption that death is penal; these fears make pardon a very inviting motive to them. These fears may be a while stifled in men, but they easily return and can no way be appeased, but by pardon and reconciliation with God, carried on in such a way, as they may be exempted from these fears; therefore 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.'

3. Pardon of sins is very necessary to the end of reconciliation, which is living in a course of holy amity and state of friendship with God till we live with him for ever in heavenly glory. Here I am to prove three things:—(1.) That the end of reconciliation is walking in a course of holiness; (2.) That this holiness is carried on in a state of

love and friendship between God and us ; (3.) That pardon is the fittest way to breed this holiness and increase it.

[1.] That the end of reconciliation is walking in a course of holiness ; for Christ died not to reconcile God to our sins, but that, reconciling our persons, we might quit our sins, and walk as those that are at good accord with him : Amos iii. 3, 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed ?' and 1 John ii. 7, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.' Now pardon of sin hath a mighty influence upon holy walking ; justification and sanctification are distinct privileges, but they always go together, and the one doth exceedingly suit with the other. These two privileges, pardon and holiness, the one freeth us from the guilt, the other from the stain of sin. The one concerneth God's interest, our subjection to him ; the other our own comfort. The one is the end, the other the means ; pardon is the means to holiness, and holiness is the end of pardon ; our general pardon is to put us into a state of acceptable obedience, our particular pardon to encourage us in it, and quicken us and excite us anew. The conditional and offered pardon is the means to work regeneration, and regeneration qualifyeth for actual pardon : Titus iii. 7, 'That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life ;' and Heb. viii. 10-12, 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord ; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts ; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people ; and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know me from the least to the greatest ; for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more ;' and Acts xxvi. 18, 'To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith.' And then actual pardon quickeneth us by love, to carry on that holiness of heart and life which God requireth ; for this mercy is the powerful motive to persuade us to obedience. Because he hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood, therefore we must love him and serve him all our days ; Luke i. 74, 75, 'That we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life ;' 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, 'For the love of Christ constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, that they which live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to him that died for them ;' Titus ii. 11, 12, 'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world ;' Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' His pardoning mercy and justification by Christ is the great enforcing argument. Those who are fetched up even from the gates of hell, and delivered from under the sentence of the law, and called into the state of God's children, should thankfully accept the benefit, acknow-

ledge the benefactor, live in love to God and holiness, hate that sin they have repented of, and which hath been pardoned to them, and still hold on their course in a way of obedience, till their full recovery in the everlasting estate.

[2.] That this holiness is carried on in a state of love and friendship between God and us. Love beareth rule in the spiritual life, and pardon is the great ground of love: Luke vii. 47, 'She loved much, because much was forgiven her.' The great business of religion is to love God above all; and a man that is uncertain whether there be any such thing as pardon, how can he love God above himself and all other things? Self-love is very hardly cured, for what is nearer to us than ourselves? Therefore self-love is very deeply rooted in us, especially love of life, that it must be some very strong and powerful thing which can subdue it. Now nothing will do it, but the love of God. Propound the terrors of the Lord; that will not do it, men will not be frightened out of self-love. It must be a powerful love that must divert us from it: as one nail driveth out another, so doth one love drive out another. Now what can be more powerful than the love of God? 'It is as strong as death; many waters cannot quench it,' Cant. viii. 7. This prevaileth over our natural inclination, so that we shall not only forsake the sins and vanities which we now love, but also life itself: Rev. xii. 11, 'They loved not their lives unto the death.' This prevaileth over our natural inclination, so that we can lay all things at God's feet, and suffer all things, and endure all things for God's sake, yea, even life itself for his glory.

[3.] Pardoning mercy in Christ is the great argument which breedeth and feedeth this love. How can I love a God which I think will damn me, and may probably do it? Our turning to God must be by love, and our living to God and for God is carried on by love; but how can I come to him who seemeth so unlovely to me? Therefore God, to draw us into this amity and holy friendship, will be represented as willing to pardon and save us, and that in such an astonishing way, that more cannot be done to express his love: Rom. v. 8, 'Herein God commended his love to us, that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.' See at what an high rate he is content to pardon and save us, that he may draw our love and attract our hearts, which, under the terrors of guilt and condemning justice, would never have been brought to love him.

4. The forgiveness of sins is that which is most expressly, directly, and formally eyed in the death of Christ: Eph. i. 7, 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins;' so Mat. xxvi. 28, 'This is my blood which was shed for the remission of sins;' so Heb. ix. 22, 'Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.' Why is not sanctification mentioned? it was purchased by his blood as well as remission. It was guilt made his blood necessary for our recovery, and the depravation of the heart of man is part of the punishment, spiritual death as well as temporal and eternal. And to be polluted is our punishment as well as our sin, and the guilt of sin stoppeth our mercies, cuts off the intercourse between God and us: Isa. lix. 2, 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God;' and Rom. iii. 23, 'For all have sinned, and are come short of the glory

of God.' And when the obstruction is removed, and the offence given by our sins pardoned, the sanctifying of our nature followeth. If there had been nothing to do but to renew us by repentance and sanctification, that might have been done without the blood of the Son of God, as God at first gave his image freely; but his governing justice required, that before man was set up with a new stock of grace, there should be so great a price paid. Well then, this is mentioned as the great way of our reconciliation, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.'

5. This was the great difficulty, how, when sin was once entered, it might be remitted. Sin was the great make-bate between God and us; and it is not so slightly done away as most do imagine. The great mystery and design of grace was, how lapsed man, who was under the guilt of sin and the desert of punishment, should be restored to favour, the honour of God be safe, and the government of the world secured; or to make the pardon of man's sin, a thing convenient for the righteous and holy God to bestow without any impeachment of the honour of his wisdom, holiness, and justice; for there being a sentence of the law against us, by which we are condemned, John iii. 18, it would not seem to become the wisdom of God, that he should wholly quit his law, as if it were made in vain. His servant was loath to be found in a double mind, that his word should be yea and nay, 2 Cor. i. 18. Levity is an imputation which he seeketh earnestly to avoid there. Nor the holiness of God to be too favourable to sinners, Hab. i. 13, 'He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.' Nor his justice; laws must not seem a vain scarecrow. In short, there must not be yea and nay with God; he must be demonstrated to us in his own divine perfections, and must not permit his laws and government to be despised or broken by a rebel world, without being executed upon them according to their true intent and meaning, or some equivalent demonstration of his justice, such as might vindicate both law and lawgiver from contempt. Well then, this was the great mystery and wonder of grace, 'that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them;' that his wisdom found out a way to exercise pardoning, saving mercy, without any injury to his governing justice and truth, or giving any leave to sinners to flatter and embolden themselves in their sins with the thoughts of impunity, which are so natural to us. Therefore well might the apostle mention this privilege, as a special branch of our reconciliation with God.

6. This is the proper privilege of the new covenant, or covenant of grace, and the difference between it and the law; the law knew no way but saving the innocent, but the gospel discovered a way of saving the penitent. The law was fitted only to our innocency, and required us to continue as God left us, but the offer of pardon of sins suiteth with our lapsed, guilty estate; there God revealeth himself to the apostate world in that way which was fit for their recovery. The law knew no such thing as the forgiveness of sin; the fallen creature had thereby no hope, for the tenor there was, Do, and live; sin, and die; here a way is found out how our trespasses may not be imputed to us, and the edge of the curse abated, and God represented as pacified; and so this privilege was fitly mentioned by the apostle.

Use 1. Is to press us to enter into God's peace by looking after the pardon of sins. I shall only urge three things—(1.) The necessity; (2.) The readiness of God to bestow this benefit; (3.) The excellency of the privilege.

1. The necessity of obtaining this benefit. There are three notions, which press it upon sleepy sinners—law, judge, conscience: there is the law broken, the judge to whom we are responsible, conscience which raiseth fears in us because of the breach.

[1.] Remember there is a righteous law broken, and the sentence of it standeth unrepealed against you, till, in a broken-hearted manner, you sue out your pardon in the name of your mediator; condemned, though not executed, John iii. 18; and condemned to what? Rom. ii. 9, 'Tribulation and anguish, and wrath upon every soul of man that doth evil;' and this will be executed, James ii. 13. The law is in force against those that refuse the gospel; therefore you must change copy, get this sentence reversed, or you are undone for ever. You have but a little time wherein to make your peace; there is but the slender thread of a frail life between you and execution; it is peace upon earth, Luke ii. 14. You are but reprieved during pleasure; that is the true notion of the present life: better never born, if you do not get off this curse. O christians, do you know what it is to have God an enemy? to be liable to his righteous wrath, to bear the burden of your own sins, to be answerable for his violated law?

[2.] The second awakening notion is that of a judge. I observe in scripture it is usually mentioned to quicken us to seek after repentance, and the pardon of sins. It is said, Acts x. 42, 43, 'He hath commanded us to testify and preach to the people, that he it is who was ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and the dead; to him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins;' and, Acts xvii. 30, 'He commandeth all men to repent, because he hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained;' and Acts iii. 19–21. 'Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things.' Why doth the scripture suggest this meditation? Partly, because our pardon is not complete till that day; now we have it under his hand in the word, under his seal by the Spirit, then from his mouth. And partly, because of the strictness of that day, now to consider that our case must be reviewed, that by our works and words we must be justified or condemned, Mat. xii. 36, 37. Surely we should make our peace, and be more watchful and serious for the future. And partly, considering who is judge, it is a strong motive to press us to receive his person, embrace his doctrine, and to put ourselves under the conduct of his Spirit; and depending upon the merit of his sacrifice, to use the appointed means in order to our full recovery and return to God.

[3.] The third working consideration is conscience, which anticipateth the judgment, and taketh God's part within us, rebuking us for sin—a secret spy that is in our bosoms, which handleth us as we handle it,

Rom. ii. 14, 15. Before the action, conscience showeth us what is to be done; in the act, it correcteth; after, alloweth or disalloweth. As a man acts, so he is a party; as he censurcth the action, so a judge. After the act, the force of conscience is most usually seen, more than before the fact, or in the fact; because, before, or in the action, the judgment of reason is not so clear and strong, the affections raising mists and clouds to darken the mind, and trouble it, and draw it on their side by their pleasing violence; but after the action, the violence of these things ceaseth, and is by little and little allayed. Guilt flusheth in the face of conscience; Judas, Mat. xxvii. 4, said, 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.' Reason hath the greater force, doth more affect the mind with grief and fear. When a man hath sinned against his conscience, when the act is over, and the affection satisfied, and giveth place to reason, that was before contemned, when it recovereth the throne, it striketh through the heart of man with a sharp reproof for obeying appetite before itself, bringeth in terror and contest unto the mind, and the soul sits uneasy. Now then, because of this conscience of sin, let us sue out our pardon and discharge. Conscience may be choked and smothered, but the flame will break forth again; it is not quietly settled but by reconciliation with Jesus Christ; they shun it all that they can, but cannot get rid of it: 1 John iii. 20, 'For if our hearts condemn us,' &c. There is a hidden fear in the heart of man not always felt, but soon awakened; usually it speaketh out men's condition to them, when their hearts are unsound with God: Job xxvii. 6, 'My heart shall not reproach me all my days.' The heart hath a reproaching, condemning power against a man when he goeth wrong. None of us but feel these heart-smitings and checks; therefore we should consider of them. Now these should be noted, partly, because to smother and stifle checks of conscience produceth hardness of heart, if not downright atheism; and partly, because conscience, if it speaketh not, it writeth; and where it is not a witness, it is a register: and partly, because it is God's deputy, 1 John iii. 20, 21; and partly, because heaven and hell is often begun in conscience; heaven, in our peace and joy, which is unspeakable and glorious, 1 Peter i. 8, and 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience.' Sometimes hell, in our grief and fears as appeareth in Judas: Mat. xxvi. 4, 5, 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood; and he went forth and hanged himself.' A good conscience is sweet company, as a bad is a great wound and burden. Well then, be settled upon sound terms, if you will not have your consciences upbraid you. Thus to the sleepy sinner.

2. To the broken-hearted I shall speak of God's readiness to pardon and to forgive. It is his name, Neh. ix. 17, 'But thou art a God ready to pardon.' It is his glory, Exod. xxxiii. 18, compared with Exod. xxxiv. 7. It is his delight, Micah vii. 18. The case of any sinner is not desperate; a pardon may be had, Isa. lv. 7, 8, '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 to our God, for he will abundantly pardon; for my thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor my ways as your ways, saith the Lord.' A sensible sinner, his condition is hopeful, Mat. ix. 13, with 28, 'Christ

came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance ;' and, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' To a repenting sinner it is conditionally certain, 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess and forsake our sins, he is just and faithful to forgive us our sins.' To those who seriously address themselves to this work, God sometimes vouchsafeth notable experiences, Ps. xxxii. 5. To those who have verified the sincerity of their faith and repentance, it is actually certain, evident and comfortable: Prov. xxviii. 13, 'He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy.' If they fulfil their covenant consent, confess sin so as to hate it and leave it, it is certain to them in *foro caeli*, and in *foro conscientie* ; and the more they come to God by Christ, and acquaint themselves with him, it groweth more firm: Job. xxii. 1, 'For I know that my redeemer liveth ;' and Rom. v. 1, 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.' Then their reconciliation is secured to them by renewed evidences and assurances ; habitual and familiar converse with him, as one friend doth with another, maketh it grow up into an holy security and peace ; for the good and advantage of waiting upon God is better discerned when men have persevered in it, than when they first began.

3. The excellency of the privilege. Let me speak to the actually pardoned to admire the privilege, and get their hearts more affected with it.

[1.] In the general: This way of reconciling us by Christ that our trespasses may not be imputed to us, was the product of God's eternal wisdom and goodness. As when there was a search for wisdom, 'The depth saith, It is not in me ; the sea saith, It is not with me,' Job xxviii. 14 ; so when there is an inquiry for a satisfactory way of reconciling the creatures to God, so as may suit with God's honour, and appease our guilty fears, go to the light of nature: it saith, It is not in me ; to the law, It is not in me ; only the gospel revealeth it, and there it is learned and discovered. The light of nature apprehendeth God placable, for he doth continue many forfeited mercies to us, and doth not presently put us into our final estate, as the fallen angels are *in termino* presently, upon the fall. It apprehendeth that God is to be appeased by some satisfaction ; hence those many inventions of lancing and cutting themselves, and offering their children, *et solo sanguine humano iram deorum immortalium placari posse*. The law that discovered our misery, but not our remedy, it showeth us our sin, but no way of deliverance from sin and acceptance with God. The law can do nothing for sinners, but only for the innocent ; it doth only discover sin, but exact obedience, and drive and compel men to seek after some other thing, that may save them from sin, and afford them a righteousness unto salvation ; when man was once a sinner, the law became insufficient for those ends: Rom. viii. 3, 'It became weak through our flesh.' It was able to continue our acceptance with God in that condition in which we were first created, but after that man by sin became flesh, and had a principle of enmity in him against God, the law stood aside as weakened, and insufficient to help and save such an one. But then, the gospel yieldeth full relief, propounding such a way wherein God is glorified and the creature humbled, and due provision made for our comfort without infringing our duty, that we might be in a capacity comfortably to serve and enjoy God, who

otherwise had neither had a mind to serve him, nor a heart to love him. Thus mercy and justice shine with an equal glory; so do also his wisdom and holiness. Our necessity is thoroughly remedied, and God's love fully expressed. When we were lost children of wrath, under the curse, and no hand that could help us, then he set his hand to that work which none could touch, and put his shoulders under that burden which none else could bear. If John mourned when none was found worthy in heaven or earth to open the book of visions, and unloose the seals thereof, how justly might the whole creation mourn, because none was found worthy in heaven or in earth to repair this disorder, till the Son of God undertook it, and made himself an offering for sin. Oh! Let us give due acceptance and entertainment to this wonderful love and blessed privilege.

[2.] The happiness of being actually pardoned is exceeding great. This is notably set forth by the psalmist: Ps. xxxii. 1, 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, in whose spirit there is no guile.' The privilege of the pardoned sinner is here set forth by three expressions: forgiving iniquity, covering sin, and not imputing transgression; and the manner of delivery is vehement and full of vigour—oh, the blessedness of the man! And it is repeated over and over again. Let us a little view the phrase; the Hebrew is, who is eased of his transgression. Junius; *qui levatur a defectione*. It compareth sin to a burden too heavy for us to bear. The same metaphor is used, Mat. xi. 28, 'Come to me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden.' The second expression relateth to the covering of filth, or the removing that which is offensive out of sight; as the Israelites were to march with a paddle tied to their arms, that when they went to ease themselves, they might dig and cover that that came from them. Deut. xxiii. 14, you have the law, and the reason of it: 'For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of the camp, therefore shall thy camp be holy, that he see no unclean thing in thee.' The third expression is, 'To whom the Lord imputeth not sin,' that is, doth not put sin to their account; where sin is compared to a debt, as it is also: Mat. vi. 12, 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.' So that sin is a burden, of which we should seek to be eased; filthiness, which we should get to be covered; debts, which we should get to be discharged. Oh, blessed we when it is so, when God lifts off from our shoulders the burden of the guilt of sin, covereth this noisome filthiness which maketh us so loathsome to him, and quits the debt and plea which he had in law against us. This forgiving or lifting of the burden is with respect to Christ's merit, on whom God laid the iniquities of us all, Isa. liii. 6; this covering is with respect to the adjudication of Christ's righteousness to us, which is a covering which is not too short; this not imputing is with respect to Christ's mediation or intercession, which in effect speaketh thus, What they owe, I have paid. Oh, the blessedness of the man! You will apprehend it to be so. What a burden sin is when it is not pardoned! Carnal men feel it not for the present, but they shall hereafter feel it. Now two sorts of conscience feel the burden of sin, a tender conscience, and a wounded conscience. It is grievous to a tender heart, that valueth

the love of God, to lie under the guilt of sin: Ps. xxxviii. 4, 'Mine iniquities are gone over my head, as a burden too heavy for me.' Broken bones are sensible of the least weight: so Ps. xl. 12, 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold of me.' What kind of hearts have they who can sin freely and without remorse? Is it nothing to have grieved the Spirit of God, and violated his law, and rendered ourselves obnoxious to his wrath? A wounded conscience feeleth it also. There is a domestic tribunal which we carry about with us wherever we go, as the devils carry their own hell about with them, though not now in the place of torments: Prov. xviii. 14, 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?' Natural courage will bear up under common distresses which lie more without us, but when the spirit itself is wounded, what support under so great a burden? Ask Cain and Judas what it is to feel the burden of sin. All sinners are subject to this, and this bondage may be easily revived in them; a close touch of the word will do it, a sad thought, a pressing misery, a scandalous sin, a grievous sickness, a disappointment in the world. There needs not much ado to put a sinner in the stocks of conscience; as Belshazzar, that saw but a few words written on the wall, and 'his countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against the other.' Again, it is filthiness which rendereth you odious in the sight of God; we ourselves cannot endure ourselves, when serious, John iii. 20; it maketh us shy of God's presence. Once more, it is a debt which bindeth us over to everlasting punishment; and if we be not pardoned, the judge will give order to the jailer, and the jailer will cast us into the prison, 'till we have paid the utmost farthing,' Luke xii., last verse; and that will never be. How doleful is their case who are bound hand and foot and cast into hell, there to remain for ever and ever! Now put all together: certainly if you had ever been in bondage, and felt the sting of death, the curse of the law, or been acquainted with the fiery darts of Satan, or scorched with the wrath of God, or known the terrors of those, of whom God hath exacted this debt in hell, surely you would say, Blessed is the man! happy are those whose sins are pardoned! Those that mind their work, that know what it is to look God in the face with comfort, that have this chain broken, the judge turned into a father, the tribunal of justice into a throne of grace, and punishment into a pardon, will say, Blessed is the man!

SERMON XXXVII.

And hath committed to us the word of reconciliation.—2 Cor. v. 19.

WE come now to the third thing, the means of application or bringing about this reconciliation on man's part: *θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν*—hath placed in us. In which observe two things—

1. The matter of the charge, trust or thing entrusted—*The word of reconciliation*; called also, ver. 18, the ministry of reconciliation, that is, the gospel which revealeth the way of making peace with God, and is the charter and grant of Christ, and all his benefits from God, unto every one that will receive him. Now the gospel may be considered as written or preached; as written, so it is properly called the word of reconciliation; as preached, so, the ministry of reconciliation. The one serveth to inform, the other to excite; by the one the door of mercy is set open by discovering the admirable methods of grace in reclaiming the world; by the other, men are called upon, persuaded, and exhorted, to accept of the remedy offered.

2. The persons to whom he hath committed—*He hath put in us*, the apostles and their successors. (1.) The apostles are of chief consideration, for these, as master-builders, were to lay the foundation, 1 Cor. iii. 10; and Eph. ii. 20, ‘And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the corner-stone.’ They were infallibly assisted and to be absolutely trusted in what they wrote: had the power of miracles, to evidence their mission and call; they were confined to no certain charge and country; therefore, this trust did belong to the apostles in all respects, chiefly in some respects to them only. (2.) Ordinary ministers are not to be excluded because they agree with the apostles as to the substance of their commission, which is to reconcile men to God, or to preach the gospel. The ordinary ministerial teaching is Christ’s institution, as well as that of the apostles: Eph. iv. 11, ‘He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.’ He that appointed prophets and apostles to write scripture, hath also appointed pastors and teachers to explain and apply scripture. This is done *pleno jure*: Mat. xxviii. 19, 20, ‘All power is given me in heaven and earth; go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you; and lo! I am with you to the end of the world.’ By virtue of that authority given him by God, they are in the same commission, and have a promise of the same presence and Spirit. So also 1 Cor. iii. 5, ‘Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?’ As to the substance of the work, they do the same thing; as to the substance of the blessing, they are accompanied with the same Spirit. In both, as their ministry, for the matter of it, is the ministry of reconciliation, so for the power of it, it is the ministration of the Spirit unto life; only the one are immediately called, miraculously gifted, infallibly assisted, sent out to all the world; the other have an ordinary call, a limited place, but yet do the same work, in the same name, and are assisted by the same Spirit.

Doct. That much of the wisdom and goodness of God is seen in the course he hath taken for the applying of reconciliation.

In the merit, or way of procuring, in the branches, the restitution of his favour and image, we have seen already; now the way of applying that will appear.

1. God would not do us good without our knowledge, and therefore first or last he must give us notice; it is everywhere made as an act of

God's goodness to reveal the way of reconciliation. When the psalmist had discoursed of the pardon of sins, he presently addeth, Ps. ciii., 'He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel;' and Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20, 'He hath showed his word unto Jacob, and his judgments unto Israel; he hath not dealt so with every nation; as for his judgments, they have not known him;' and Micah vi. 8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good;' but especially in the new administration of the covenant, Heb. viii. 10, 11, 'I will put my laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people, and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, nor every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know me from the least to the greatest;' and Isa. liii. 2, 'By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.' Those places show, that as it is a great favour, that the way of reconciliation was found out, so this is a new favour, that the way is so clearly revealed, that it is not left to our blind guesses. If God had intended to do us good, but would not tell us how, there would not have been due provision made for the comfort and duty of the creature: not for our comfort, for an unknown benefit intended to us can yield us no comfort. Christ's prophetic office is as necessary for our comfort as his sacerdotal: Heb. iii. 1, 'Consider the apostle and high-priest of our profession, Jesus Christ.' We could take little comfort in him as an high priest, if he had not been also an apostle. The highest office in both the testaments was necessary to our comfort and peace. In the old testament, all the business of that dispensation was to represent him an high priest; so in the new, as an apostle, that was to open the mind and heart of God to us, and show us how to be happy in the love and enjoyment of God. Nor could we understand our duty: all parties interested in the reconciliation must be acquainted with the way of it; and therefore man must understand, what course God would take to bring about this peace. How else should he give his consent, or seek after the benefit, in such a solemn and humble manner, as is necessary? And how else can we be sensible of our obligation, and be thankful, and live in the sense of so great a love? John iv. 10, 'If thou knewest the gift,' &c.

2. As God will not do us good without our knowledge, so not against our will and consent, and force us to be reconciled and saved, whether we will or no. Man is a reasonable creature, a free agent, and God governeth all his creatures according to their receptivity. With necessary agents, he worketh necessarily; with free agents, freely; a will is required on our parts: Rev. xxii. 17, 'Whosoever will;' and Ps. cx. 3, 'His people shall be a willing people in the day of his power.' Their hearts are effectually inclined to accept of what God offereth. All that receive the faith of Christ, receive it most willingly, and forsake all to follow him: Acts ii. 41, 'They gladly received his word;' then was that prophecy in part verified.

3. God will not work this will and consent by an imposing force, but by persuasion, because he will draw us 'with the cords of a man,' Hosea iv. 14; that is, in such a way and upon such terms as are proper and fitting for men. God dealeth with beasts by a strong hand of absolute power, but with man in the way of counsel, entreaties and persuasions, as he acted the tongue of Balaam's ass, to strike the sound of those words

in the air, not infusing discourse and reason : therefore it is said, Num. xxii. 28, 'He opened the mouth of the ass;' but when he dealeth with man he is said 'to open the heart,' Acts xvi. 14; as inwardly by a secret power, so outwardly by the word so offered, that they attended. That is a rational way of proceeding, so to mind as to choose, so to choose as to pursue; men is drawn to God in a way suitable to his nature :—

4. To gain this consent the word is a most accommodate instrument. I prove it by two arguments.

[1.] From the way of God's working, physically, morally, powerfully, sapientially. The physical operation is by the infusion of life; the moral operation is by reason and argument. Both these ways are necessary in a condescension to our capacities; *fortiter pro te, Domine, suaviter pro me*; God worketh strongly, like himself, and sweetly, that he may attemper his work to our natures and suit the key to the wards of the lock. Both these ways are often spoken of in scripture: John vi. 44, 45, 'No man can come unto me except the Father draw him; as it is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God.' They are taught and drawn, so taught that they are also drawn and inclined; and so drawn, as also taught, as it becometh God to deal with men. Therefore sometimes God is said to create in us a new heart, making it a work of power; Ps. li. 10, 'And we are his workmanship created to good works,' Eph. ii. 10. Sometimes to persuade and allure; Hosea ii. 15, 'I will allure her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her;' Gen. ix. 27, 'The Lord shall persuade Japhet,' by fair and kind entreaties, draw them to a liking of his ways. The soul of man is determined to God, by an object without and a quality within. The object is propounded by all its qualifications, that the understanding may be informed and convinced, and the will and affections persuaded in a potent and high way of reasoning; but this is not enough to determine man's heart without an internal quality or grace infused, which is his physical work upon the soul. There is not only a propounding of reason and arguments, but a powerful inclination of the heart, and so we are by strong hand plucked out of the snares of death. Both are necessary; the power, without the word or persuasion, would be a brutish force, and so offer violence to our faculties. Now God doth not oppress the liberty of the creature, but preserve the nature and interest of his workmanship; on the other side, the persuasion, offers of a blessed estate without power, will not work; for if the word of God cometh to us in word only, but not in power, the creature remaineth, as it was, dead and stupid.

[2.] If we consider the impediments on man's part. The word is suited as a proper cure for the diseases of men's souls. Now these are ignorance, slightness, and impotency.

(1.) Ignorance is the first disease set forth by the notions of darkness and blindness, Eph. v. 8; 2 Peter. i. 9. We are so to spiritual and heavenly things. Though men have the natural power of understanding, yet no spiritual discerning, so as to be affected with, or transformed by, what they know, 1 Cor. ii. 14; no saving knowledge of the things which pertain to the kingdom of God, or their everlasting happiness. This is the great disease of human nature; worse than bodily blindness, because they are not sensible of it: Rev. iii. 17, 'Thou thoughtest that thou wast rich, and increased with goods, and knowest not that thou art

wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked ;' because they seek not fit guides to lead them.

(2.) Slightiness. They will not mind these things, nor exercise their thoughts about them : Mat. xxii. 5, 'And they made light of it,' would not let it enter into their care and thoughts ; Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?' Non-attendance is the great bane of men's souls ; it is a long time to bring them to ask, 'What shall I do to be saved ?'

(3.) Impotency and weakness, which lieth in the wilfulness and hardness of their hearts ; our *non posse* is *non velle* ; Ps. lviii. 4, 5, 'They are like the deaf adder which stoppeth her ear, and will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely ;' and Mat. xxiii. 37, 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not ?' and Luke xix. 14, 'We will not have this man to rule over us ;' John v. 40, 'They will not come unto me that they may have life ;' Ps. lxxxii. 11, 'Israel would have none of me ;' Prov. i. 29, 'But they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.' You cannot, because you will not, the will and affections being engaged to other things. You have the grant and offer of mercy from God, but you have not an heart to make a right choice. If you could say, I am willing but cannot, that were another matter ; but I cannot apply myself to seek reconciliation with God by Christ, is, in true interpretation, 'I will not,' because your blinded minds and sensual inclinations have misled and perverted your will ; your obstinate and carnal wilfulness is your true impotency.

Now what proper cure is there for all these evils but the word of God ? Teaching is the proper means to cure ignorance, for men have a natural understanding. Warning us of our danger, and minding us of our duty, is the proper means to cure slightiness, and to remove their impotency, which lieth in their obstinacy and wilfulness. There is no such means as to besiege them with constant persuasion, and the renewed offers of a better estate by Christ, for the impotency is rather moral than natural ; we do not use to reason men out of their natural impotency, to bid a lame man walk, or a blind man see, or a dead man live ; but to make men willing of the good they have neglected or rejected, we must persuade them to a better choice. In short, to inform the judgment, to awaken the conscience, to persuade the will, this is the work and office of the word by its precepts, promises, and rewards. It is true the bare means will not do it without God's concurrence, the influence and power of his Spirit ; but it is an encouragement to use the means, because they are fitted to the end, and God would not appoint us means which should be altogether vain.

5. That it is not enough that the word be written, but preached by those who are deputed thereunto for several reasons—

[1.] Partly because scripture may possibly lie by, as a neglected thing. The Lord complaineth, Hos. viii. 12, 'I have written to them the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.' Men slighted the word written, as of little importance or concernment to them, are little conversant in it ; therefore some are appointed that shall be sure to call upon us, and put us in mind of our eternal condition ; that may bring the word nigh to us, lay it at our doors, bring a special message of God to our souls : Acts xiii. 26, 'To you is the

word of salvation sent.' He speaketh to all the world by his word, to you in particular by the special messages his servants bring you. It is sent to you, there is much of God in it; the word written hath its use to prevent delusions and mistakes, and the word preached hath also its use to excite and stir up every man to look after the remedy offered, as he will answer it to God another day.

[2.] Partly because the word written may not be so clearly understood, therefore God hath left gifts in the church, authorised some to interpret: as the eunuch was reading, and God sent him an interpreter: 'Philip said unto him, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except somebody guide me?' Acts viii. 30, 31. The scripture is clear in itself, but there is a covering of natural blindness upon our eyes, which the guides of the church are appointed and qualified to remove: Job xxxiii. 23, 'If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one of a thousand, to show a man his uprightness.' There are messengers from God authorised to speak in his name, to relieve poor souls, that they may soundly explain, forcibly express, and closely apply the truths of the word, that what is briefly expressed there by earnest and copious exhortations may be inculcated upon them, and the arrow may be drawn to the head, and they may more effectually deal with sinners, and convince them of their duty, and rouse them up to seek after the favour of God in Christ. Look, as darts that are cast forth out of engines by art, and fitted with feathers, are more apt to fly faster, and pierce deeper, than those that are thrown casually, and fall by their own weight; so, though the word of God is still the word of God, and hath its proper power and force, whether read or preached, yet when it is well and properly enforced with distinctness of language, vehemency and vigour of spirit, and with prudent application, it is more conducive to its end.

[3.] Because God would observe a congruity and decency. As death entered by the ear, so doth life and peace: Rom. x. 14, 15, 'How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?' By the same sense by which we received our venom and poison, God will send in our blessings, work faith and repentance in us by the ministry of reconciliation. Besides, as vision and seeing are exercised in heaven, so hearing in the church; it is a more imperfect way of apprehension, but such as is competent to the present state: Job xlii. 5, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee,' speaking of his extraordinary vision of God, which is a glimpse of heaven. Now we have a report of God, and his grace; satisfying ocular inspection is reserved for heaven; but now we must be contented with the one without the other.

6. That to preach the word to us, God hath appointed men of the same mould with ourselves, and entrusted them with the ministry of reconciliation. As the fowler catcheth many birds by one decoy, a bird of the same feather; so God dealeth with us by men of the same nature and affections, and subject to the law of the same duties, who are concerned in the message they bring to us as much as we are—men that know the heart of man by experience, our prejudices and temptations,

for the heart of man answereth to heart as the face in the waters, Prov. xxvii. 19; and so know all the wards of the lock, and what key will fit them. Now the love and wisdom of God appeareth herein,—

[1.] Because God will try the world by his ordinary messengers: Col. i. 21, 'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' We now live by faith and not by sight, and therefore he will not discover his own majesty, and send us nuncios and messengers out of the other world, or deal with us in an extraordinary way to lead us to faith and repentance, but send mean creatures like ourselves, in his name, who, by the manifestation of the truth, shall commend themselves to every man's conscience, to see if they will submit to this ordinary stated course. We would have visions, oracles, miracles, apparitions, one come from the dead, but Christ referreth us to ordinary means; if they work not, extraordinary means will do us no good: Luke xvi. 30, 31, 'And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went from the dead, they will repent; and he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.' When God used extraordinary ways, man was man still: Ps. lxxviii. 22–24, 'Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation, though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them the corn of heaven.' They had their meat and drink from heaven, and yet they were rebels against God and unbelievers. Their victuals came out of the clouds, their water out of the rock; so that miracles will not convert, nor beget saving faith in them with whom ordinary means do not prevail. An oracle; Samuel thought Eli called him, when it was the Lord: 2 Peter i. 19.—*βεβαιότερον λόγον*, 'We have a more sure word of prophecy.' Or one from the dead. Christianity is the testimony of one that came from the dead, Jesus Christ. There can be no better doctrine, no more powerful persuasion, nor stronger confirmation, or greater cooperation. God trieth us now; but we would have all things subjected to the view of sense.

[2.] He magnifieth his own power, and useth a weaker instrument, that we might not look to the next hand, and gaze upon them, as if they, by their own power and holiness did make the dead live, or the deaf hear, or convert the sinner to God: 2 Cor. iv. 7, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us;' that the efficacy of the gospel may be known to be from God alone, and not of men. He can blow down the walls of Jericho by a ram's-horn, by weak men bring mighty things to pass. Treasure in an earthen vessel is supposed to allude to Gideon's stratagem of a lamp in a pitcher, Judges vii. 16. What was that to fight against the numerous host of Midian? They brake their pitchers, and cried, 'The sword of the Lord and Gideon!' So we have this light in an earthen vessel; 'the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God,' 2 Cor. x. 4. God chose *τὰ μὴ ὄντα*, 1 Cor. i. 28, 'foolish things to confound the wise, and weak things to confound the mighty, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.' God's ordinances are simple in appearance, but full of power.

[3.] God dealeth more familiarly with us in this way, conveying his

mind to us by our brethren, who are flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone; such with whom we have ordinary and visible commerce. We read, Exod. xx. 18, 19, that the people when they heard the thunders, they stood afar off, and said unto Moses, 'Speak thou unto us and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.' It is a great mercy to man, that seeing he cannot endure that God should in glorious majesty speak to him, that he will depute men in his stead: Deut. xviii. 15, 'The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken; according to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb, in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not;' that is, Christ principally, and all those sent in his name, and come in his stead. Nay, we are not able to bear the glorious ministry of the angels; they would affright us, rather than draw to God. As Elihu saith to Job, chap. xxxiii. 6, 7, 'I that am formed out of the clay, am come to thee in God's stead; my terror shall not make thee afraid;' so may the ministers of the gospel say, We that are of the same mould and making, we are ambassadors in God's stead, come to pray you to be reconciled to God. You need not be afraid of us nor shy of us.

[4.] There is more certainty this way, because by those whose fidelity in other things is approved to us, who cannot deceive us but they must deceive their own souls; they know the desert of sin, and the danger by reason of it; those who have had experience of the grace they preach; as Paul was an instance of the gospel, as well as a preacher of it, 1 Tim. i. 17; and he saith, 'He did comfort others with the comforts wherewith he himself was comforted of God,' 2 Cor. i. 4; spake from a sense and taste, commended his apostleship from his own knowledge; who come not with a report of a report, who confirm their doctrines by their practice; for they are to be examples to the flock; and sometimes by their blood and sufferings, if need be, it is their duty at least—would these deceive us? There are more rational, inducing grounds of probability in this way, than any extraordinary course that can be taken.

Use 1. Let us respect God's institution the more. We see the reason of it, and the love and wisdom which God hath showed in it, and especially regard the way of reconciliation. Peace and life are tendered in his name to self-condemning and penitent sinners, through the mediation of Jesus Christ. This circumstance of the means teacheth us several things.

1. That it is not enough to look to the purchase, price, and ransom, that was given for our peace, but also the application of it; for the apostle doth not only insist upon the giving of Christ, but also on the word of reconciliation by which it is offered to us. In the 18th ver., this text and the 20 ver., 'God may be in Christ reconciling the world to himself,' and yet we perish for ever, unless we be reconciled to God; and therefore the means of application must be regarded, as well as the means of impetration; and as we bless God for Christ, so also for the ministry and ordinances.

2. It showeth that God hath not only a good will to us, but this

good will is carried on with great care and solicitude, that it may not miscarry at last. Here is wisdom mixed with love. As God was careful in laying a foundation of it by Christ, so you see with what wisdom the means are appointed, that this peace may be dispensed to us in the most taking way. Now God hath travailed so much in this matter, shall the gospel be cast away upon you? He hath set up an ordinance on purpose to treat with sinners.

3. That those things which God hath joined must not be separated, nor any part dispersed—Christ, Spirit, ministry. Christ purchaseth all, the Spirit applieth all, the ministry offereth all by the word. If we go to God for grace, if it were not for Christ, he would not look towards us; he sendeth us therefore to Christ, who is the golden pipe through which all the fatherly goodness of God passeth out unto us. If we go to Christ, he accomplisheth all by his Spirit; it is the Spirit that by his powerful illumination must enlighten our minds, and open our hearts, and effectually renew and change the soul, Tit. iii. 5, 6. If we look to the Spirit, he sendeth us to the ordinances; there we shall hear of him in the word written and preached. Despise that course, and all stoppeth; therefore you must be meditating on his word, which is the seed of life; ‘be swift to hear;’ make more conscience to attend seriously to the dispensation of it. This last is most likely to be despised; men will pretend a love to Christ and the Spirit, a reverence to the word written, but despise the ministry, because they are men of like passions with ourselves. No; it is God’s condescension to our weakness, which cannot admit of other messengers, to employ such; therefore receive them as messengers of Christ: they work together with God, 1 Cor. iii. 9, they are labourers together with God: 2 Cor. vi. 1, ‘As workers together with God, we beseech you, receive not this grace in vain;’ and Christ saith, ‘he that despiseth you despiseth me, and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me,’ Luke x. 16. What is done to a man’s apostle is done to himself; and Mat. x. 40, ‘He that receiveth you receiveth me.’ Christ meant not to stay upon earth visibly and personally to teach men himself; therefore he committed this dispensation to others, left it with faithful men, who are to manage it in his name.

4. Those who are enemies of the ministry of the word are enemies to the glory of God, and the comfort and salvation of God’s people. The glory of God: 2 Cor. i. 20, ‘For all the promises of God in him are yea and amen, unto the glory of God by us;’ and the comfort of God’s people, ver. 24, ‘Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy.’ And their too much preaching is their too much converting souls to God, and reconciling souls to God.

You hear not the word aright, unless it be a word of reconciliation to you, a means of bringing God and you nearer together, to humble you for sin, which is the cause of breach and distance: or to revive thy wounded spirit, or to make you prize and esteem the grace of the Redeemer, or more earnestly to seek after God by a uniform and constant obedience.