

consciences, put out that light that should guide them. And therefore get your hearts purged from sin; for as faith makes way for holiness, so doth holiness again for faith.

SERMON VI.

For by it the elders obtained a good report.—HEB. xi. 2.

THE whole chapter is mainly spent in the praise of sanctifying faith—a necessary grace, and of a universal influence into all the parts of the spiritual life.

Divers things are attributed to faith, and that several ways: either as acts or as effects, or as fruits and consequences of faith.

1. As acts, which decipher the essence and formal nature of it, ver. 1. These are the *elicite*, or formal acts of faith, which substantiates things hoped for, and convinceth of things that are not seen.

2. Then there are the effects of faith, or, as the schoolmen call them, *imperate* acts, which flow from the primary acts, as hope, valour, patience, christian self-denial; all which are the progeny of faith, as in opening the following verse will appear.

3. Then there are the fruits and consequences of faith, which follow faith though they do not flow from it; as the recompenses and rewards of religion, temporal or eternal, which a believer receives not from the power and worth of his faith, but from the free grace of God. Faith is a condition by the ordination and appointment of God, but not a cause: that distinction is necessary for the clearing many parts of the chapter. Such a fruit of faith you have in the text, the approbation or testimony which the ancient fathers received from God in the word, 'For by it the elders received a good report.'

To commend that faith which he had before described, the apostle brings the experience of the elders, or of the Old Testament saints. Here you have—(1.) The persons—*The elders*: (2.) The means—*By it*: (3.) The blessing—*They obtained a good report*. Or else—(1.) The condition—Faith; (2.) 'The consequent—*ἐμαρτυρήθησαν*, they were witnessed to or spoken of with respect in the world; and (3.) The subject in which both these do meet and concur.

'The elders;' by faith 'the elders obtained a good report.'

'The elders,' *πρεσβύτεροι*, the patriarchs, fathers; the word is rather proper to the life of man than to the age of the world. The ancients are called *οἱ παλαιοί*, *homines prisci sæculi*, but the words are confounded. And they might well be called elders, not only for their antiquity, and living in the first ages of the world, but because most of them were *μακρόβιοι*, of wonderful long life.

'By it,' *ἐν ταύτῃ*. It is not *for* faith, but *by* faith, for faith is as improper as for works; but having faith, not by the worth and influence of it as a cause, but through faith as a condition appointed and ordained by God.

‘They obtained a good report,’ *ἐμαρτυρήθησαν*; the word signifies they received a testimony; they were attested to, or witnessed of. Now this testimony which the faithful receive is double: inward, or the testimony of conscience; outward, or the testimony of God in his word. (1.) Inward, or the testimony of conscience: 1 John. v. 10, ‘He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.’ (2.) Outward, from God in the word; they received a testimony. What is that? they were chronicled and set out in the scriptures as a pattern for all future ages. This is most proper, and therefore it is elsewhere rendered ‘of good report.’ Acts vi. 3, ‘Look you out among you seven men’—*μαρτυρουμένους*—‘of honest report.’ And it suiteth with the context, for what is spoken here in the general is in particular applied to Abel and Enoch. To Abel, ver. 4, ‘He obtained witness that he was righteous;’ it is meant in the scriptures, where his usual title and appellation is, ‘righteous Abel,’ as I shall show in that verse. So to Enoch, ver. 5, ‘He had this testimony, that he pleased God’—a testimony from God in his conscience, and it is now recorded in the word.

After the apostle had laid down the description of faith, he applies it to the patriarch fathers, or ancient servants of God under the dispensation of the Old Testament. Hence observe—

Obs. 1. That the fathers under the law had the same kind of faith that we have. They had the same promises, not of Canaan, but of heaven: Heb. xi. 13, ‘And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth;’ they sojourned here as in a strange country, and counted the world a strange place, and looked for heaven as their home, as we do. And the promises were made to them upon the same terms of grace. The same reason or inducement that moves God to covenant with us moved God to covenant with the fathers of the Old Testament: Deut. vii. 8, ‘Because the Lord loved you,’ &c. The merit upon account of which he might receive them into favour was the same, the blood of Jesus Christ: Heb. xiii. 8, ‘Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.’ It is not meant of his eternal divinity, and the unchangeableness of his godhead, but of the manifestation of his grace. The ages past and the ages to come, they are all one in Christ. Though we lived not in Christ’s time, yet we have salvation by him, ‘for he is the same for ever;’ and though they lived not in our time, yet they had salvation by him, ‘for he was the same yesterday,’ &c. He is called the ‘Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,’ Rev. xiii. 8, that is, in God’s decree; and he was slain in the figures and types of his death. Though Christ’s blood was not as yet shed, yet it was decreed to be shed in the purpose of God, and so it was as effectual to them as to us.

Use. Free grace is no novel doctrine, it is the old course which God hath always taken for saving of souls. The curiosity of man is altogether for new ways; but however the new may seem more plausible, yet the old is more certain and true: Jer. vi. 16. ‘Ask for the old paths, where is the good way,’—the ancient way of God’s grace,—‘and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.’ Novelty maketh things liable to suspicion. *Verum quod primum*, that is true which is the first. Though error be very ancient, error may be mouldy, as well as truth greyhaired; yet that which is oldest is best, and truth is

first. Now this is God's old way, to bring in sinners to Christ by free grace. When we shall come to heaven, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we shall hear the elders of old reading lectures of free grace, and singing praises to the Lamb, by whose blood they were redeemed, and by whose merit they were brought to glory. There will be Abraham, and Moses, and all the worthies of God; God hath used several dispensations, but the end of the journey is the same.

Secondly, 'By it the elders obtained a good report.' I observe again—

Obs. 2. That the apostle ascribes their renown in the church to their faith. By it they obtained. They were famous for other graces,—Abel for righteousness and innocence; Enoch and Noah for walking with God; Moses for meekness, and wise conduct; Abraham for obedience; others for their valour and resolution; but mark, the crown is set upon the head of faith; 'by it the elders obtained a good report.' Nay, throughout the whole chapter many effects here spoken of do more directly and formally belong to other graces, as to self-denial, and christian fortitude, rather than to faith; yet still the apostle saith, by faith they did this, by faith they did that. Though the private soldiers do worthily in the high places of the field, yet the general bears away the honour, he gets the battle and wins the day; so here, all graces have their use in the holy life, all do worthily in their order and place; love worketh, hope waiteth, patience endureth, zeal sparkleth, and obedience urgeth to duty; but faith bears away the prize, this is the chiefest pin and wheel in the whole frame of salvation. Partly because it is the grace of reception on our part, by which we receive all the influences of heaven. On Christ's part it is all ascribed to the Spirit, on our part to faith; Christ lives in us by his Spirit, and we live in him by faith. There is no more intrinsic worth in faith than in any other grace, but Christ hath appointed it to this office. And partly because it directs and quickens all other graces—'Faith worketh by love,' Gal. v. 6. It feeds hope, it teaches patience to wait, it makes zeal to sparkle, it gives relief to self-denial, and encourageth obedience. Faith is like a silken string, which runs through the chain of pearl; or like the spirits that run with the blood throughout all the veins. Other graces without faith are but the moral elevations of nature; this gives a man acceptance with God; this conserves his other graces, and preserves him against assaults. It is called 'the shield of faith,' Eph. vi. 11, as the shield covereth the whole armour. God hath assigned this office to faith to quicken and preserve graces, and conquer difficulties: 1 John v. 4, 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

Use. It shows what should be our principal care—to get faith and to maintain faith.

1. To get faith, in some sense there is as great a necessity of faith as of Christ. What good would a deep well do us without a bucket? John iv. 11, 'The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep;' so for us to have a deep well and a fountain of salvation, when we have nothing to fetch water out of these wells of salvation, what will it stead us? Faith is the life of our lives, the soul of our souls; the *primum mobile*, that moves all the wheels of

obedience. He that hath a mind to work would not be without his tools. We can do nothing in religion without faith. Oh! beg faith; it is necessary—*necessitate medii*: you may as well want Christ as faith; God will not violate his own order. All other graces follow the proportion of faith.

2. Maintain and keep it lively. Of all graces it is the most excellent, and of all graces it is most assaulted. The malice and spite of Satan is at your faith. Saith Christ to Peter: Luke xxii. 31, 32, 'Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not,' he would undermine thy faith. Usually there are no defects in the life, but first there is some decay of faith. You had need keep that grace lively by which you live. The scripture speaks not only of a living faith, but of a lively faith and a lively hope, 1 Peter i. 3. The means to keep it lively are—

[1.] Meditation; that is the great fuel of faith, it keeps in the fire in the soul; it is both wood and bellows. Now meditation must look forward and backward; backward with thankfulness, and forward with hope. (1.) Backward with thankfulness upon the love of Christ, often considering the greatness and willingness of his passion. There is not a greater incentive to obedience than to consider the sufferings of Christ. A soldier, when his request was denied, showed the emperor his wounds. Oh! feed your faith with such a sight, show it the wounds, and the sufferings and bruises of Christ, then the soul will not be so sluggish and averse from duty: 2 Cor. v. 14, 'The love of Christ constrains us.' Meditation helps faith, and faith awakens love, and then love presseth and urgeth the soul to obedience, and will not let us be quiet. I have observed that we are more affected with what men suffer for us than what men do for us, because there is more self-denial in suffering, but only courtesy in doing. Oh, what hath Jesus Christ suffered for us? He came from heaven, and when he was to go up to Golgotha, there was no reluctance in his spirit; he did not plead, It will cost me dear, it is a hard work! but, Lo, I come to do thy will, Ps. xl. 7, 8; here are cheeks for the nippers, a back for the smiters, here is a body for the cross; and when faith urgeth this, the soul will be ashamed to go less cheerfully to the throne of grace than Jesus Christ went to the cross. (2.) Look forward upon Christ's purchase. Heaven is a fair field for meditation, and faith hath a pleasant walk when it can walk through the land of promise; as God bade Abraham: Gen. xiii. 17, 'Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it, for I will give it thee.' Meditation should awaken faith, and encourage it to walk through the land of promise, All this will the Lord give thee. Moses' faith was the more resolved because heaven was still in his eye: Heb. xi. 26, 'For he had respect to the recompense of the reward.' Keep the eye steady in the view of glory. The transfiguration of Jesus Christ fitted him for his suffering. The messengers of the cross, they came to him in shining garments, 'to talk of his decease that he should accomplish at Jerusalem,' Luke ix. 31. It will not be mercenary for us to use the same art. Let faith climb up into the high mount by meditation, and in our thought foretaste the glory of the everlasting state, that we may be fitted to do and suffer for God.

[2.] Frequent act and exercise: James ii. 22, 'By works faith was made perfect.' How could this be? rather faith makes works perfect. It is not meant in that sense, as if work did communicate any merit and value to faith, but only that hereby it is more increased, more drawn up to the height and perfection. All graces are perfected by much use and exercise; so is faith. Look, as the exercise of the members of the body increaseth their vigour and strength, and therefore the right arm is biggest, because of much exercise; so inwardly the soul is bettered, and faith is much improved by frequent operation. Neglect of grace is the ground of its decrease and decay. Wells are the sweeter for the draining; so graces are the better for this exercise.

3. A careful use of ordinances; there faith is begotten, and there it is increased. Look, as the strength of the body increaseth by degrees, so doth the soul. We grow up to our complete stature and strength in religion by the constant supplies and ministration of the word; the soul must be fed as well as the body. There is no stop in grace, still we must be growing: 'They that are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God,' Ps. xcii. 13; Luke viii. 18, 'Take heed how you hear, for whosoever hath, to him shall be given.' How comes this to be the reason of the precept? Our Saviour hereby implies, that the more we hear, the more we increase. None want ordinances so much as those that think they do not want them. Painted fire wants no fuel, and counterfeit graces need not constant support from ordinances; but true grace languishes in the neglect of them, for the use of ordinances is God's way and method.

Obs. 3. That the faith of the elders was an active faith, that discovered itself by good fruits and gracious actions; otherwise it could not have brought them into credit with the church. God only knows the heart. It is actions that discover their faith, and the strength of their assent. It is but a necessary postulation, James ii. 14, 'Show me thy faith by thy works;' men have no other discovery. A bare profession or fruitless observation of the ceremonies and rites of religion would never have continued their memory in the scripture, nor made them famous. A hidden faith is of no account; it must be discovered in the life. The apostles speaks of the Romans: chap. i. 8, 'Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world;' compare it with chap. xvi. 19, 'Your obedience is come abroad unto all men.' The faith that brings in a good report must be showed by some visible public actions.

Use. Do not content yourselves with an idle naked faith. There is more necessary to endear you to the churches of God, than a barren profession; there are many qualifications necessary in order to a good report.

1. Mortification. Men naturally reverence strictness. It is said, 'Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and an holy man,' Mark vi. 20. This will beget a fear and an awe upon worldly men, the strictness and severity of your lives. Mortified christians are the world's wonders: 1 Peter iv. 4, 'Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.' They wonder how they are able to withstand desires so pleasing and so satisfactory. Wicked men will be always speaking evil of the children of God; yet they dread those whom they slander; when they see them

mortified and heavenly, their hearts are convinced when their tongues revile. There is a majesty and beauty in a mortified life; some strictures and beams of the divine power that darts reverence into man.

2. Self-denial, nothing being a greater reproach unto religion than self-seeking. The world will be apt to suspect religion, as if it were but a device to gratify interests; and where professors are altogether for worldly greatness, the suspicion is fed. There is no such way to stop the clamour, as by renouncing interests; then the world will be convinced, that you think a good conscience worth something. We must overlook concerns, as well as renounce lusts. Trace all the instances, and you will find, that by this the elders live in the records of the world. A coward and an epicure are the stains of mankind. Faith is tried by its fortitude and valour, as well as by its heavenly progeny. The memory of the martyrs lives now, because of their spiritual fortitude and valour. When men can for a good conscience sacrifice their interests, it discovers the glory of religion. This will put to silence the clamours of the world, and right religion when it is suspected.

3. Duties of charity. These are visible fruits, and very much endearing to men in the world. Jesus Christ would have religion honoured this way, therefore this was the great rule our Lord taught, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' Acts xx. 35. It is the great principle of our religion to be giving; nothing is more taking with the world than bounty. See what the apostle saith: Rom. v. 7, 'For scarcely for a righteous man will one die,' that is, for men of rigid innocence a man would hardly be brought to suffer; 'but for a good man,' that is, one that is bountiful and communicative, 'a man would even dare to die.' This doth exceedingly melt and win upon the hearts of the men of the world.

4. A holy strict life and conversation: 2 Cor. viii. 21, 'Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.' Men must not have wherewith to blemish our walking. The world would fain blemish religion and religious persons, therefore they pitch upon the least failing. We read of Naaman, 2 Kings v. 1, 'He was a great man with his master, and honourable, but he was a leper;' and that stains all his glory. This is usually the form of men's commendations, they are thus and thus; but they will pitch upon the least failing. Usually the world's commendation is like Joab's salute to Abner,—compliment, and smite him under the fifth rib; they commend with many words, but they stab with a but. As an archer draws back his hand, that the arrow may pierce the deeper; therefore we had need be strict. The world is quite contrary to God, who, in the midst of many failings, takes notice of a little good: 1 Peter iii. 6, 'Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, and called him lord.' The whole history is full of unbelief, nothing savoury but that word, and the Spirit of God takes notice of it. So James v. 11, 'You have heard of the patience of Job;' though a great many murmurings are recorded, yet the Holy Ghost pitcheth upon this, not the other. But the world passeth over the good, and pitcheth upon what is evil; as vultures flee over many gardens, but pitch upon a dead carcase. You may

observe how differently the world deals with astrologers and physicians; if astrologers fail often, and hit but once, the world cries them up for cunning men, but in a physician one gross miscarriage stains all his worthy cures. See the proneness of nature to unworthy arts; so they deal with the children of God, observe their failings and sore places, but overlook their worthy acts.

5. The duties of civil righteousness, these things are precious in men's eyes, and by these the world is preserved and kept up. The apostle speaks to subjects, that they should obey their governors, 'That they might put to silence the ignorance of foolish men,' 1 Peter ii. 15; these mastiffs will be opening their throats. Now we cannot muzzle them better but by duties of righteousness to men, which very much recommend our religion to God. These things draw men to the truth, and approve of the faith of the gospel. This is that which men praise most, and therefore hereby we shall remove all occasions of offence.

Obs. 4. One of the rewards of an active faith is a good report. Here I shall show—

1. The reasons of God's ordination.
2. In what manner the Lord bestows this blessing upon believers.
3. Whether in the exercise of faith we may have an eye to this recompense, and respect the blessing of a good report.

First, For the reasons of God's ordination and appointment. I shall touch upon those that are of a chief regard and consideration.

1. That every necessary blessing may be adopted and taken into the covenant, and provision made against all inconveniences that may befall us in the way of religion. As the psalmist saith of Zion, Ps. xlviii. 12, 13, 'Walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof: mark ye well her bulwarks; consider her palaces;' that is, see if any thing be wanting that is necessary for use or ornament; so walk through the land of promise, and survey the riches of the covenant, see if any necessary defence or privilege be wanting to believers. The world is apt to clamour, and wicked men are ready to cast reproach upon the servants of the Lord, therefore among other blessings God hath provided for their repute and honour. Look, as against outward wants, God hath raised up a bulwark of promises to assure us of outward sustentation, and a supply of necessary provisions; so against reproaches there are frequent promises of providing for our renown and esteem in the world: 'That he will bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday,' Ps. xxxvii. 6. A believer is secured against all the assaults of the world. There is balm in the covenant against the wounds that are made by the fist of wickedness, or the breach that is made by the tongue of reproach. This is the usual trial of God's people, when they are exempted from other sufferings: Ps. lxiv. 3, 4, 'The wicked whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bow, to shoot their arrows, even bitter words; that they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him and fear not.' Perfection meets with envy; men malign what they will not imitate. Religious eminency usually is blasted with slander; men scorn to see any above them. They that are at the bottom of the hill curse those that are atop. The world would have all equal; therefore when they cannot reach the eminency

of religious persons, they blast it till their repute be stained, and they are rendered criminal; they cannot make them like themselves, which is the revenge that wicked men take. Godly men's lives are a reproach to their conscience; so 'Noah by preparing an ark condemned the world,' Heb. xi. 7; and therefore by censure, and reproaches they stain their credit, that their own sin may be less odious, and avenge the wounds of their consciences by their reproaches of godly men. Now God has provided not only against their open assaults of violence, but against their privy detractions; as he hath secured our persons against their injuries, so our names against their reproaches. Every blessing is adopted and taken into the covenant.

2. Because of the great inconveniences of reproach and infamy, either to God and religion itself, or to good men. (1.) 'The great inconveniences which redound to God and religion itself. The credit of religion depends much upon the credit of the persons that profess it. When godly men are evil spoken of, the way of truth suffers: Ezek. xxxvi. 20, 'They have profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land,' that is, by their scandals. The offences charged upon the worshippers of God redound to God himself, and prove in effect the disgrace of Jesus Christ. They are called christians to the disgrace of Christ. When David fell, 'he gave the enemies of the Lord occasion to blaspheme,' 2 Sam. xii. 14. Men are apt to fly from the person to the profession. Hatred, saith the philosopher, is *πρὸς τὰ γέννη*, to the whole kind; therefore wicked men that hate religion do not seek to blast the repute of particular persons, but even of religion itself: as Haman thought scorn to lay hold upon Mordecai alone, therefore he sought to destroy all the nation of the Jews, Esther iii. 6. Now God will provide for his own honour in the honour of his servants. It was a credit for David to have so many famous worthies under him, therefore they are called David's worthies; believers are Christ's worthies, he will be honoured in their renown. It is an honour to Christ, when believers are unspotted. It was the brag of the King of Assyria: Isa. x. 8, 'Are not my princes altogether kings?' When Christ adopts a people to himself, it is, 'that they may be to him for a name,' Isa. lv. 13. What is the reason Christ forms such excellent vessels of mercy out of thorns and briars, out of crabbed and sour trees, but that they may be to him for a name? And at the day of judgment, the Lord will be 'glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe,' 2 Thes. i. 10, not only in his own personal glory, and the brightness of his presence, but in the social glory that results from the dignities and privileges of his people: then Christ will be admired in his saints, now he will be honoured in his saints. Believers had need to be careful of their lives, for the credit of Christ lies at stake. (2.) The inconvenience that redounds to good men. Observe all the passages of providence, and you will see, that infamy is but the forerunner of greater trouble; showers of slander are but the presages and beginnings of grievous storms; first it rains down in slander, then comes a storm of persecution. The devil is first a liar, and then a murderer; wicked men take the more liberty to vex the children of God, when they are represented as criminal. It was a fashion in the primitive times to invest christians with bear-

skins, and then to bait them as bears; and it is an usual practice of Satan to put the skin and livery of shame upon christians, and then bait them. He first blasts the repnte of religious persons, then persecutes them as offenders. This is the meaning of that expression, Ps. v. 9, 'Their throat is an open sepulchre;' that is, the slanders of the wicked are but preparatives to death, an alarm to persecution; as when the sepulchre is opened, it is prepared and ready to swallow the dead carcase. The same expression is used elsewhere of the force of the Babylonians: Jer. v. 16. 'Their quiver is an open sepulchre;' that is, you can expect nothing but death from the force and puissance of their assaults; so here, the throat of the wicked is not only a burying-place for your names, but your persons; first, men slander, and then molest the children of God. Certainly we had need look about us; you do not know the issue and result of the present reproaches, which we cast one upon another. Eusebius, lib. viii. chap. 1, showeth that the persecutions of the heathens took their rise from the mutual provocations, and reproaches of the christians. The devil is afraid to meddle with unstained innocency. When Valens the Arian emperor raged like a fierce beast against the orthodox, and the pastors of the churches were suppressed, he durst not meddle with Paulinus, out of a reverence to the unspottedness of his life and fame. And Ignatius in his epistle to the Tralians, speaketh of Polybius their bishop, that he was of such a clear reputation, that the atheists stood in fear of him. Wicked men cannot with any advantage to their designs meddle with such. A good report is a great security and protection against violence.

3. That God may retaliate with faith. Believers honour him, therefore he will honour them: 1 Sam. ii. 30, 'Those that honour me I will honour.' Never did any lose by a care to honour God. Now believers do not only honour God, by ascribing to him the glory of his excellency by internal acts of faith, but by their outward conversation: Mat. v. 16. 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven;' 1 Peter ii. 12, 'Having your conversation honest among the gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.' God's returns of blessings do often carry a proportion and suitableness to our acts of duty. None ever lose by honouring God; besides the recompenses of the world to come, he casts honour upon them in this life. The life of a believer is a real honouring of God; for nothing honoureth God so much as the active faith. Formal professors serve Christ just as the devil did; the devil carried him up into an high mountain, but it was to tempt him to throw himself down again; so they seem to set him upon the highest point of eminency in their professions and expressions, but they throw him down again, and deny him in their lives and conversations. Formal christians are like an ungracious son, he will be apt to quarrel for the honour and repnte of his father, yet his courses are far more grievous to his father than other men's reproaches; so those that seem to plead for the repnte of their religion are a more real dishonour to Christ than the blasphemers, or Turk, or pagans. The Lord is not pleased with empty prattle: Ps. l. 23, 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright

will I show the salvation of God.' No such glory as that which results to God from the christian conversation.

4. That this may be a bait to draw in others to a liking of his ways. The virgins are allured by the smell of his fragrant ointment, Cant. i. 3. When Christ's name, and the name of religion is fragrant, and yields sweet perfume in the nostrils of the world, this draws them in. It is a usual prejudice against the strictness of religion, men think it will be a debasing to them, and take off from their honours and esteem. *Coquantur esse mali, ne viles habeantur.* It is much against the hair and bent of nature to own the despised ways of God, that which brings nothing but infamy and reproach; therefore men stand off and are prejudiced. I confess this is their great sin. They should take up David's resolution: 2 Sam. vi. 22. 'I will be yet more vile.' But now God condescends to their infirmities, and casteth honour upon his servants to invite the world, because the temptation of honour is very taking with ingenuous spirits. Of all possessions, fame comes nearest to grace; some providences seem to be like Haman's proclamation before Mordecai, 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom God delighteth to honour:' or to speak in the language of the psalmist, Ps. cxlix. 9, 'This honour have all his saints.'

Secondly, In what manner doth the Lord dispense this privilege? And it is grounded upon an objection, that may be framed thus; the servants of God are often clouded with black reproaches, 'They took away the spouse's veil,' Cant. v. 7; that is, her honour and name. David complains, Ps. xxii. 6, 'He was a reproach of men, and despised of the people;' so the apostle, 1 Cor. iv. 13, 'We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things to this day.' God's jewels are often counted the world's filth. Therefore how doth God give in this recompense to the active faith? I answer, in several propositions.

1. The blessing is not absolutely complete in this life. As long as there is sin we are liable to shame. A good name is an outward pledge of eternal glory. When sin is abolished then may we expect perfect glory. In a mixed estate we must look for mixed dispensations. Here we pass through honour and dishonour, evil report and good report, 2 Cor. vi. 8. Thus it will be; there are changes and imperfections in our outward condition, as well as in the inward frame of our souls. Here God doth but begin to glorify, and begin to honour us, therefore it is not absolutely complete.

2. The wicked are not competent judges when they judge of the faithful: Luke vi. 26, 'Wo unto you when all men shall speak well of you.' General applause can seldom be had without compliance, and without some sin; therefore it is spoken as a cursed thing to gratify all, and seek to draw respect from all. There is one rare instance in the third Epistle of John, ver. 12, 'Demetrius hath a good report of all men, and of the truth itself;' that is, he is generally well-famed, but usually the world is froward, and will blast those that differ from them; John xv. 19, 'If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have called you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.' It is suspicious to be dandled upon the world's knees. These elders obtained a good report;

but when? in the scriptures, in the churches. It is a favour to be the object of wicked men's reproaches. That of an heathen was notable, *Quid mali feci?* what evil have I done? when he was entertained with general applauses. The respects of an enemy makes a man suspected.

3. We have the approbation of their consciences, though not the commendation of their lips; and their hearts approve when their mouths slander; and we have their reverence, though not their praise. Wicked men dread the heavenliness and strictness of the children of God, though they do not actually honour them; their malice and hatred is more against the party, than against their personal failings, which is sometimes acknowledged: *Caius Sejus vir bonus, nisi quod christianus.* They had nothing against Daniel but only in the matter of his God, Dan. vi. 5. And Trajan's testimony in Tertullian is full, 'That he could find no fault in them worthy of death or of bonds, only they were wont to hear sermons, to sing psalms to God and Christ. Otherwise for their conversation, they were very honest, conformable to the laws of their princes, and forbade murder, theft, adultery, and other sins, which were destructive to human societies.'—*Tertul. Apolog. adversus gentes.* Oh! if we did not let fall the majesty of our conversations, we should approve ourselves to the consciences of wicked men, and our only crime would be our profession.

4. There are some special seasons when God will vindicate his people from contempt. There is a resurrection of names as well as of persons. When they seem to be buried in the throat of the wicked, which is an open sepulchre in obloquy and reproach, God raiseth them up in honour. The Lord saith, 'that he will establish Zion, and make Jerusalem a praise upon the earth,' Isa. lxii. 7; so Zeph. iii. 18–20, 'I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee, and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land, where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn your captivity before your eye, saith the Lord.' The prejudices of the world vanish, and the renown of the people of God is cleared up. Strong prejudices have a strong antidote. 'Christ was declared to be the son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead,' Rom. i. 4. There are strong providences which roll away the reproaches of God's children, Zech. iii. 4, 'Take away the filthy garments from him.'

5. Those that do observe the usual course of God's providence shall find strange traverses in reference to the good report of the saints. God is ever ready to confute the reproaches of the wicked, and to clear up the innocency of his particular servants. It is good to observe providence herein, how God brandeth the wicked, and discovers the hypocrite, and vindicates and rolls away contempt from the godly. He brands the wicked; that of Solomon is a positive rule: Prov. x. 7, 'The name of the wicked shall rot.' God leaves them to rottenness and stench, and pours infamy upon them, that their names have an ill

savour to them that are of their own party. So observe how providence doth discover an hypocrite, God giveth them up to folly and sin, whereby they contract a blot and blemish to themselves: Prov. xxvi. 26, 'His wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation.' God will put off his vizard, and expose him to shame and contempt. There is seldom a hypocrite upon the stage of the world, but his disguise falls off one time or the other. Yea, sometimes the very secret sins of God's children are made manifest: 2 Sam. xii. 12, 'Thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.' God would shame David for his secret sin and wickedness. Observe again how providence at other times doth vindicate the godly, and cast shame upon those that do accuse them: 1 Peter iii. 16, 'Having a good conversation, that whereas they speak evil of you as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.' All the reproaches of the wicked are but like the dashing of the waves against the rock; the foam returns upon themselves; but God's people have the glory; or as they that spit against the wind, the drivel is cast upon their own faces. Patience and a good conversation will soon dispel all those mists and clouds. Hair will grow again though shaven, as long as the roots remain; so though the razor of censure bring on baldness and reproach upon the head of religion and ways of God, yet while the root doth remain, while there is a good conversation, it will spring up again. Trust God with your repute, and good names as well as your estate; the hearts and tongues of men are in his hands, and he can overrule them; nay, you have given some occasion because of your folly, yet be more circumspect, and so trust God.

Thirdly, Whether in the exercise of faith we may eye a good report? is not this vain-glory? I answer in four things.

1. Our chief care must be to do the duty, and trust God with the blessing; this is the temper of a christian. Men usually do quite otherwise; they would enjoy the blessing, and neglect the duty: 'yet honour me before the people,' said that sly hypocrite, 1 Sam. xv. 30. We are careless of service, and yet hunt for praise. *Laus humana non appeti debet, sed sequi*; outward praise must not be the aim of the action, but the event. And again, Aquinas; *Gloria bene contemnitur, nihil male agendo propter ipsam, et bene acquiritur, nihil malo agendo contra ipsam*. We must do well, that we may not miss of a good report; and we must not do ill, that we may obtain it. We must do things that are praiseworthy, though not to that end. Do what may be seen, though not to that end that it may be seen: Mat. v. 16, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' It doth not show what is the aim and chief end of a christian, but what will follow upon such an innocent, pure, and holy conversation: Luke xiv. 10, 'Sit at the lowest room, that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee,' &c. (*that is taken for then*); that is, when you are so modestly humble, then the master of the house will bid you sit higher. When the heart runs out upon praise more than duty, it is naught. Therefore take heed of such secret whispers of vanity, and suppositions of applause, hearkening after the echo, the running out of the spirit or soul by unworthy low aims.

and carnal reflections. We are commanded to do things that are 'of good report,' Phil. iv. 8. though not with that aim.

2. If we expect it as a blessing of the covenant, we must rather look for it from God than from men, expect it as the gift of his grace for our encouragement in the ways of religion. Usually we do quite otherwise, and therefore are more careful of credit than of conscience, and are not careful of pleasing God so much as compliance with men. A man that expects a good name differs as much from him that hunts after vain glory, as he that looks after an estate differs from him that would only please himself in the repute of it, or being accounted rich. You must prefer the testimony of a good conscience before the applause of men: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience;' found all your hopes in the inward witness of the Holy Ghost, and take more care to be good, than to seem to be good. The people of God may be described thus; they perform inward duties cheerfully, that they may approve their hearts to God; and outward duties watchfully, that they may not taint their actions with any unworthy aim. Others are altogether for pleasing of men, and careless of grieving the Spirit of God.

3. All the respect that we have to men, is by a greater care of duty, to prevent undue surmises and suspicion: 2. Cor. viii. 21, 'Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of God, but in the sight of men.' To clear up their hearts to God, and clear up their religion to men: 1 Peter iii. 16, 'Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil-doers; they may be ashamed, who falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.' Thus are you to cut off occasion from them that desire occasion to reproach you. This is but a necessary aim to undeceive the world.

4. The glory of God and the credit of religion must be at the utmost end of all: Mat. v. 16, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works'—he doth not stop there, 'and glorify your Father which is in heaven;' and 1 Pet. ii. 12, 'That whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.' Still the utmost end must be the glory of God and credit of religion. Usually men desire a name and repute in the world, on design to promote carnal and secular advantages, but our main end should be God's glory, and adorning the gospel. All a christian's actions and aims terminate in reasons and ends of religion, and they eye self only in subordination to those great ends.

Use 1. Prize this blessing; it is a sweet encouragement to you in the work of God. I observe that usually men first make shipwreck of a good name, then of a good conscience. He that is tender of his conscience will not be over lavish of his credit. The old testament, which speaketh sparingly of heaven, speaketh often of the advantage of a good name: Eccles. vii. 1, 'A good name is better than precious ointment.' Religion preserves the name from rottenness and putrefaction; this will embalm, perpetuate, and preserve your memories in the churches. Religion with a good name is like a comely body in a handsome garment; a jewel set in iron hath not the lustre as when set in gold. Grace hath its lustre, though clouded with reproaches, but a good

name will make you more cheerful; 'For a good report maketh the bones fat,' Prov. xv. 30. And it will make you more useful; a blemished instrument is of little use. The priests under the law were to have no outward blemish or deformity. It is a qualification of a bishop, 1 Tim. iii. 7, 'That he must have a good report of them that are without;' not only be known in the churches, but of unstained life in the world. Who would drink of a suspected fountain? or take meat out of a leprous hand? Men are prejudiced with the offering of the Lord when the priests are scandalous: 1 Sam. ii. 17, compared with ver. 25.

Use 2. Be careful how you prejudice the good name of a believer; you cross God's ordination. How ought you to tremble, when you go about to take off the crown which God hath put on their heads! Num. xii. 8, 'Wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?' What! against Moses! Did not your knees smite one against another for very fear? 'Thus shall it be done with the man whom the king delighteth to honour,' Esther vi. 9. A man should be afraid to dishonour those whom God will honour. You are the worst thieves, you rob them of the most precious jewel; no treasure like a good name: Prov. xxii. 1, 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.' This is the very devil's sin; it is his proper work to be the accuser of the brethren, Rev. xii. 10; to frame mischievous insinuations against the children of God. The devil doth not commit adultery, break the sabbath, dishonour parents, but he doth accuse the brethren. You are but acting the devil's part, while you are scandalising those that are eminent for grace: Ps. lxiv. 3, 'They whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows, to shoot their arrows, even bitter words.' It is meant of those that speak against religious eminency; and see their judgment, ver. 7, 8, 'But God shall shoot at them with an arrow, suddenly shall they be wounded; so they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves.' Better a mountain fall upon you, than when he shall come to visit this sin, the mischief of your evil tongue should fall upon you. Most odious it is in those that pretend to be christians, to do it to one another; as for one soldier to defame another, or for a scholar to despise learning. We should rejoice in the repute of others, that they have a worthy name, and not blemish it; as the apostle, Rom. i. 8, 'I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world,' that you are eminent believers; so Col. i 3, 4, 'We give thanks to God, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have unto all the saints.' That Christ hath worthies abroad, this should be our joy. We should preserve the repute of others, because it is a good means to keep our own. Rash censures meet with a retaliation: Mat. vii. 1, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' But you will say, If the man do but profess religion, must we not speak evil of him? no, unless it be done with grief; that one which belongs to Christ should dishonour himself and his profession. There may be malice where there is truth, if we are glad of their failing; 'Of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,' Phil. iii. 18; he speaks of licentious persons under a form of godliness, which drive on a secular design. Take heed what thou sayest of those who in outward profession are more zealous than

thou. John Baptist's head in a charger is an ordinary dish at our meals. When men's hearts are warm with wine and good cheer, then the children of God are brought in like Samson, to make sport for the Philistines. When they are full, then they call for a holy person, upon whom they may vent their malice, as the Babylonians called for an holy song: Ps. cxxxvii. 3, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'

Use 3. To press you to this active faith. There is great reason for it upon these grounds.

1. Because there are so many censures abroad. In times of division men take a liberty to blast opposite parties. Now shine forth in the lustre of an holy conversation, that envy may find nothing in you: Neh. v. 9, 'Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?' Should not we be of more strict and holy conversations, that we may silence censures and reproachers? Well-doing is the best confutation of slanders: 1 Peter ii. 12, 'Having your conversation honest among the gentiles; that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.' The apology is soon diffused, though not by your own mouth; wicked men become our compurgators. Words are apt to beget strife, and are more liable to suspicion: by a good life you approve yourselves to their consciences. Revengeful replies lose their majesty. When John's disciples came to Christ to know whether he were the Messiah or no, saith our Saviour, Mat. xi. 4, 'Go tell John the things you see and hear.' Christ doth not plead for himself, but shows his works. So this will be the best confutation, those real apologies are best; let the world see what is in us by the strictness and holiness of our lives and conversations.

2. Because there are so few good works abroad. Man is no further esteemed than he is useful. Many of the heathens were canonised for their usefulness. There is no such way to keep your memory savoury in the church as by public usefulness. For hereby a christian doth not only provide for present esteem, but for future. These elders in the text live in the world to this day. Every age should yield some honourable instances of the efficacy of faith: how few hath Christ in this age whose memory will be fresh and savoury in the church of God? God hath still his worthies. Transmit a good example to posterity; you may live and do good hereby after you are dead, 'Who being dead, yet speaketh,' Heb. xi. 4; as Elias lived again in John Baptist, 'who came in the spirit and power of Elias,' Luke i. 17. Look, as a wicked man lives after he is dead in his evil example, and his sin is perpetuated, as Jeroboam did in the lives of the wicked kings, who walked in his way; so do you live in some pious monument of your faithfulness to God. I have observed why most good works have been done by superstitious men, who had been men of infamous life, that they may retrieve the wickedness of their life by some acts of charity. But good men do few public works, partly because usually God's people are humbled with wants and poverty, and so have not such advantage in regard of worldly concerns. Or else they do it in a more secret way, and retail their charity out in secret by several parcels; as good housekeepers are not prodigal in feasting. Or else, that they may abhor the way of doing good only at their death, when they can keep their

wealth no longer. Worldly men are like the mice, which, they say, feed in the golden mines; they eat the ore, but do not deliver it up again till they die, and are cut asunder. It is said of wicked men, 'their bellies are filled with hid treasure,' and when they die they leave their substance to their children, Ps. xvii. 14; but the children of God do good in their lives.

SERMON VII.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.—HEB. xi. 3.

IN these words the apostle beginneth the history of faith, and therefore goeth so high as God's ancient work of creation. His drift is to prove that faith satisfieth itself in the word of God, though nothing be seen; and he proveth it in the first instance and exercise of faith that ever was in the world—the creation.

In the words you may observe—(1.) The doctrine of the creation laid down; (2.) The means whereby we come to the understanding of it.

1. The doctrine of the creation is delivered in all the necessary circumstances of it.

[1.] The matter framed—*τοὺς αἰῶνας*, the ages, that is, the world which hath endured so many ages; the essence and duration of a thing being so near akin, they are often taken for one another: Eph. ii. 2, 'Wherein in time past ye walked, *κατ' αἰῶνα*, according to the course of this world:' which is necessary to note against the Socinians, who to evade that testimony for the Godhead of Christ: Heb. i. 2, 'By whom also he made the worlds,' understand it of the ages, and the collection of the church in all times.

[2.] The manner—*κατηρτίσθαι*, he curiously jointed and made it, and digested it into an exquisite rank and frame.

[3.] The instrument—*ῥήματι Θεοῦ*—*By the word of God*. It may be taken either for his substantial word, or his word of power, by which all things were produced out of nothing; 'He spake, and it was done,' Ps. xxxiii. 9.

[4.] The term from whence God's action took its rise—*ἐκ μὴ φαινομένων*—*Of things which do not appear*. *ἐκ* doth not properly note the matter; and when we say, God made the world out of nothing, our meaning is not, that nothing is the matter whereof the world is made, as if God should bestow a new fashion and shape upon nothing; but only that it is the *terminus a quo*, not *materia ex qua*, as much as to say, God made the world when nothing was before; God had not any matter to work upon. There are some difficulties attending the Greek phrase, but I shall consider them hereafter.

2. The means whereby we come to understand this great mystery—*πίστει νοῦμεν*—*By faith we understand*. Reason will give us a