

knoweth there is such a creature as thou art, such a man or woman of the world, knoweth thy uprising and down-lying : Ps. cxxxix. 2, 'Thou understandest my thoughts afar off.' He knoweth whether we are laughing, mourning, or praying. He that will judge thee knoweth thee, or else he were an incompetent judge.

[5.] Humble thyself for walking so unanswerably. It would trouble us to have our thoughts, counsels, actions, all we think and speak, divulged and published. All is naked and open to God. If we did not think God's eye a fancy and fond conceit, we would at least walk more humbly. It would trouble us exceedingly if men had a window into our hearts in a time of prayer. Why not because God seeth? How watchful are we not to incur the penalty of man's law, but offences against God are lightly passed over. With what copiousness and flowings of language will men enlarge themselves in prayer when in company, and how slight and overly in closet duties, if not wholly neglective of them; which is in effect to say, Our heavenly father seeth not in secret.

### SERMON CLXXXIV.

*My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.*—  
VER. 171.

In the two former verses he had prayed—(1.) For an increase of saving knowledge, ver. 169. (2.) For deliverance out of his troubles, ver. 170. He reinforceth his request by a promise of thankfulness, if he could get a gracious answer to that, 'My lips shall utter praise,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. A resolution of praise, *my lips shall utter praise.*

2. The reason and occasion of it, *when thou hast taught me thy statutes.*

First, A resolution of praise.

The word for 'uttereth praise,' signifieth that praise should break from him as water boileth and bubbleth up out of a fountain. Indeed words cometh from the abundance of the heart, Mat. xii. 34; either from the plenty of spiritual knowledge, John iv. 38—as a fountain yieldeth water, so his knowledge breaketh out into praises—or from the plenty of spiritual affection; rather from the great esteem of the benefit, or fulness of joy at the thought of it. It is a great privilege to be delivered from blindness and ignorance: 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God,' Mat. xiii. 11. Now they that have a spiritual gust and taste are so affected with it that they cannot be enough thankful for it; and it is notable that this thankfulness is promised upon granting the first request.

*Doct.* Divine illumination is so great a gift, that all who are made partakers of it are especially obliged to praise and thanksgiving.

This will appear by these considerations:—

1. That upon the receipt of every mercy we should praise God. There is an equity in it, for this is God's pact and agreement with us:

Ps. I. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' We are forward in supplications, but backward in gratulations; all the lepers could beg health, but one returned to give glory to God, Luke xvii. 18. Self-love puts us upon prayers, but the love of God upon praises. Now we should be as much affected, or rather more, in the receiving mercies, as we were in asking mercies; because before we knew it only by guess and imagination, but then by actual feeling and experience of the comfort of it. Therefore to seek, and not to praise, is to be loving to ourselves.

2. Those that have received most from God are most bound to honour him and praise him, for the return must carry some proportion with the receipt: 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 'Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done unto him;' not according to the kind, only good, and not evil for good, but according to the degree. Great mercies require great acknowledgments: she loved much to whom much was forgiven, and she<sup>1</sup> loved little to whom little, Luke vii. 47. More sins pardoned, more mercies received, God expecteth more love, more praise, more thanksgiving. And Luke xii. 48, 'For unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom men commit much, of him will they ask the more.' Christ pleadeth the equity from the practice of men. The more helps, the more work and service we expect. He should come sooner who rideth on horseback than he that cometh on foot; so the more light and knowledge God vouchsafeth, the more honour and glory he expecteth from us.

3. That we should praise God especially for spiritual benefits. Usually those are overlooked, but they deserve the greatest acknowledgment; these are discriminating, and come from special love. Corn, wine, and oil are bestowed upon the world, but knowledge and grace upon his saints; these are the favour of his peculiar people: Ps. cvi. 4, 'Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest to thy people; O visit me with thy salvation.' To have the favourite's mercy is more than to have a common mercy. Protection is the benefit of every subject, but intimate and near admission is the privilege of special favourites. Love and hatred cannot be known by the things before us, Eccles. ix. 1-3. Christ gave his Spirit to the good disciples, the keeping of the purse to Judas.

[1.] Partly because these concern the better part, the inward man, 2 Cor. iv. 16. He doth us more favour that healeth a wound in the body than he that seweth up a rent in the garment. Is not the body more than raiment, the soul more than the body? and the soul as furnished with grace more than the soul only as furnished with natural gifts and endowments?

[2.] Partly because these are brought about with more ado than temporal favours. God, as a creator and merciful upholder of all his creatures, doth bestow temporal blessings upon the ungodly world, even upon heathens, who never heard of Christ; yet saving grace he bestoweth only as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Eph. i. 3, with respect to the merit of Christ, who was to purchase these blessings before he could obtain them.

[3.] Partly because they are pledges of eternal blessings, and the

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'he'?—ED.

beginning of our eternal well-being, John vi. 27. These and eternal blessedness are so linked together than they cannot be separated: Rom. viii. 29, 30, 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformable to the image of his Son: that he might be the first-fruits among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified;' and Phil. i. 6, 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.'

[4.] Partly because these incline and fit the heart for praise and thanksgiving; the one giveth occasion to praise God, the other a heart to praise God. Outward mercies give the occasion to praise God, these the disposition; other mercies the motives, these the preparations; these dispose the heart to it: Ps. cxix. 7, 'I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I have learned thy righteous judgments.' Here they dispose the lip and open the mouth: Ps. li. 15, 'O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.' The work of grace doth set our lips wide open in the magnifying and praising of God. Grace is the matter of God's praise, and also giveth a ready will to praise God, yea, the very deed of praising him.

[5.] Partly because temporal favours may be given in anger, but the graces of the Spirit are never given in anger. God may give an estate in judgment, and indulge large pastures to beasts fitted for destruction; but he giveth not an enlightened mind and a renewed heart in anger; it is a token of his special love: 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God,' Mat. xiii. 11. Well, then, for all these things should we praise God. We have a quick sense in bodily mercies, but in soul concernments we are not alike affected.

4. That among spiritual blessings divine illumination is a very great gift, and accordingly should be acknowledged by us. To make this evident, I shall—

[1.] Open the nature of this divine illumination.

[2.] Show you the worth of it, and how much it should be valued by us.

[1.] For the nature of it. There is a twofold wisdom and knowledge of divine mysteries:—

(1.) One which is only a gift: 1 Cor. viii. 1, 'We know that we all have knowledge: knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.' This is an excellent gift, but yet it floweth from the common influence of the Spirit, and puffeth up the party, because it is apprehended only by such an excellency as conduceth to the interests of the flesh, and to attain esteem in the world; and because he hath not thereby a deep and piercing knowledge of his misery, but is cold and weak, and doth not warm the heart with love to the thing known. Therefore we should see to it what kind of knowledge we have, whether it be a gift or a grace, whether we use it to exalt God or ourselves. The bare gift puffeth us up with a lofty conceit of ourselves and a disdain of others, but grace keepeth us humble; for the more we know that way, the more we see our defects, and what little reason we have to glory

in our knowledge, or any other grace; and besides, by it we are suitably affected to what we know.

(2.) There is a special knowledge of divine mysteries wrought in us by the special and sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost; this is 'the wisdom which cometh from above,' which 'is first pure, and then peaceable,' James iii. 17, which humbleth the man that hath it, for the more he knoweth of God, the more his own opinion and estimation of himself is lessened: Job xlii. 5, 6, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.' I have spoken unadvisedly of God. This knowledge also maketh him serious, and is operative upon the heart, and worketh love to the thing known: John iv. 10, 'If thou knewest the gift,' &c.; and maketh us to know God in Christ, so as to acknowledge him, and give him due honour, respect, and reverence. It is a knowledge joined with oblectation and affection. This knowledge is considerable as to its beginning and increase.

(1st.) Its beginning, the first removing of the natural blindness and darkness of our understandings, so that we have a clear discerning of the things of God when the scales fall from our eyes. Naturally we were ignorant of God and the way to heaven, but now, brought to the saving knowledge of God in Christ, we are acquainted with both. The first creature which God made was light; so in the new creation, the new creature is illuminated with a heavenly light, and cured of its former blindness, that we see things in another manner than ever we saw them before: 1 Peter ii. 9, 'Called out of darkness into his marvellous light;' as a man brought out of a dark dungeon into an open light. And Acts xxvi. 18, 'To open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.' So Eph. v. 8, 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now light in the Lord.' To be seeing is better than to be blind, to be in light than to be in darkness. This is God's first work, and it is marvellous in our eyes; it is double, when we first begin to have a clear knowledge of our own misery, Rev. iii. 18. Whereas before we lived in gross ignorance of our own condition; so when we begin to see the remedy, as well as our misery; 2 Cor. iv. 6, 'God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' The first thing that God convinceth us of is our own sin, guilt, and misery. So that those things that either we knew not, or did swim loose in the brain, we begin now to be affected with them. We talked before of sin as a thing of course, and were wont to marvel why men kept such a deal ado about sin; but now the case is altered. God hath opened his eyes, and therefore he complaineth of it as the greatest burden, and fain would be rid of it at any rate. He beginneth to seek after Christ as his only remedy, and nothing will satisfy him but Christ; and all things are but dung and dross in comparison of the excellency of Christ, and that he may be found in him. He lamenteth his case, and can trust himself nowhere but in Christ's hands. A natural man slippeth into a heedless credulity, and either doth not look upon the gospel as a real truth, or else is not affected with it so as to venture his salvation in that bottom.

(2d.) As to the increase and progress, and so those that are taught of God need to be taught of God again, and to seek a further increase of spiritual wisdom, or a further degree of the saving knowledge of divine mysteries; as the apostle prayeth for the Ephesians, towards whom he acknowledgeth God had abounded in all wisdom and prudence, yet prayeth that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that the eyes of their understandings might be opened, Eph. i. 17, 18, with the 8th verse. We are yet ignorant in many things, for we know but in part, not fully rooted in the knowledge of these things which we know. They need to be refreshed with new illumination from God, that our knowledge may be active and lively, and stand out against new and daily temptations, and that oblivion and forgetfulness, which is a kind of ignorance, and is apt ever and anon to creep upon us, may be prevented, and truths may be ready at hand for our use, James i. 5. And this is that which David beggeth an increase of knowledge for; he, being a holy man and a prophet, needed not the first illumination: and every degree is a great favour, to be acknowledged with praise.

[2.] Let me speak of the worth of this divine illumination in itself. The worth of it appeareth in four things:—

(1.) Its author. God, by his efficacious teaching, doth cure the blindness of our minds, and doth open and incline our hearts towards spiritual and heavenly things: John vi. 45, 'They shall all be taught of God;' 1 Thes. iv. 10, 'Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another;' 1 John ii. 27, 'The anointing teacheth you all things.' As the heathen Cato would have none to teach his son but himself, for he said that instruction was such a benefit, that he would not have his son beholden to any for it but himself. Oh! it is a blessed privilege to be taught of God, to be made wise to salvation, and not only to get an ear to hear, but a heart to understand, and learn by hearing, not only the power to believe, but the very act of faith itself. God's teaching is always effectual, not only directive, but persuasive, enlightening the mind to know, and inclining the will and affections to embrace what we know. He writeth the truth upon the heart, and puts it into the mind, Heb. viii. 10. He sufficiently propoundeth the object, and rectifieth the faculty, imprints the truth upon the very soul. But how doth God teach? In the very place where Christ speaketh of our being taught of God, he presently addeth, John vi. 46, 'Not that any man hath seen the Father.' God's teaching doth not import that any man must see God, and immediately converse with him, and talk with God, and so be taught by him. No; God teacheth externally by his word, and internally by the Spirit, but yet so powerfully and effectually that the lesson is learned and deeply imprinted upon our souls. This teaching is often expressed by seeing. Now, to a clear sight three things concur—an object conspicuous, a perspicuous medium, and a well-disposed organ or clear eye. In God's teaching there is all these. The object, to be seen plainly in the scriptures, are the things of God, not fancies, but realities, and by the light of the Spirit represented to us, and the eye of the mind opened. A blind man cannot see at midday, nor the most clear-sighted at midnight, when objects lie hidden under a veil of darkness.

The object must be revealed and brought nigh to us in a due light ; and God secretly openeth the eye of the soul, that we see heavenly things with life and affection. The author then showeth the mercy, when God will not only teach us by men, but by his Spirit.

(2.) The objects known, the highest and most important matters in the world, the gracious soul is savingly acquainted with. It is more to have the knowledge of the profoundest sciences than of some poor and low employment ; as Themistocles said, To know a little of true philosophy is more than to know how to play upon a fiddle. But now, to have the saving knowledge of God and of the life to come is more than to have the most admired wisdom of the flesh, than all the common learning in the world. And therefore how much are we bound to praise God if he will teach us his statutes ! More than if we knew how to govern kingdoms and commonwealths, and do the greatest business upon earth. Two things do commend the object of this knowledge :—

(1st.) It is conversant about the most high and excellent things.

(2d.) The most necessary and useful things.

(1st.) Things of so high a nature as to know God, who is the cause of all things ; and Jesus Christ, who is the restorer of all things ; and the Spirit, who cherisheth and preserveth all things ; especially to know his heavenly operations, and the nature and acting of his several graces : Jer. ix. 24, ‘ Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he knoweth me, saith the Lord.’ There is the excellency of a man to know God, to conceive aright of his nature, attributes, and works ; so as to love, trust, reverence, and serve him. Alas ! all other knowledge is a poor low thing to this. God hath written a book to us of himself, as Cæsar wrote his own Commentaries, and by histories and prophecies hath set forth himself to us to be the creature’s creator, preserver, deliverer, and glorifier. This is the knowledge we should seek after ; common crafts teach us how to get bread, but this book teacheth us how to get the kingdom of heaven, to get the bread of life, the meat that perisheth not. Law preserveth the estates and testaments of men, but this the testament of God, the charter of our eternal inheritance. Physic cureth the diseases of the body ; this, afflicted minds and distempered hearts. Natural philosophy raiseth up men to the contemplation of nature ; this, of the maker of all things and author of nature. History, the rise and ruin of kingdoms, states, and cities ; this, the creation and consummation of the world. Rhetoric, to stir the affection ; this, to enkindle divine love. Poetry moveth natural delight ; here psalms, that we may delight in God. These are the only true and sublime things. As light is pleasant to the eye, so is knowledge to the mind. But where have you the knowledge of such high things ? What are the mysteries of nature to the mysteries of godliness ! To know the almighty living God, and to behold his wisdom, goodness, and power, in all his works, surely this is a sweet and pleasant thing to a gracious soul ; but especially to know him in Christ, to know the mystery of the incarnation, person, natures, and mediation of Christ : 1 Tim. iii. 16, ‘ Great is the mystery of godliness.’ This is a mystery without controversy great, to know the law and covenant of God : Deut. iv. 6, ‘ This is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations who shall hear these statutes.’

And the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, by which we are wrought and prepared for everlasting life.

(2d.) So necessary and useful to know the way of salvation, the disease and remedy of our souls, our danger and the cure, our work and our wages, the business of life and our end, what is to be believed and practised, what we are to enjoy and do ; these are the things which concern us, all other knowledge is but curious and speculative, and hath more of pleasure than of profit. To know our own affairs, our greatest and most necessary affairs, these are the things we should busy ourselves about. *Ἐνός χρεια*, 'One thing is necessary,' Luke x. 42. Other things we may well spare. Now what is necessary but to know our misery that we may prevent it ; our remedy, that we may look after it in time ; our work and business, that we may perform it ; our end, that we intend it, and be encouraged by it ; what course we must take that we may be everlastingly happy ? Well, then, if God will show us what is good, Micah vi. 8, and teach us what is good, that we may know whither we are a-going, and which way we must go ; if he will give us counsel in our reins, to choose him for our portion, Ps. xvi. 5, we ought to bless his name. So the 11th verse, 'Thou wilt show me the path of life.' Though ignorant of other things, we are highly obliged for this discovery. It is the work of God to give us counsel, and should be matter of perpetual thanksgiving to us.

(3.) The use for which this knowledge serveth.

(1st.) To entertain communion with God for the present, for by knowing him, we come to enjoy him : Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness ;' that is more than to have a portion in this world. And 1 John i. 3, 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us ; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ.' By communion or fellowship is not meant a society of equals, but the dutiful yet cheerful attendance of an inferior on his superior, the creature on his creator ; but yet so as that there is a holy intimacy and familiarity in it, because we both love and are beloved of God. In every ordinance they draw nearer to God than others do ; for 1 John i. 7, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.' All our duties are the converse of a sanctified creature with a holy God, and a humble creature dealing with the blessed God for a supply of all their wants. They pour out their souls to him, and he openeth his ear and bosom unto them ; he teacheth them his way, and they walk in his paths, Isa. ii. 3. They walk in the fear of his name and the comforts of his Spirit, Acts ix. 31. They seek his glory as their great end, and live in the sense of his dearest love.

(2d.) To enjoy him for ever : 'This is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent,' John xvii. 3. Alas ! what is the knowing how to get riches and pleasures, and the vain glory of the world to this ? Surely you that are taught of God, your business is above other men's. While they drive on no greater trade than providing for the flesh, or feathering a nest that will quickly be pulled down, they are providing for everlasting glory and happiness. They aim at nothing beyond this life ; all

their cares are confined within the narrow bounds of time and the compass of this world ; but these look higher, and begin a life which shall be perfected in heaven ; they are laying up treasure in heaven.

(4.) The manner of knowing things, when taught of God. They see things with greater clearness, certainty, efficacy, and power.

(1st.) With greater clearness. Others know words, but they know things, and therefore know as they ought to know them. They know the grace of God in truth, Col. i. 6. They have the spiritual discerning, and that is a quite different thing from a literal discerning, 1 Cor. ii. 14. He hath an experimental and sweeter knowledge than learned men that are ungodly. He hath tasted that the Lord is gracious, the sweetness of his love, and the riches of his grace in Christ. The theory of divine knowledge, though never so exact, giveth us not this. They have more of the words and notions, but less of the thing itself, they have the sign, the other the thing signified ; they break the shell, and the other eats the kernel ; they dress the meat, but the others feed upon and digest it ; dig in the mines of knowledge as negroes, but others have the gold. A rotten post may support a living tree.

(2d.) With more certainty. There is a great deal of difference between taking up religion out of inspiration, and out of opinion or tradition. Faith is the gift of God, but credulity is received by the report of men. Men may guess at the truth by their own wit, they may talk of it by rote, and according to what they read and hear from others ; but divine knowledge is the fruit of the Spirit : Mat. xvi. 17, 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed these things unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven ;' John iv. 42, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, but we have heard him ourselves, and know indeed that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world ;' and 1 Thes. i. 5, 'For our gospel came to you, not in word only, but in power and the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.' We never apprehend the truth with any certainty, nor can we discern God's impress on the word, but in the light of the Spirit. God's illumination maketh our knowledge of things certain and infallible : 'Know ἀσφαλῶς, assuredly,' Acts ii. 36 ; John xvii. 8, ἀληθῶς. It is not a may be, a bare possibility, or likely to be, a probability ; but it is sure to be, and will be so, a certainty that belongeth to faith.

(3d.) For efficacy and power : 1 Thes. i. 5, 'For our gospel came to you not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost ;' 'Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,' Acts vi. 5. We are affected with the truths we know, yea, transformed and changed by them, 2 Cor. iii. 18 ; changed into a divine nature, 1 Peter i. 4. Our hearts are moulded and fitted for God, and for every good work ; so that this is a benefit should be much acknowledged.

Use 1. To inform us how the saints do and should esteem this benefit of divine illumination. In this psalm they esteem it more than if God should bestow a great deal of wealth upon them. See Ps. cxix. 14, 'I rejoice in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches ;' and ver. 72, 'More than thousands of gold and silver.' Once more, they think themselves well paid if they get it by sharp afflictions, though by loss of health or wealth : ver. 71, 'It is good



for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.' The reason is, because they value it as a mercy, for which they can never enough be thankful: Phil. iii. 8, 'Yea, doubtless, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.' The people of God have no reason to envy others that live in the pomp of the world and the splendour of outward accommodations, if he give them the saving knowledge of himself: Prov. iii. 31, 32, 'Envy not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is an abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous.' If God will teach us his statutes, though he keepeth us low, it is more to be one of God's disciples, to be owned by him in an ordinance, than to live a life of pomp and ease.

Secondly, None are fit to praise God but those whom God hath taught: Ps. l. 16, 'What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth?' The new song and the old heart do ill agree together; but when God hath framed our hearts to obedience, then is praise comely in our mouths.

*Use 2.* To direct us—

1. How to pray for spiritual grace if we would obtain it. The glory of God is the end of all grace vouchsafed to us; with this end, we must pray to God for it. The end of our petitions and requests to God should be, that we may be enabled to praise God; then we seek God for God, much more when we ask spiritual grace. To ask temporal benefits to consume upon our lusts is very bad, and the ready way to bespeak ourselves a denial: James iv. 3, 'Ye ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.' Much more to ask spiritual gifts for our lusts' sake; to beg God to open our mouths, to show forth our own praises rather than his; or knowledge to advance ourselves: as it is a greater indignity to void our excrements in a cup of gold for a prince's own drinking, than in a common utensil. Besides, it showeth our value of the benefit to think of praise before we have obtained it: Eph. i. 6, 'To the praise of his glorious grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.'

2. It must be used and improved to that end; when we have obtained, we must not be proud of any spiritual gift, but lay our crown at God's feet: 1 Cor. iv. 7, 'Who made thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received?' We pervert the end of the end when we are puffed up, and give shrewd suspicion that it is a common gift, not saving grace, when we are puffed up with it.

*Use 3.* Exhortation to press you to glorify God and praise him, if he hath given you any knowledge of himself and of the way of salvation.

1. This is God's end in bestowing his grace, that in word and deed we should be to the praise of his glorious grace: 1 Peter ii. 9, 'That ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.'

2. You were as indocile and unteachable as others, only God made the difference: Job ii. 12, 'For vain man would be wise, though man be born like the wild ass's colt;' Jer. xxxi. 18, 'Like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke;' and therefore the glory must entirely redound to him. You might have perished as a witless fool, and gone to hell as others do, but that God gave you counsel.

3. It is the way to increase it: Col. ii. 7, 'Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.' Thanksgiving for what we have received is an effectual means to make us constant, grow and abound in every grace: 'Let the people praise thee, O God, yea, let all the people praise thee,' Ps. lxxvii. 3. Look, as the vapours go up, so the showers come down. Experiences of former mercies thankfully acknowledged draweth down more mercy.

4. Prayer necessarily inferreth praise: Phil. iv. 6, 'In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.' Blessing God for favours already received is necessary to be joined with prayer; it is disingenuous to be always craving, and never give thanks. Be thankful and depend for more; not always pore upon wants, but take a survey of your mercies, and that will not only enlarge your hearts in thankfulness, but even invite God to bestow further mercies.

### SERMON CLXXXV.

*My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.*—VER. 172.

THE man of God had spoken in the former verse how his lips should praise God; here is his second promise that he maketh, of holy conference with others.

In the words we have:—

1. David's resolution, *my tongue shall speak of thy word.*

2. The reason; because it contained matter that deserved to be spoken of, *for all thy commandments are righteousness.*

[1.] He speaketh of the whole word of God, *all thy commandments.*

[2.] In the abstract, *are righteousness*; altogether righteous and faithful.

First, From the first branch, David's resolution, 'My tongue shall speak of thy word,' observe—

*Doct.* The subject of a believer's ordinary discourse should be the word, and those spiritual and heavenly matters contained therein.

1. Not that they are always talking of these things; there is a time for all things; the business of our calling will sometimes take us up, and sometimes our recreations; but yet there should be generally a difference between us and others. The people of God should be observantly different as to their words and discourse from other people: Cant. iv. 11, 'Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb.' The lips of Christ's spouse should flow with matter savoury and useful. So Prov. x. 20, 21, 'The tongue of the just is as choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is little worth; the lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for want of wisdom;' where the speech of the righteous is compared to silver; of the wicked, to dross; for because their heart is little worth, their discourse will be accordingly: and then the good man is compared to one that keepeth open house, that feedeth all those that resort to him; but fools do not only not

feed others, but perish themselves by their own folly. So Prov. xv. 7, 'The lips of the wise disperse knowledge, but the heart of the foolish doth not so.' Men usually discourse as their hearts are. A man of a frothy spirit will bring forth nothing but vain and frothy discourse, but a gracious man will utter holy and gracious things; for the tap runneth according to the liquor with which the vessel is filled. One place more: Ps. xxxvii. 30, 31, 'The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment; the law of God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide.' All men's discourses are vented according as their hearts are busied and affected. A man that hath the word of God rooted in his heart, and maketh it his work to suit his actions thereunto, will also suit his words thereunto, and will edify those that he speaketh unto. Thoughts, words, and actions are the genuine products and issue of the heart. Grace in the heart discovereth itself uniformly in all holy thoughts, holy words, and holy actions; otherwise their conversation is not all of a piece. All these places show that a Christian's discourse will differ from other men's; but, alas! our conference is little different from ordinary men's.

2. More particularly I shall show you that we are not left to run at random in our ordinary discourse, as if our tongues were our own, to speak what we please. This I shall show—(1.) Negatively; (2.) Positively.

First, Negatively; no profane, no idle discourse.

1. No profane discourse: Eph. iv. 29, 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.' Christians are accountable for their words as well as actions.

*Quest.* But what is corrupt communication?

*Ans.* (1.) Obscene scurrilous discourse. When the heart is filled with such corrupt stuff, the mouth will be apt to vent it. So Col. iii. 8, 'Put away filthy communication out of your mouth.' Sins of the tongue and outward man must be abstained from, as well as sins out of the heart. That *αἰσχρολογία*, that filthy speaking, rotten speech, is one of the great sins of the tongue. When we speak of those things which belong to uncleanness, this is quite unbecoming the purity and cleanness of Christians; the heart of man being as powder to the fire, easily taken with such temptations.

(2.) Calumnious and censorious discourses, when we cannot meet together but we must be speaking of others, suggesting evil against them, blemishing their graces, or carping at their weaknesses, or aggravating their sins, or divulging their secret miscarriages beyond what Christianity requireth. This sin the scripture brandeth as mischievous to ourselves and others. Ourselves: James i. 26, 'If any man seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is in vain.' Censuring is a pleasing sin, very suitable with corrupt nature, but yet it is a bad sign. It is made to be the hypocrites' sin, who, being acquainted with the guile of their own spirits, are apt to suspect others, and deprave their best actions, and upon the ruin of other men's credit build their own reputation for religion. And it is mischievous to others, and against that justice and charity which we owe to them: Prov. xx. 22, 'The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.' They wound men's reputation unperceivably, and secretly strike

them a blow that smarts not for the present, but destroyeth their service, at least to such as receive these privy defamations and whisperings; and it is more craftily carried when they wound while they pretend to kiss, and make their praise but a preface to their reproach, as an archer draweth back his hand that the arrow may fly with the more force. They say, He is this and that; but, &c.

(3.) Proud and arrogant speaking, when all our discourse is a self-boasting. The pride of the heart sometimes shooteth out by the eyes, and therefore we read of haughty eyes and a proud look; but usually it is displayed in our speech, in a proud ostentation of our own worth and excellency: 1 Sam. ii. 3, 'Talk no more so exceeding proudly: let not arrogancy come out of your mouth.' When *I* cometh in at every sentence, *περιαντολογία*, wanteth not its vanity: Prov. xxv. 27, 'For men to search their own glory is not glory.' All their discourses is to set off themselves, and to usher in something of themselves; and if religion be talked of, it is to commend their own knowledge, and their own notions, or their own endeavours for Christ, or to blemish others, that they may shine alone.

(4.) When anger sets us a-discoursing; therefore the apostle saith, Eph. iv. 31, 'Let bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all malice.' Where there is bitterness, or a secret smothered displeasure, or alienation of affection, it soon breaketh out into rage; which if an impetuous rage, or passionate commotion, that produceth anger, or a desire of revenge. Anger produceth clamour, or boisterous words, loud menaces, and brawlings, or inordinate speeches, which are the black smoke whereby anger and wrath within doth first manifest itself; then clamour produceth evil-speaking, which are disgraceful and contumelious speeches; therewith the party incensed doth stain the reputation of him with whom he is angry; and then malice is rooted anger and continued wrath. Now all these should be put away. Christians should have nothing to do with them. But that we have in hand is disgraceful and contumelious speaking, as it is the result of anger, wrath, and malice, either by open railing, or derision, and jeering at their sins and infirmities to shame them, or by imprecation and cursing, and wishing evil to them; all which is contrary to that meekness and love which should prevail in the hearts of Christians. As Saul in his anger called Jonathan, 1 Sam. xx. 3, 'Thou son of the perverse and rebellious woman;' in his raging fit he blemisheth his own wife, of whom we hear elsewhere no such imputation. Thou art more likely to be a bastard than my own son. Frantic words, all interpreters think them to be.

This is a taste of that profane discourse which is forbidden to Christians. Now the reasons of it are these:—

(1.) Because this allowed and habituated, argueth a rotten and unrenewed heart: Mat. xii. 34, 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' Words much discover the temper of the heart, there being a quick intercourse between the heart and the tongue.

(2.) Because it is noisome and offensive to honest ears; it is not a speech that hath any grace or comeliness in it: Col. iv. 6, 'Let your speech be always with grace.'

3. It is contagious and infectious to ordinary hearers; especially to

children and weak ones: 1 Cor. xv. 33, 'Evil words corrupt good manners.' We convey our taint.

(4.) Sinful, vain, and frothy discourse doth make the heart more vain, perverse, and wicked, while the corruption that is in it doth strengthen itself by getting vent. When the sparks fly abroad of the fire kindled in our bosoms, a man waxeth worse and worse; his reverence of God is lessened and weakened as he hath dared to give vent to his sin and folly, and is more emboldened to sin again: Mat. xv. 19, 20, 'For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile the man.' Evil-speaking is one thing mentioned, and it layeth men open to Satan. Therefore, as the heart should be kept from framing such conceptions, so the tongue from uttering them; for so they prove more dishonourable to God, hurtful to ourselves, and offensive to others.

(5.) I will venture at one reason more against profane discourse; it grieveth the Spirit, Eph. v. 29, 30. Many by their obscene, putrid, and carnal discourse intend no further than to make themselves merry, jovial, and glad: Hosea vii. 3, 'They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies,' saith the prophet; yet, alas! it is but a poor sport, and will prove so in the end, for it draweth God to be against them; the Holy Ghost is displeased and grieved with it, these things being against his light, motions, and directions, and so an offence to him, which a tender conscience is soon sensible of.

2. Not idle discourse, which tendeth not to the glory of God and the edification of our neighbour. We should have an eye to the good of those with whom we speak, so as to edify them with our speech; for Christ telleth us that we must give an account to God, not only for words, but even for idle words: Mat. xii. 36, 'I say unto you, that for every idle word that men speak, they shall give an account thereof in the judgment.' Men esteem little of their words, yet when they are put into God's balance they may weigh heavy; not only wicked words, but even idle words, such as serve for no good purpose, or for no lawful end; and in your account they will come in as so many sins, and sit heavy upon you; if you have not received pardon before, it is a strict sentence. But what is this idle discourse? Such as wanteth the solidity and substance of truth; such as tend to no use and benefit. *De jure* God may condemn you for these, though *de facto* upon repentance he pardoneth greater sins. Or possibly such are idle words as come from a vain idle frame of heart; for he had spoken before in the 35th verse that a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man evil things. Now such idle words are a note of the wickedness of the man, of the evil treasure that is in his heart; for these he is responsible at the day of judgment, as for a vain conversation and the unfruitful works of darkness. However, we must not open a gap to licentiousness; as when the apostle forbiddeth profane discourse, he enjoineth profitable discourse as the only remedy: Eph. iv. 29, 'Let no corrupt communication come out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.' As much as may be, holy conference should be mixed with all our discourses and converses, other-

wise they are accountable to God. And it is very notable the apostle forbiddeth *μωρολογία ἢ εὐτραπεία*, foolish jesting: Eph. v. 4, 'Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which is not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.' As he condemneth filthiness, or words contrary to Christian gravity, decency, or modesty, so he condemneth foolish talking, which is impertinent, superfluous, and vain discourse. And then jesting; not all honest mirth or use of wit, but an intemperate use; when men give up themselves to a frothy vanity, that they cannot be serious; or to tart reflections upon the personal imperfections of others; or to impious jests, by wresting the scripture, to express the conceptions of a vain and wanton wit. In the general, there must be a great guard on all jesting, lest it degenerate; and that we entertain one another with thanksgiving, and discourses of the love of God, and his manifold mercies to us; for it is not an easy matter to keep within bounds of cheerful and allowed mirth. Hearts that are kept sensible of God's goodness are desirous to express it to others whenever occasion offereth, and vain and idle communication is nothing so pleasing to them.

Secondly, Positively; we are to edify one another, as David professeth here that his tongue should speak of God's word; his conferences and discourses should be filled up of no other matter.

1. Because our tongue is our glory: Ps. x. 9, 'My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth.' Compare Acts ii. 26, 'My heart rejoiceth, and my tongue was glad.' Now, why is our tongue our glory? Not only as it was given us for the use of tasting meat and drink (so the tongues of the brute beasts serve them), but because thereby we must express the conceptions of our minds. So speech is the excellency of man above the beasts; but Christianity giveth us a higher reason, because thereby we may express the conceptions of our minds to the glory of God, and the good of others: James iii. 9, 'Therewith we bless God, even the Father.' That is our glory, that we cannot only think of God, but speak of God, his word and works.

2. Because conference and edifying discourse is one means of spiritual growth and spiritual improvement to ourselves and others. (1.) To ourselves: Prov. xvi. 21, 'The wise in heart shall be called prudent, and the sweetness of his lips increaseth learning.' The more he venteth what he knoweth, the wiser himself groweth, and learneth by teaching others; for the more he draweth forth his knowledge, the more it is impressed upon his own heart. It is a truth, he that watereth shall be watered, and our gifts, as the loaves, are increased in the breaking, or as the widow's giving oil to the prophet was enriched by it; not only as we occasion others to draw forth their knowledge, but as our own is confirmed and strengthened by using it, as to him that hath shall be given, Mat. xxv. 29. As venting of sin and folly increaseth sin and folly, so doth venting spiritual knowledge still increase it. (2.) Others: it is a great benefit to them when we communicate our experiences to them: Luke xxii. 32, 'When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.' When he was converted by repentance, he should be more careful to convert and strengthen others, that they fall not in like manner, or help them to recover out of the mire of sin. And the apostle saith, 2 Cor. i. 4, 'That God

comforteth us, that we may be able to comfort others in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God.' The Lord comforts one that another may be comforted; as in the celestial bodies, whatever light and influence the moon and stars receive, they bestow it on these inferior bodies: they have their light from the sun, and they reflect it again on the creatures below. Or as the official part in the body; as the heart and liver receive, and convey, and derive the blood and spirits to all the other parts, so a Christian, when he is strengthened in himself, ought to convey his comfort and strength to others. It is mighty edifying, when we have found the usefulness of the word, to speak of it to God's praise; if we have gotten direction in doubtful cases, or benefit by it in the mastery of our lusts, and the promises have afforded any support and deliverance in our distresses, we are debtors of the comfort and experiences we have, and are stewards to dispense it to others. Many take a glory that they have cordials, strong waters, and medicines in their closets and repositories, that may be a relief to the bodies of others; so should we delight to refresh their souls with what has done us good. The humiliation and brokenness of heart which thou hast found may be powerful to persuade others of the bitterness of sin. David, when he had smarted for sin, saith, Ps. li. 13, 'I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.' He had found how bitter a thing it was to provoke God by sin, and he could tell them such stories of it as would make their hearts to wake, and cause them to hate it. The faith and knowledge which God hath given thee may direct and preserve others; thy temptations may conduce to the succouring of others who are tempted.

3. It is a mighty comfortable duty, that hath much sweetness in it, to confer together of holy things: Rom. i. 12, 'That I may be comforted by the mutual faith of you and me.' Holy discourse doth refresh more than vain and foolish jesting; it is a far sweeter thing to talk of the word of God, and those spiritual and heavenly things which are contained therein, than to spend the time in vain and foolish jesting, or discoursing about mere worldly matters. Should anything be more delightful to a Christian than Christ and heaven, and the promises of the world to come, and the way that leadeth thither? and should it be burdensome to talk of these things, which we profess to be our only hope and joy? Certainly our relish and appetite is mightily depraved if we think so, judge ourselves in a prison when we are in good company who remember God; and when they invite you to remember him with them, will you frown upon the motion, because it is some check and interruption to your carnal vanity?

4. The well ordering of our words is a great point of Christianity, and argueth a good degree of grace: 'He that bridleth his tongue is a perfect man,' James iii. 2. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, saith Solomon, Prov. xviii. 21; upon the good or ill use of it a man's safety doth depend. Not only temporal safety, but eternal: Mat. xii. 37, 'By thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned.' These evidences are brought into judgment; therefore it concerneth us to see what our discourses are, as

well as our actions. Solomon often describeth the righteous by his good tongue: Prov. x. 13, 'The mouth of the righteous bringeth forth wisdom;' and Prov. xii. 18, 'The tongue of the wise is health.'

*Use 1. Reproof.* It reproveth us for being so dumb and tongued in holy things. We can speak liberally of any subject, only we are dumb in spiritual matters which concern our edification. We show so little grace in our conferences, because we have so little grace in our hearts. Alas! many that profess religion, their talk is little different from other men's, as if they were ashamed to speak of God, or had nothing to say of him and for him. I do not always bind you to talk of religious things, but sometimes it bindeth. Now, when is it your tongues speak of the word in a serious and affectionate manner? Can you love God and never put in a word for him? Can you see or hear God dishonoured, and suffer your mouths to be sealed up with a sinful silence, that you should not have a word to speak in the cause of God?

*Use 2.* To exhort us to be frequent and serious in our discourses of God, and spiritual heavenly things.

For means to help us.

1. Divine illumination; to teach others the way of God requireth that we ourselves should be taught of God; then it cometh the warmer and fresher when we speak not by hearsay only, but experience; as heart answereth to heart, so the renewed heart in him that heareth to the renewed heart in him that speaketh, and we show others what God by his illuminating grace hath first showed us; it savoureth of that Spirit that worketh in both. He will easily kindle others who is once on fire himself. The word passeth through others as water through an empty trunk, without feeling; they may speak very good things, but they do but personate and act a part. But when we have been in the deep waters, and God hath bound up our wounds, we can more feelingly speak to others.

2. A sight of the excellency of the word, and a value and esteem thereof. The reason in the text, 'For all thy commandments are righteousness.' We are apt to speak oftenest of those things which we most affect. Did not your souls grow out of relish with these holy, spiritual, and excellent things, your speeches about them would be more frequent, lively, serious, and savoury; for we cannot conceal our affections. Our coldness in speaking to others of these spiritual and heavenly things cometh from want of this persuasion, that 'all his commandments are righteousness;' for they who are persuaded of the excellency of the word will be talking of the sweetness of its promises continually.

3. A stock of spiritual knowledge: Mat. xii. 35, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things.' Every man entertaineth his guests with such provisions as he hath. It is the word which enableth us to edify ourselves and others with holy conference. The more store, the more we have to bring forth upon all occasions: Col. iii. 16, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.' A plentiful measure of gospel knowledge enableth us to direct and



instruct others; there all wisdom is made plain, things revealed which cannot be found elsewhere; that which may by long search be found elsewhere is made ready to our hands, and brought down to the meanest capacity. The heart is the fountain from whence the tongue doth run and flow; and when the heart is well furnished, the tongue will be employed and exercised.

4. Zeal for the glory of God, and love to others' souls. We should communicate to others what we have learned ourselves. David would not reserve his knowledge to himself: 'Teach me, and my tongue shall speak of thy word.' Fire turneth all about it into fire: mules and all creatures of a bastard race do not procreate. David's *Maschil*, Ps. xxxii. title, is to instruct others. True good is diffusive in itself; our candle enlightened, should enlighten others. When Philip was called, he inviteth Nathanael to come to Christ, John i. 45; Andrew calleth Simon. True grace showeth itself in zeal to promote the kingdom of Christ and the good of our neighbours' souls; and the new nature seeketh to multiply the kind, and such as are brought to Christ will be careful to invite others.

5. Wisdom is necessary: Col. iv. 6, 'Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how to answer every man;' that is, seasoned with the salt of holy and divine wisdom, that it may be savoury and acceptable to the hearers; and both delight and edify. Without this holy skill and wisdom, how often is conference turned into jangling or mere babbling!

6. Watchfulness and heed, otherwise corruption will break out in pride, in a vain ostentation of parts, passion in some heat of words, worldliness and sensuality in diverting from holy conference to that which is carnal and worldly, discontent in some, unseemly expressions of God's dealings with us, indiscretion and folly in a multitude of impertinent talk: Ps. cxli. 3, 'Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.' The tongue must be watched as well as the heart. All watching will be to little purpose unless God bridle and direct our tongue, that nothing break out to his dishonour. There must be a constant guard that nothing break from us that is unseemly.

Secondly, We come to the reason, 'For all thy commandments are righteousnessness.'

*Doct.* There is righteousness, nothing but righteousness, all righteousness to be found in the word of God.

1. There is a perfect uprightness in all God's promises. They are sure principles of trust and dependence upon God: Ps. xviii. 30, 'The word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.' He is most just and faithful, and his promises without all deceit or possibility of failing, and will certainly protect all those that rely and depend upon him.

2. As to his precepts, nothing is approved in them, or recommended to us, but what is holy, just, and good. There is no virtue which it commendeth not, no duty which it commandeth not, no vice which is not condemned therein, nor sin which is not forbidden.

I shall prove the doctrine by three things:—

1. By the sufficient provision that is made for man's duty. In a moral

consideration there are but three beings—God, neighbours, and self. Paul's three adverbs are suited to these, Titus ii. 12, 'soberly, righteously, godly.'

[1.] For self-government, or living soberly in the present world, nothing conduceth to that more than God's precepts. The whole drift of his word is to check self-pleasing and sense-pleasing, and to condemn all excess of meat, drink, or apparel, lest our hearts be besotted and overcharged, and, by indulging sensuality, diverted from spiritual and heavenly things.

[2.] For carriage to our neighbour. What religion provideth so amply as the word of God doth against all fraud and violence, requireth us in all things to do as we would be done by? Yea, it not only enforceth justice, but charity, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to account his welfare our own, and rejoice in his good, and mourn for his evil, as for our own.

[3.] For the third, godliness. God is nowhere represented and discovered so much as in his word; nor a way of commerce between him and us anywhere else so clearly established; nor what kind of worship we should give unto him, both for matter and manner. In short, the scripture is written to teach us how to love him, and entertain communion with him, and to serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days; and maketh our daily converse with God in holiness our great work and business.

2. It appeareth by the connaturality and suitableness which they have to the best and holiest: Ps. cxix. 140, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' It is written in our hearts as well as in God's book; and there is something in the one akin to the other: Heb. viii. 10, 'I will write my law in their hearts and minds.' On the contrary, so far as a man is depraved, so far he hateth it, Rom. viii. 7; yea, the more he feareth it: John iii. 20, 21, 'He that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be revealed.'

3. The event showeth it; for the more the word of God is preached, the more is righteousness spread in the world, and men grow wiser and better. Banish the word of God, or discourage the preachers of it, and there followeth nothing but confusion of manners and corruption in religion. The word, then, is the only means of reforming the world, and curing the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Where either the word hath not been received, as among the pagans, or where it hath been restrained, as in Popery, scriptures locked up in an unknown tongue, or where neglected or sleepily urged, as in churches that have left their first love, there is a greater overflow of wickedness; their ignorance hath caused a great part of them to degenerate into a more sensual, sottish sort of people.

*Quest.* But are not people very bad that have the scriptures? Do not we ourselves complain of a flood of wickedness?

*Ans.* 1. Christianity must not be judged by the rabble of nominal, literal Christians, no more than we will judge of the cleanness of a street by the foulness of a sink or kennel, or of the sound grapes in a bunch by the rotten ones, or of the fidelity of subjects by the rebellion of traitors, or the honesty and justice of a nation by a crew of

thieves and robbers, nor of the civility of a nation by the rusticity of ploughmen or carters. Those who are serious in their religion are the best men, and of the choicest and most excellent spirits in the world; the scandals and wickedness of others do not impeach their rule.

2. The strictly religious must not be judged by the revellings of the carnal, who are their enemies; ignorant and ungodly men will blast them: 1 Peter iv. 4, 5, 'Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you; who shall account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.'

3. Neither is the state of religion to be judged by the complaints of friends, hating the least evil, ashamed of men's unthankfulness. Light maketh it odious; as bad as we are, it is worse where the word is not preached in a lively manner.

*Use 1.* Let us approve of those things which God hath bound us to believe and practise; they being all suitable to the nature of God and man. The first ground of obedience is consent and approbation: 'I consent to the law that it is good,' Rom. vii. 16. So to the gospel: 'It is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptation,' 1 Tim. i. 15.

2. Let us answer this word, let the fruit of the Spirit be in us all, righteousness, goodness, and truth. The stamp is answerable to the seal; this is the genuine result of the doctrine we profess.

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### SERMON CLXXXVI.

*Let thine hand help me: for I have chosen thy precepts.*—VER. 173.

THE two first verses show the drift of this portion. He begs two benefits—instruction and deliverance. His first request, for instruction, is enforced by a promise of praise, ver. 171, 'My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.' In ver. 172, of conference or holy discourse, whereby others may be edified, 'My mouth shall speak of thy word.' Now he comes to enforce the second request for deliverance by an argument of his ready obedience, 'Let thine hand help me: for I have chosen thy precepts.'

Observe here—

1. The petition, *let thine hand help me.*

2. The argument or reason to enforce it, *for I have chosen thy precepts.*

First, For the petition, 'Let thine hand help me.' Hand is put for power: Let thy power preserve me and defend me; and help is sometimes put for assistance and sometimes for deliverance. God may be said to help us when he doth assist us and support us in troubles, or when he doth deliver us from troubles. This latter acceptation suits with this place, and it is equivalent with what he said before, ver. 170, 'Let my supplication come before thee; deliver me;' so, 'Let thine hand help me,' 'deliver me according to thy word.' A good man may be brought into great straits when his own hand cannot help and stead him, but then he may fly to God, and say, 'Lord, let thine hand help me.' His argument and motive which he urgeth is, that 'I

have chosen thy precepts;’ and from thence he infers his hope of deliverance.

The points will be two :—

*Doct. 1.* That this is the character and description of a good man, that he is good, and doth good out of choice. So David pleads it here, ‘I have chosen thy precepts.’

*Doct. 2.* That a man which makes conscience of God’s commands is encouraged to seek help from him in all his straits; for he prays, ‘I have chosen thy precepts,’ therefore, ‘Lord, let thine hand help me.’

*Doct. 1.* It is the plain character of a good man to be good and do good out of choice.

It was not out of rashness and ignorance and inconsiderate zeal that David with so much hazard betook himself to God’s service, and was so exactly faithful with God; but upon due choice, trial, and examination: ‘I have chosen thy precepts.’

The point may easily be proved out of scripture, Isa. lvi. 4. God’s people are described to be those that choose the things that please him, and take hold of his covenant. Taking hold of his covenant relates there to the privilege part of the covenant. As they seek their happiness in the privileges of God’s covenant, so as to the duty part, they choose the things which please him. After serious and mature deliberation, and judgment rightly informed, and affection thereon grounded, they embrace the ways of God by a free election and choice. And so you shall see it is the charge against wicked men, this is the disproof of their confidence, Prov. i. 29, that they did not choose the fear of the Lord. Mark the expression, that is, prefer it before the baits of sin. So Deut. xxx. 19, ‘I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that thou and thy seed may live.’ We shall never have life unless we have it by choice. He sets both before them; choose life, not as if it were indifferent in point of duty for to do the one or the other, but to set an edge upon their affections; I have set both before you. God will have his service entered upon by choice: Josh. xxiv. 15, ‘Now if it seem evil for you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods whom your fathers served, on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell; but as for me,’ &c. He leaves it not arbitrarily to the Israelites whether they should serve God or no, but this he saith that they might freely and without compulsion declare what they were minded to do, and that they might be the more firmly tied to serve the Lord, because they had voluntarily taken upon themselves to do it. ‘Now choose you whom you will serve;’ that is, compare that which is best with that which is worst, life and death, light and darkness, heaven and hell together; and resolve accordingly; because no man in his right wits would make any doubt after such a representation which to choose. Joshua’s speech is just such another speech as that of Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 21, ‘If God be God, serve him; if Baal be God, follow him.’ Not as if he made it any doubt, or would have them make it any doubt, or as if it were uncertain, but that they might choose more freely, and delight and persevere in their choice. These places show we never rightly enter into God’s service until we enter upon it by choice.

Here I shall inquire—

1. What it is to choose God's precepts.

2. Give some reasons why they must be chosen, else they can never be rightly kept, or why this is so necessary.

First, What is choosing God's precepts? It implies five things—(1.) Deliberation; (2.) Esteem or preference; (3.) A voluntary inclination; (4.) A firm and steadfast resolution, by which we are bound all our days; (5.) A complacency and contentment in what we have chosen.

1. Deliberation, or a due consideration of what is chosen, its nature, worth, and excellency; for until we compare and weigh things, how can we make a choice, but take them hand-over-head; and therefore there is a weighing the reasons on both sides. God's children are not ignorant what it is to flow in worldly wealth, pleasures, and earthly comforts, and to enjoy the favour of the world, and to sail here with a full stream; and on the other side, they are not ignorant what it will cost them to be through with Christ, to be religious indeed. They do not run hand-over-head to resolve upon such a course. No; they sit down, they count the charges, Luke xiv. 27. The business sticks with many in this first work; we cannot bring them to any serious consideration; they will not weigh things, but act as their brutish lusts incline them. It is said, Isa. xlvi. 8, 'Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it to mind, O ye transgressors.' It is a disgrace to our reason, when we will not consider well of things, and bring them not back to our hearts, as the word signifies; but we run on as chance offereth objects or occasions. Consider what this and that will tend to, weigh things in your souls. Even good itself, if we stumble upon it, it is but a lucky hit or a happy mistake; therefore the apostle adviseth us to resolve upon trial: 1 Thes. v. 21, 'Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.' Men will not hold fast that which is good unless they first prove and try. Indeed those things which usually oppose themselves against the spiritual life are such poor paltry inconsiderable vanities, that they are not worthy to be brought into competition, or into any serious debate with them; for it is no hard question to resolve whether God or the flesh shall be pleased? whether the transitory pleasures of sin should be preferred before eternal glory or the happiness of the saints? But yet serious consideration will discover this to us, and shame us out of our perverse and preposterous choice; whereas otherwise we should go on like men asleep, or like men out of their wits, choose poor base things, delight in inconsiderable trifles, before the things whereof we are so deeply concerned; therefore it requires deliberation in weighing.

2. Choice notes esteem or preference; for election and choice is a preferring of one thing before another. Though God and Christ be good, and grace and heaven be good, yet there are other things that come in competition with them, and when we set ourselves to seek after God and Christ, these competitors are suing for our hearts, and rival Christ in the soul. And therefore this choice implies a renunciation of all other things, a trampling upon them, and a high esteem and value of Christ and his ways. The scripture speaks of selling all for the pearl of great price, Mat. xiii. 45, 46, of accounting things but dung

and dross in comparison of Christ, Phil. iii. 8, 9. In choosing the ways of God many things will be offered to us that may hale us this way and that way, many pleasures and contentments of this life. Now we must trample upon them all, and renounce them as they are temptations, that we may actually exalt, prefer, and esteem Christ and his grace. There are two things which assault our resolution for God—the terrors of sense, and the allurements of the flesh or the vanities of the world. Now a soul resolved to serve God, must actually and positively prefer obedience before both of these, before temptations on the right hand and on the left.

[1.] For the terrors of sense, we must be resolved rather to suffer than to sin. In choosing the ways of God, the heart must come to a firm resolution rather to suffer the greatest inconvenience than to commit the least sin. This was Moses' choice, Heb. xi. 25. When once it came to a case of sin, then he renounceth pleasures, treasures, honours. Whatever it costs us, we must resolve to be faithful with God, and to run the greatest hazard rather than to do the least thing that is contrary to his will.

[2.] We must prefer obedience before all the allurements of the flesh and vanities of the world. David chose God's precepts, that is, valued them more than all other things. See ver. 14 of this psalm, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches.' He explains the choice here mentioned. If we have grace to serve God, and to keep the way of his testimonies, we count ourselves more happy than if we had all the world. It is not enough to approve God's ways simply, but we must approve them comparatively; not only as good in themselves, but as better than all other things; and it should be more to us to be taught our duty, and to know how to serve God, than if we did enjoy the fulness of all earthly comforts.

3. Choosing the ways of God implies a voluntary inclination, that we should of our own accord follow them; for choice is free, and it is opposed to force and constraint, and a man is said to choose those things which he likes, which he loves, which his soul inclines to, when he is carried to them not by the compulsion of an external principle, but by his own propension and inclination. Look, as the wicked they are described to be those 'who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness,' Prov. ii. 13, that is, have an inclination to one rather than another; for what is expressed that the wicked leave the paths of uprightness, it is explained, John iii. 9, by 'loving darkness rather than the light.' And so it is said of Mary, she hath chosen that good part; of her own voluntary accord and free inclination she was moved to sit at Christ's feet, to attend upon the improvement of her soul. The business of salvation is offered to our choice, it is left to our own free inclination, though God gives the inclination beforehand (as by and by). If you choose death, you willingly and freely forsake your own mercies.

4. Choice implies a firm and immutable purpose, a resolved adhesion to those things we choose. The mind is not anxious and doubtful, and hanging between two contraries, when we choose, but fixed and determined: 'I have chosen thy precepts;' that is, firmly resolved to observe them. We never choose till we come to a full purpose, Acts xi.

33. He exhorteth them with full purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord. A wavering inclination infers no choice. There may be good thoughts and meanings in the soul, but till we are resolved for God we do not choose his precepts. Many are convinced of a better way, but their hearts are not engaged to walk in it. We are fixedly determined by our choice: Jer. xxx. 21, 'Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.' He hath sincerely obliged and bound himself to live in a close way of communion with God. The soul begins to pause and consider the vanity of earthly things; there is the first. Yea, and after this, they are brought on that they say, Certainly it is much better to be a servant of the Lord than to be a servant of sin; and they see that the greatest inconvenience is a more tolerable thing than sin, and all the pleasures and profits of the world will not countervail our duty to God. There is an inclination to the way of God. Ay! but this inclination, while it is wavering, it may be taken off, till it come to a resolution. Here I will stick; I will seek my happiness and comfort in seeking God: 'It is good for me to draw nigh unto God,' Ps. lxxiii. 28; and therefore I am resolved to seek my happiness and contentment, whatever I do.

5. Choice implies a contentment and complacency in that which we have chosen; and the act of the will is quickened by a suitable affection that accompanieth it. Mark, election is properly an act of the will. Ay! but the affections they are but the vigorous motions of the will. Where there is a remiss will, that is without affection; but where there is a strong bent in the will, that is always accompanied with some suitable affection. As if I have a strong bent and nilling of sin, there is an affection of hatred accompanying it; if I have but a remiss will for holiness, that will never save me; that is made to be one of the seven deadly sins which the schoolmen call listlessness; but where there is a serious will, such a willing as a choosing, certainly there is an affection that accompanieth it. Look, as David, when he had chosen God for his portion, presently he professed his complacency and delight in his choice: Ps. xvi. 6, 'The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.' Where there is a choosing God for our portion and all-sufficient happiness, there is presently a delight and satisfaction which results from this choice, and the soul is affected with its own felicity in God, and finds a joy and pleasure in choosing him. So it is in choosing the precepts of God: 'I have chosen thy precepts.' See the next verse, 'Thy law is my delight.' Where there is choice there is delight. A man loves what he chooseth, and is ready and forward to do it; and it is a pleasing thing to serve the Lord, for election in such a weighty case is accompanied with love. It is not an act of a remiss, but strong will; and where there is love, nothing will be grievous, 1 John v. 3.

Secondly, To give reasons why we must thus choose the precepts of God. I shall reason—(1.) From the necessity; (2.) From the congruity and convenience; (3.) From the utility and profit of it.

1. The necessity of it. It must needs be so that God's ways must be taken up upon choice, because there are several competitors that bid for the heart of man; where there is but one thing, there is no choice.

There is the devil, by the world, through the flesh, seeks to get in, and reign in your hearts; and there is God, Christ, and the Spirit. Now there must be a casting out of one, and putting in the other. Look, as in Prov. ix., the whole chapter; there wisdom and the foolish woman are brought in pleading to draw in the heart of unwary man to themselves. Wisdom is pleading, and the foolish woman is pleading. In the beginning of the chapter, wisdom tells what comfort, what peace they shall have, if they will take her institutions; wisdom offers solid benefits, but folly offers stolen waters and bread eaten in secret, some carnal mirth when conscience is asleep. Ay! and the dead are there too. The intoxicating pleasures of this world bring death along with them, when they can choke the sentiments of God that are in his heart. 'Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither,' saith wisdom; and 'who is simple, let him turn in hither,' saith folly. As the poets feign of their Hercules, that virtue and vice appeared to him, and the one showed him a rough, the other a pleasant way. Certainly as soon as we come to years of discretion, we come to make our choice, either to go on in the ways of death, or to choose the ways of God; either to give up ourselves to the pleasures of sin, or else to seek after the comforts of the Spirit. Now, since there are two competitors for the heart of man, and his love cannot lie idle, it must be given to one or another; love and oblectation cannot remain idle in the soul, either it must leak out to the world, or run out to God. There is a necessity of a choice, of renouncing the bewitching vanities of the world, that we may seriously betake ourselves to the service of God.

2. Consider the congruity and conveniency of it, both to the honour of God and nature of man, that no man should ever be happy or miserable but by his own choice.

[1.] It is not for the honour of God that a man should be happy or have such great privileges settled upon him without his own choice; such great benefits as justification, sanctification, and eternal glory. On the other side, that a man should be miserable without his knowledge, or against his will, or besides his purpose and consent, that God should give eternal life whether men will or no. It is not agreeable to the honour of God to inflict eternal death upon them without their consent, unless they choose the ways of death; man's heart else would have a plea against God. Certainly the wise God will never make any happy without their own consent, and never make any miserable but their destruction is of themselves, Hosea xiii. 9.

[2.] Neither will it agree with the nature of man, who is a reasonable rational creature, or any agent capable of election or choice. The brutes are ruled with a rod of iron. God guides all things by his providence; inanimate creatures by mere providence, brutes by their own instinct, and man as a free agent, capable of knowing and prosecuting his chief end. Now every creature of God is governed according to the nature which is put into it; and therefore, since man is a free agent, God expects, in submitting to his service, the creature's consent and choice; and before we can submit to his service, before he will admit us to the benefits, there must be a choice, and an actual will on our parts: Rev. xxii. 17, 'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' The business is brought home to us, and left with our



will. If we miss of happiness, it is because we would not choose it, and the way that leads to it. The Lord chargeth it still upon man's will, John v. 40; Luke xix. 14; Mat. xxiii. 37; Ps. lxxxii. 11. Our misery is from our own wilfulness; but in all that are brought into grace, there is a will it is true, but God prevents them and inclines their will: Ps. cx. 3, 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of grace and power.' You have a grant, and an offer of mercy from God, and then he inclines and moves you to make a right choice. So that of the good and bad it may be said they have their choice. If you neglect and refuse holiness, you choose your own destruction, and neglect life. Your hearts must tell you this: Thou wast the fault of it; as Plutarch brings in one Apollodorus, that dreamed one night that he was boiling in a kettle of scalding lead, and that his heart cried out to him, I have been the cause of all this. This heathen improves it to show there is a vengeance that attends sinners. I mention it only allusively. Now it was your own perverse choice and will that made your hell; thou hast but the fruit of thine own choice. Indeed, as to what is good, if you have chosen the precepts of God, there God must have the glory. You must say, Not I, but Christ; as the apostle. Ay! but there you come in; there is an act of your will, but as disposed and rightly inclined by God. You come both to the duties and privileges of religion by a choice also, though not of yourselves, but of God.

3. Let me reason from the utility and benefit. A man that takes up the ways of God upon choice—

[1.] He is able to justify the ways of God, for he seeth a reason for what he chooseth. When temptations come strong, there will be many misgiving thoughts. Ay! but then wisdom should be justified of all her children, Mat. xi. 19. A blind accidental love is the fruit of chance, but a love that is grounded upon knowledge and judgment, that is choice. This is so grounded, therefore he seeth reason for what he doth: Phil. i. 9, 10, 'I pray God that your love may abound in all wisdom and understanding, that ye may approve things that are excellent.' They see a reason, for they took it upon choice. The Lord hath showed them the worth and excellency of his ways, therefore they can better justify God against all their prejudices.

[2.] Such will be more firm and steadfast. The cause of all halting in religion is the want of a choice, of a purpose resolutely set. A wavering double-minded man, that is half off and half on, will be unstable in all his ways, James i. 8, *διψυχος ἀκατάστατος*, a two-soul man, a man that seems to have a soul for God and a soul for earthly things, and the heart hangs sometimes for one, and sometimes for another. A scoff or scorn, or a little inconvenience, a little fear, a little enticement or stirring of the rebelling flesh within, will make him turn out of the way; and how can such a one hold out with God, when his way to heaven is a continual warfare? But on the other side, a man that is a Christian, and a servant of God by choice, his course is likely according to his choice, because he is fixed upon evidence, he knows he is upon sure ground; and depending upon God, he will not miscarry. And therefore Joshua, when he would engage the Israelites to continue faithful with God, he draws them on

to a choice, and then saith, Josh. xxiv. 22, 'Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen the Lord to serve him, and they said, We are witnesses.' It much strengthens the bond when a man binds himself freely and willingly, and he makes himself the more culpable and the more inexcusable if he do not observe it.

[3.] They will carry on the work of their heavenly calling with the more ease and delight, because a choice is nothing else but the inclination of the soul guided by reason, strengthened by a purpose, and quickened and actuated by our love. This reason justifies our choice. Purpose binds it, makes it firm; but now here comes love, which makes it easy and sweet to do what we have resolved upon. A resolute traveller will go through his journey, and overcome the tediousness of it; his mind is set to finish it, let him have what way or weather he will. So a Christian will overcome his difficulties when his heart is inclined to this course; it is his own choice, and he will hold to it. It is a hard heart that makes the work hard, but when the will is engaged, a firm resolution of the will is the life of our affections, and to affection all is easy.

*Use 1.* To show that they act upon a wrong principle who are not good, and yet do good out of chance. To this end I shall show you—(1.) That a man may do good by chance, and not be good. (2.) A man may do good by force, and yet not be good. (3.) That some do good out of craft and design; but to do good out of choice doth only discover the truth and sincerity of religion.

1. Some do good by chance. As—

[1.] The man that taketh up religion by example barely, and tradition; not out of any sound conviction of the truth and worth of it. Thus many are Christians by the chance of their birth in those countries where the name of Christ is professed and had in honour; and the main reason into which their religion is resolved is not any excellence in itself, but the custom and tradition of their forefathers: John iv. 20, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain;' and 1 Peter i. 18, 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers.' It was hard to reclaim them from their inveterate customs; this is the religion in which they have been born and bred. It is true that tradition from father to son is a duty, and a means to bring us to the knowledge of the truth, and that Christianity is such an institution as doth so clearly evidence itself to be of God, and speaketh to us of such necessary and weighty matters, that it cannot but a little rouse and affect the mind of him that receiveth it, however he receiveth it. But most men do but blindly and pertinaciously adhere to it as that religion wherein they have been born and bred, without any distinct knowledge of the worth of it; so that if there be any goodness in their Christianity (as their profession is good in itself), they are but good by chance; for upon the same reasons they are Christians, if they had been born elsewhere, they would have been Mahometans or idolaters.

[2.] Not only these, but also those who stumble upon the profession of religion they know not how, and those who in a pang and sudden motion are all for God and for heavenly things, but this vanisheth into

nothing; as fire in straw, which is soon kindled and soon out. This is a free-will pang, not a choice; the heart is not habitually inclined and devoted unto God: John vi. 34, 'Oh! that I might die the death of the righteous,' Num. xxiii. 10. Such kind of wishing of holiness, as a necessary means, there may be, as well as happiness. These are accidentally stirred up in us.

2. Some men do good by force. These also are of two sorts—such as are forced by the fear of men, or of God.

[1.] Forced by the fear of men, because they dare not be bad with credit and security; as fear of parents, tutors, and governors: 2 Chron. xxiv. 2, 'Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.' He did that which was right as to external acts, but after Jehoiada's death he revolted from the Lord, 2 Chron. xxiv. 17, 18. So fear of magistrates, as Josiah compelled them to stand to the covenant: therefore, Jer. iii. 10, 'Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly.' Fear of the times when set for religion: Esther viii. 12, 'Many of the people of the land became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.'

[2.] Forced by the fear of God. A little unwilling service may be extorted from them by the force of a convinced conscience. There is a slavish kind of religiousness, arising from a fear of punishment, without any love and delight in God. Men may be against God and his ways, when fear only driveth them to them. They do something good, but had rather leave it undone; they avoid some sins, but had rather practise them. By the spirit of bondage they are brought to tender some unwilling service to Christ; and their only motives are fear of wrath, and hell, and a sight of the curse due to sin. The falseness of this principle appeareth—

(1.) Because it is most stirring in a time of eminent judgments, when they are sick and like to die: Isa. xxvi. 9, 'When thy judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness;' Jer. ii. 26, 'In their affliction they will cry, Arise, and save us.' Metal in the furnace is very soft, but take it out and it returneth to its old hardness. See Ps. lxxviii. 34-37. The sense of present devouring wrath, and the terrors of an angry God, may drive men to some temporary acts of devotion. These proceed only from the natural fear of death and love of self-preservation. This may put a stand for a while to their former ways of provocation, and incline them to seek God with some diligence in the outward forms of religion; but it produceth no steadfastness in the covenant. As if there had been some weak effect upon them; as if it brought them for awhile to some temper of piety; but it was not hearty and durable, but only formal and temporary.

(2.) Because they take all occasions to enlarge themselves out of the stocks of conscience, and as soon as their fear is worn off, away go all their religious pangs, and thoughts of the other world, and care about it. How often is this verified by daily experience! Many that were frightened into a course of religion went on from duty to duty out of a fear of being damned, but their hearts were another way; but afterwards they cast off all, when they have sinned away these fears; as

Herod feared John, and afterwards put him to death, Mark vi. 19, 20. Yea, all the while they did good they had rather do otherwise if they durst, and therefore did but watch the occasion to fly out.

(3.) Because men of this frame dispute away duties rather than practise them, and are quarrelling at those things which the new nature would sufficiently incline them unto, if they had it. In the New Testament, God much trusts love; and the number and length of duties is not stated so exactly, because where the love of God prevaleth in the heart, men will take all occasions of glorifying God and edifying themselves. But when men quarrel, How do you prove it to be my duty to do so much and to give so much? When the duty itself is instituted, love will make God a reasonable allowance, and not stand questioning, How do you prove it to be my duty to pray so often in my family, or in secret, or hear so many sermons, which our constant necessities do loudly call for? Men that have a love to a thing will take all occasions to enjoy it, or be conversant about it; and a willing heart is liberal and open to God, and is rather disputing the restraint than the command: How do you prove it is *not* my duty? and is loath to be kept back from its delight.

3. Some do good out of craft and design, there is some by-end in the cause; as Jehu was not so much zealous for God as his own interests, 2 Kings x. 16; and our Lord telleth us of some that make long prayers to devour widows' houses, Mat. xxiii. 14; made piety a colour and pretext to oppression, and, that they might be trusted, took a show of great devotion; and of this strain were those that followed Christ for the loaves, John vi. 20, to be fed with a miracle and to live a life of sloth and ease. God never set any good thing afoot but some temporal interest grew upon it, with which men were swayed more than with what belongeth to God.

*Use 2.* To persuade you to choose God's precepts: 'I have chosen thy precepts,' said the man of God. To this end I shall give you both motives and directions; motives why you should choose them, and then directions in what manner things are to be attended upon in your choice.

First, For the motives.

1. Choose them because they are God's, to whom you are indebted for life, being, and all things. Shall we not obey him that made us, and in whom still we live, move, and have our being? We are debtors to him for all that we have, and truly we cannot have a better master. He was angry with his people, that when the beasts would own their benefactors, that his people would not own him from whom they had all things, Isa. i. 3. The brute beasts, the dullest of them, the ox and the ass, are willing to serve those that feed them, and pay a kind of gratitude; and shall not we own God? Every day your health, strength, and comforts come out of his hands, so every night's rest and ease; and after this can you sin against God that keeps you by night and by day?

2. These precepts are all holy, just, and good. What is it the Lord requires of you, but to love him, and serve him, and fear him, and forbear those things which hurt the soul? Thus he speaks to Israel, Deut. x. 12. Surely these commands are not unreasonable nor grievous.

You dare not say sin is better, that it is more profitable to please the flesh, and to wallow in and seek after worldly things. Why then do you not choose God's precepts before the work which Satan puts you upon? for these precepts commend themselves by their own evidence.

3. In keeping them there is a great deal of benefit.

[1.] For the present, there is a deal of comfort and peace to be found in the ways of God. If there were no reward of heaven, yet there is such comfort and peace that attends holy living, even as heat from the fire, that certainly this should draw our choice: 'All her ways are ways of pleasantness,' Prov. iii. 17. And again, the prophet tells you, 'The fruit of righteousness is peace.' A man that doth evil hath a sting in his conscience and a wound in his own soul. But every good action is followed with a serenity of mind, and an approbation from the heart of him that doeth it. Nay, you shall not only have peace, but joy in the Holy Ghost; for if you walk in the fear of God, you walk in the comforts of his Spirit, Acts ix. 31; and the kingdom of God stands in righteousness and peace. Ay! and a distinct privilege, joy in the Holy Ghost, Rom. xiv. 17. What is the difference between peace and joy in the Holy Ghost? Peace is a tranquillity of mind resulting from the rectitude of our actions, but this joy is an impression of the comforting Spirit. This joy hath God for its author, he puts it into our hearts; therefore it will more affect us than the bare act of our natural faculties. Peace is an acquittance from conscience, but joy in the Holy Ghost is an acquittance from God, who is our supreme judge, and is the beginning of that endless joy which he hath prepared for them that love him in heaven.

[2.] For the future and final reward, that is great and glorious indeed. Surely the glory of the everlasting kingdom should invite us to choose God's precepts, whatever it may cost us to keep them; for in choosing holiness you choose life, and in choosing the ways of God you choose the heavenly inheritance, which is the certain end and issue of them. So Prov. viii. 35, 36, 'Whose findeth me, findeth life, and obtaineth favour of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me, love death.' Christians, when you are about choosing, these are the terms propounded to you, and they should be seriously weighed by us—evil and death, good and life. Will you choose sin and death, or holiness and life? Is the pleasures of the flesh for a few hours better than the endless joy of the saints? If you believe heaven and hell, as you profess to do, why should you stand demurring? Are you content to be thrust out from the presence of the Lord, with the devil and his angels, into unquenchable flames, for a little contentment here in the world, for a little ease and delight here given to your carnal nature? Is an earthly life, that you cannot long hold, more valuable than an eternal heaven you shall enjoy forever? No; let us go to heaven, though we get thither with many pains and sufferings. If you forsake all, not only in vow and purpose, but actually and in deed, yet still you have something better; you shall be no loser in the end; you shall so choose the blessed God, and live with him for evermore, and be filled with his love as full as you can hold, and be employed in his service; and all this in an eternal perfection and glorified estate.

4. Motive. Choose, for you will never have cause to repent of your choice. The Lord stands upon his justification, is very tender of giving his people any cause to repent of his service: Micah vi. 3, 'O my people! what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.' Pray what hurt hath holiness done you? Who was ever the better for sinning, or who was the worse for holiness? There was none that ever made a carnal choice but first or last they had cause to repent of it. Either they repent of it in a kindly manner, while they may mend the matter, or else they shall repent for ever in misery. But who ever repented of his repentance, or cursed the day of his new birth? To whom ever was it any grief of heart that they were acquainted with God and Christ, or the way that leadeth unto life? Who dieth the sweeter death? or who repents of their choice then, the serious or the carnal? Oh! they that have chosen the world, they cry out how the world hath deceived them; but never any repented of choosing God and the ways of God. Let these things persuade you to choose his precepts.

Secondly, For directions.

1. In choosing, the object is to be regarded. God's precepts indefinitely, all of them, not one excepted, the smallest as well as the greatest, the troublesome as well as the easy, the most neglected as well as the most observed. We must choose all God's precepts, not abate anything, but especially the main or the essential precepts of Christianity, or the fundamental points of the covenant. Now the question is, what is the fundamental point of the covenant? Truly that is known by the form of baptism. Baptism is the solemn seal of entering into covenant with God; it is the seal of our initiation or first entrance into covenant with God, Mat. xxviii. 19. Now what is to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? When you first choose the ways of God, here you must begin; you must close with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, heartily take them to be your God; that is, you must close with God the Father, as your all-sufficient portion, or chiefest happiness, to be loved above all; and also as your highest Lord, that he may be served, pleased, and obeyed above all. Well, and in the name of the Son, that is, Jesus Christ, he must be taken as your saviour and redeemer, to bring you to God, and to reconcile you to him. And to be baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost is this, to take him as your sanctifier, guide, and comforter, to make you a holy people to God, to cleanse your hearts from sin, to write all God's laws upon your hearts, and put them into your minds, and to guide you by the word and ordinances to everlasting life. This is the main thing that is first to be minded, because it contains all, and doth necessarily infer the rest; for otherwise, to be resolute in some by-point of religion, though it be right, this is but the obstinacy of a faction, not the constancy of a Christian zeal.

2. As you must look to the object of this choice, so to the causes of it; and what are they? An enlightened mind, a renewed heart, a love to God, and then the Spirit of God enlightening and inclining our hearts.

[1.] An enlightened mind is a cause of choosing the ways of God, when the Lord hath taught us his precepts. An enlightened mind discovers a beauty and amiableness in the ways of God: Ps. cxix. 128,

‘I esteem all thy precepts to be right, and they are the rejoicing of my soul.’

[2.] A renewed heart, wherein all the precepts of God are written over again. They were written upon our hearts in innocency, but that is a blurred manuscript, therefore in regeneration they are written over again. God writes his law in our hearts, and puts them in our inward parts, Heb. viii. 10; and then the law within suits with the law without, for the new creature is created after God in righteousness and true holiness. In true holiness, which relates to the first table of the law, and righteousness, which relates to the second table of the law; the renewed heart that hath this inclination and propension is carried out to them.

[3.] Love to God, for that is implied in the choice: John xiv. 21, ‘He that hath my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me;’ and he that loves me hath my commandments and keeps them. It follows the other way; where there is love to God, there will be choosing of his ways.

[4.] God’s Spirit, the Lord enlightening and inclining our hearts to this choice. God enlightens, for he teacheth us the way that we shall choose; and when we see these things in the light of the Spirit, then we see the beauty of them, Ps. xxv. 12. It holds good as to the path of life, and in particular cases; but chiefly in the main case God teacheth him the way that he shall choose. And the Spirit of God inclines the heart too, as well as enlightens the mind: 1 Peter i. 22, ‘Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.’

3. There are the effects of this choice. What are they? Delight, diligence, and patience.

[1.] Delight: Ps. xl. 8, ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.’ When the law is not only written in the book but written in the heart, then there is a delight, a ready and willing obedience. It is spoken first of Christ; of David it was said in type. It is true also of all believers, for they have the Spirit of Christ; and the same also is expressed of the people of God: Ps. cxii. 1, ‘Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.’ When a man hath chosen the precepts of God, and bound himself in this way, then his heart is taken with a delight.

[2.] Diligence. God’s precepts are the great business and employment of our lives, and then there is a constant study to please him: Col. i. 9, 10, ‘Filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.’ We must do God’s will and precepts, that we may order our practice accordingly. There must be a habitual aim and purpose to please God.

[3.] Patience; a resolute continuance till our service be over. This is the way I have chosen, and here will I stick until the great reward come in hand: Rom. ii. 7, ‘To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for honour, and glory, and immortality, eternal life.’ And Luke viii. 15, ‘The good ground brought forth fruit with patience.’ That distinguished the good ground from all other grounds; they had some little liking of it, but never came to a serious choice.

But the good ground, though there be several weathers between sowing and reaping, it cherisheth the seed that it is ready at harvest time ; so we pass through many weathers before we come to our harvest of happiness and rest.

*Doct. 2.* That man which makes conscience of God's commands is encouraged to seek help from him in straits.

Such a one may be in great straits ; as David, his own hand could not help him, therefore he flies to God. The Lord permits it that he may be trusted alone in his own hands ; he will break our carnal dependences ; and that his ways may be chosen for their own sakes, and not for temporal reward, and that his love to his own people may not be shown too sensibly, that the mysteriousness of providence may leave a room and place for faith ; therefore doth God darken the glory of the godly with afflictions, and put them into straits that their own hand cannot help them.

Now in these straits, those that make conscience of God's precepts they are encouraged to seek help from God's hand. Why ? Partly because integrity breeds a confidence, so that a man which hath been faithful with God can look him in the face. It breeds a confidence in life, 2 Cor. i. 12, and in death, Isa. xxxviii. 3 ; when they are sick, weak, and know not what to do, they can fly to God. And then integrity also ; it entitles to God's protection all that heartily and sincerely depend upon God : Prov. x. 9, ' He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.' An upright, plain-hearted man, that trusts himself under the shadow and protection of God's providence, he hath no shifts and tricks ; this man shall walk safely, God is engaged to defend him. But the perverse, that fly to their shifts, God will disappoint them and show them their folly : Gen. xvii. 1, ' I am God all-sufficient ; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' Do you uprightly serve God, and study to please him, and you need not seek elsewhere for a patron, or for one to defend you and plead your cause. And partly, too, because they are exposed to the greater difficulties, because they are faithful with God, and trust themselves alone with his protection ; for so the apostle, 1 Tim. iv. 10, ' For therefore we labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God.' Faith begets faithfulness ; their dependence is upon God, and their faithfulness costs them dear, and so they suffer reproach because they did trust themselves in God's ways by God's providence. As you stand in need of God's protection, you shall have it. God will not forsake us in our greatest needs, as the world will ; but in our greatest extremities, when all carnal dependences fail us, he will not ; then is the time for God to show himself. He hath still a providence and a fatherly care over thee, but his power is especially engaged at such a time. If you will take care of your duty, he will take care of your safety, for he will either keep you out of troubles, or sustain you under troubles.



## SERMON CLXXXVII.

*I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.*  
—VER. 174.

IN this verse you have a twofold assertion or protestation—

1. Of a vehement desire of the salvation promised, *I have longed for thy salvation.*

2. A great love and complacency in the word of God, *and thy law is my delight.*

This verse may be understood either of temporal salvation or eternal salvation; the words may be accommodated to either sense. The context would seem to limit it to the former, and so an enforcing of the second request of this portion: ver. 170, 'Deliver me according to thy word.' Many interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, carry it for the other. Jewish; Rabbi David Kimchi expoundeth it thus, 'thy salvation,' *seculo futuro*; and the last clause, 'thy law,' *quia medium est ad salutem*. Christian; Chrysostom, Theodoret, Calvin. And because these senses are not contrary, but subordinate, I shall insist upon both.

1. Let me handle the words as they may be understood of temporal salvation; and so the sense will be, 'I have long expected thy deliverance, and yet do desire and wait for it.' The preterperfect tense, as Vatablus noteth, includeth also the present: 'For a long time I have expected thy deliverance, and do expect help from thee.' And the other clause, 'Thy law is my delight;' though this help seemeth to be delayed, yet thy counsel is my consolation and perpetual delight. The words thus understood yield us two points:—

*Doct.* 1. That God's people do look to God for deliverance, and longingly expect the accomplishment of it.

*Doct.* 2. We should delight in the promise before the salvation cometh.

For the first point, that God's people do look to God for deliverance, and longingly expect it, the point shall be discussed in these considerations:—

1. What longing for God's salvation implieth.
2. The encouragements and reasons of it.
3. What singular thing there is in this longing expectation, since it is natural to all to seek deliverance out of trouble.

First, What it implieth?

1. A sense of our impotency, or insufficiency to save ourselves, and help ourselves out of trouble, by any ways and means that we can find out and use: Ps. iii. 8, 'Salvation belongeth to the Lord;' Jonah ii. 9, 'Salvation is of the Lord.' Salvation and deliverance of all kinds is God's prerogative royal, and God's proper work; none can save and give peace when he commandeth trouble; and when he will save his people, none can let. It is an evidence of men's neglecting a deity when they would help and save themselves in all conditions, without depending or employing a God; Job xl. 9, 14, 'Hast thou an arm like God? then I will confess unto thee, that thine own right hand

can save thee. Alas! if we look elsewhere, how soon are we disappointed! Man is a mutable creature, his affections change, or his power may be blasted; an arm of flesh is soon dried up. Besides the distraction and uncertainty that we have while we depend upon man and look to man, we involve ourselves in greater miseries, and meet with a shameful disappointment at last. Sometimes man will not if he can, sometimes cannot if he would. If he will and can, yet he shall not help us without God; for what can the instrument do without the principal agent, the sword without the man that wieldeth it? That is one lesson God hath been teaching his people in all ages, that salvation belongeth unto the Lord; they must take their deliverance out of his hands. He sits at the upper end of causes, and saveth his people when he will, and how he will, and by what means he will; and till he take their cause in hand, how sadly do the most hopeful attempts and expectations miscarry; for to give salvation is a divine property, given to no creature, and must not be usurped by them: looking to man is the readiest way to miscarry.

2. It implieth a dependence upon his fatherly care and powerful providence, and a persuasion that he will guide us unto heaven in a way that is most convenient for us. The great cause of God's anger against his people in the wilderness was because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation, Ps. lxxviii. 22. He had undertaken to bring them into Canaan, but they mistrusted his conduct, either that he had not power enough, or enough fatherly love and care to do it; and therefore his wrath was kindled against Jacob, and his anger was hot against Israel; and so do they greatly dishonour and provoke God by their distrust who do not believe that God will bring them out of every strait, in a way most conducing to his own glory and their welfare. Now God's children are so satisfied in his conduct, that in their worst condition they can cheerfully depend upon God, and look and long for salvation from him: Hab. iii. 18, 'I will joy in the Lord; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation;' Luke i. 47, 'My spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour.' They are satisfied in his love and power: Ps. xiii. 5, 'But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.'

3. Holy desires vented in prayer; there we express and act our longings. Words are but the body of prayer, but desires are the life and soul of it. The children of God are described once and again to be such as love his salvation, Ps. xl. 16. Now there are but two acts of love—desire and delight; the one concerneth the object as future, the other as present, either to faith or to sense. They rejoice in it as present to faith in the promise, as well as when they enjoy it. But the desire we are now upon, this is vented in prayer, there they express their vehement longings for his salvation: Ps. xxxv. 3, 'Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.' God's saying is doing. He speaketh by his providence; and this is that the saints long for, they plead with him, Ps. cxix. 94, 'I am thine, save me, for I have sought thy precepts.'

4. It expresseth waiting God's leisure and submission for the kind, time, and means of deliverance: Lam. iii. 26, 'It is good to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God.' They continue looking and

waiting: Isa. xxx. 18, 'Blessed are all they that wait for him.' We must wait in the midst of manifold disappointments. When means miscarry, it is in his power to rescue his people from the greatest dangers; and hath a prerogative to save and deliver those whom reason and probability have condemned and given over for lost; as the Israelites, Exod. xiv. 13, 'Stand still, and see the salvation of God.' They were enclosed, the mountains on each side, the Egyptians behind, the sea before; yet what cannot the salvation of God do? There is a holy obstinacy in faith, trusting him in all dangers. Nay, when God himself appeareth as an enemy, cutting off our hope, and hewing and hacking at us, yet we must wait upon him. All strokes come from the hand of God, and no wound given by himself is above his own cure. Jacob when he fainted was forced to interrupt his speech, and utter this ejaculation, Gen. xlix. 18, 'I have waited for thy salvation, O God.' In short, God hath ways of deliverance more than his people know of, and can save his own when they count their case desperate: Ps. lxxviii. 20, 'He that is our God, is the God of salvation, and the issues from death belong unto him;' the escapes from death and imminent destruction.

Secondly, The reasons and encouragements of looking and longing for God's salvation.

1. God hath bound himself by covenant as our God; it is his covenant style to be the God of our salvation, Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20. In the one verse he is called 'the God of our salvation;' in the other, it is said, 'He that is our God is the God of salvation.' If he be the God of salvation, he will be the God of our salvation; for whatever God is in himself, that in the covenant he will be to his people; you shall see the blessing of his people is inferred out of his title: Ps. iii. 8, 'Salvation belongeth to the Lord; thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.' If God can save, and the salvation be a blessing to his people, he will save them, and deliver them. It is true this title doth mainly concern our eternal salvation, but the conduct of his providence by the way is aimed at in the covenant, as well as our entrance into heaven at the end of the journey. Promises relating to temporal things are put into the believer's charter; but the dispensing thereof is left in the hands of their wise and tender Father. Now temporal deliverance being a part of our charter, if it be not always performed, it is not for want of power or truth, but out of wisdom and love. God doth what is most convenient for us; it is in a wise hand: if it be good for me, I shall have it. Now this is a mighty encouragement to look and long for God's salvation. He shall have the stating of it, for time, means, and kind of deliverance, but we must look for it.

2. We must look to God for deliverance, because he is every way able, and fitted and furnished to make good his covenant undertaking. He hath power enough, wisdom enough, and love enough.

[1.] Power enough: 1 Sam. xiv. 6, 'There is no restraint in the Lord, to save by many, or by few.' The same supported Asa, 2 Chron. xiv. 11. The same supported the three children, Dan. iii. 17, 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us out of the fiery furnace.' Now a desire is mightily quickened by this confidence. God hath promised to do what is good, and it is in the power of his hands to do this for us.

[2.] He hath wisdom enough to bring it about in such a way as may be most for his glory: 2 Peter ii. 9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.' It is an art he is versed in, how to distinguish between his people and their enemies; to bring it about so as may be most for his glory. What is the usual work of providence, but to give salvation according to his covenant, in such a way as the beauty of his providence may be seen, the patience and faith of his people may be tried, and yet his enemies reckoned with.

[3.] He hath love enough. God doth concern himself in all our affairs: 1 Tim. iv. 10, 'We trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.' A protector and deliverer; yea, it is said he saveth man and beast, Ps. xxxvi. 6. The object of his providence is very large. All creatures have their being and preservation from him, much more man, much more his children. They are allowed to believe a special providence, and the more they depend upon him, the more is his care assured to them: 1 Peter v. 7, 'Cast all your care upon the Lord, for he careth for you.' The Lord is free from all passions of care and sorrow, but we shall find no less proof of his keeping off danger, or delivering us from danger, than if we were solicitous for ourselves. Surely our Father is not unmindful of us.

3. Because there is no difficulty that can fall out to check this confidence, which is built upon God's undertaking, and sufficiency to make it good.

[1.] Not any danger from men, though of never so dreadful an appearance: 2 Cor. i. 10, 'Who hath delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' The danger was trouble in Asia, a great danger, pressed above measure and above strength. Great trouble was at Ephesus, where the people in an uproar were ready to tear him in pieces, so that he received the sentence of death in himself; yet God found a way and means to save, and he came off safe and sound.

[2.] Not any appearance of anger from God himself: Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet I will put my trust in him.' Sometimes trouble may represent God as the party dealing with us; yet faith can take him for a friend when he seemeth to deal like an enemy; and we must resolve to adhere to God and his ways, and trust his power, with submission to his good-will and pleasure, and believe that he hath more respect and care over us than is seen in the present dispensation.

Thirdly, It is natural to all to seek deliverance out of troubles: Isa. li. 14, 'The captive exile hasteth that he may be delivered, and that he should not die in the pit.' How then is it any part of grace to long for God's salvation?

I answer—It is proper to the godly to love no deliverance but what God sendeth by his own means, in his own time, and to wait for it in God's way.

1. There is somewhat of grace in it, that they look for salvation from God alone, as the author, and are resolved to take it out of his hands, whencesoever it cometh. Men naturally would be *αὐτάρκος*, live upon himself, be sufficient to his own happiness; and so they

are vexed when they are left upon God, and put upon dependence and submission and waiting upon him; for they think it little worth to wait upon God as long as any other shift will serve the turn. As Ahaz, when troubled with the fear of Rezin and Pekah, and the prophet assureth him of God's salvation, and biddeth him ask a sign: Isa. vii. 11-13, 'I will not tempt the Lord.' I will not trust the Lord, he meaneth, though he useth that pretence; his expectation was fixed on the friendship of his confederates. If he had asked a sign of God, he must wait for the issue in God's way. Now Ahaz could not endure to trust God alone; he depended on the Assyrian, and not on God's salvation; he believed nothing the prophet spake, but counted it vain and frivolous, and was resolved to go another way to work.

2. God's salvation as to the means; not by our shifts, that maketh a breach upon our sincerity: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou upright.' A man that doth not trust God cannot be long true to him. You go off from God to the creature by distrust and unbelief, Heb. iii. 12. This is making more haste than good speed, Isa. xxviii. 16. It plungeth us in sin; it is the greatest hypocrisy that can be, to pretend respect to God, and shift for ourselves; it is to break prison, to get out of trouble before God letteth us out.

3. In his own time, 'Thy salvation.' They resolve to wait till he sendeth it. Carnal men, when other means and expectations fail, will seek to God; they are beaten to him. But if their expectation in waiting upon God be delayed, they wax weary and faint; as that king put on sackcloth for a while, 2 Kings vi. 30, afterwards said, 'This evil is from the Lord; why should I wait on the Lord any longer?' They give it over as a hopeless service.

4. That in the height of trouble they still go to God, and will not cast away their confidence and dependence, come what will come: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'In the way of thy judgments we have waited for thee; our desires are to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name.' They still look to him, and though often disappointed, will seek salvation from no other: they still cleave to God's way: Ps. xlv. 17, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forsaken thee, nor dealt falsely in thy covenant.' They persevere in prayer: Ps. lxxxviii. 13, 14, 'Unto thee have I cried in the morning; my prayer shall prevent thee, Lord! Why castest thou me off? why hidest thou thy face from me?' They will not give over, but show their vehement longings after God; whereas wicked and carnal men, when great troubles continue, are driven to despair, and give over all hope.

*Use.* In times of trouble let us look to God, and continue looking all the time that God will exercise our faith and patience, and express our longings and desires of God's salvation in humble and earnest prayer.

1. It is no time to look elsewhere; for God will show us that vain is the help of man by many disappointments: Isa. xlviii. 11, 'I, even I, am the Lord, and besides me there is no saviour.' He will break all confidences till we come to this. He shall be my salvation, as Job resolved when God brake him with his tempests, and pursued him with his waves, and was ready to slay him, as he thought. In all

extremities this should be our fixed ground of faith, that salvation and deliverance is to be expected from God only: Jer. iii. 23, 'Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and the mountains; truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.' God will teach us this lesson ere he hath done with us. Usually there is no serious dealing with God till we find the vanity and inability of all other dependences: looking to the hills and mountains, strength of situation, forces, all these will fail us.

2. It is no time to dally with God and his service any longer; for when troubles come close and near, the spirit of prayer should be revived, and what was cursorily sought at other times should now be sought with some vehemency and longings in prayer: Jer. xxix. 13, 14, 'When they shall seek me with their whole heart, they shall find me, and I will give them an expected end.' We do not stir up ourselves to take hold of him: Ps. xiv. 7, 'Oh! that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!' There should be a longing, we should not content ourselves with a few dead and drowsy prayers.

3. Salvation may be comfortably expected from God; for as necessity enforeth these longings, so hope quickeneth them. Now it may be expected, for he is mighty to save, Isa. lxiii. 1; he is willing to save a distressed people: ver. 5, 'I looked, and there was none to help, therefore mine own arm brought salvation to me.' God struck in for the deliverance and help of his people when all human help failed; he did the work alone himself. Once more, when he meaneth to save, he covereth himself with frowns and anger, as if he meant to destroy: Isa. xlv. 15, 'Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God, the saviour.' He seemeth to hide and stand aloof from his people in their afflictions, and carrieth himself so closely and covertly in the passages of his providence, that his people know not what he meaneth to do. What is our work, then, but to keep longing and waiting and looking to God's hands, till he have mercy upon us?

*Doct.* 2. That we should delight in the promise before the salvation cometh.

So doth David say here, 'Thy law is my delight;' that is, whilst he was longing for God's salvation; and by law is meant God's word in the general; the promise is included in it, as well as the precept.

1. A believer should not be comfortless in his troubles: John xiv. 1, 'Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.' Immoderate sorrow for temporal evils will not become one that hath an interest in God and Christ. Whatever falls out in the world, God is the same still, and the covenant is the same; and our better part, and our happiness is above the reach of trouble; there is a long-suffering with joyfulness, Col. i. 4.

2. All our delight and solace must not arise from the delights of sense, but out of the word of God. It is good to see what is our solace and support in troubles, for the man is as his solace is: Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.' How do we ease ourselves in our perplexities and griefs? Is it with God's comforts? Now God's comforts are gospel comforts; the comforts we have from the word they will make us

more love the word, and trust more upon God's word, and the more confidently expect the performance of it.

3. The promises should support us upon a twofold account—partly because they are good, and partly because they are sure.

[1.] They are good; there is a fulness in God's allowance that suiteth with all our cases: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; he will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that live uprightly.' So 1 Tim. iv. 8, 'Godliness hath the promises of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.' Heaven and earth are laid at the feet of it. A man cannot desire a greater cordial than necessary provisions for this and the future life: Ps. cxix. 111, 'Thy testimonies I have taken for an heritage for ever; they are the rejoicing of my heart.' The promises of the world to come should swallow up all our present grief, for there is more in heaven than can be taken from us in the creature: 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,' Heb. x. 34, 'And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods; knowing in yourselves that in heaven ye have a better and more enduring substance.' We have a treasure and a happiness elsewhere, which cannot be infringed by the afflictions we endure in this world. We do not lose much if we get eternal salvation in the issue, and so we get to heaven, no matter how dark soever our passage be. Then for the promises of this life, they suit with all our troubles, wants, dangers, breaches, and distresses. But what confidence can we have of these temporal deliverances or mercies? *Ans.* Either we shall have the mercies themselves, or God will order providences so as it may be good for us to want them, and have something better given in lieu of them, Rom. viii. 28. We know he will not leave us wholly destitute, Heb. xiii. 5, nor bring upon us insupportable difficulties, 1 Cor. x. 13; and this should be enough for us to maintain us in life and comfort.

[2.] They are sure as well as good.

(1.) As promises. A promise is more than a purpose, for it is a purpose not as conceived in the mind of a man, but declared to another to invite hope. It is more than a doctrine. A doctrine giveth notice of privileges, but a promise giveth us an interest in them. It is more than a revelation or prophecy. Scripture prophecies will be fulfilled because of God's veracity; but scripture promises not only because of God's veracity, but also his fidelity and justice. There is a kind of righteousness in making good promises, because we give another a right and claim to the things promised by the promises we make to him. A promissory lie is worse than an assertory lie. A promise gives us a holdfast upon God, *promittendo se fecit debitorem*.

(2.) As the promises of God, who cannot lie and deceive the creatures: Heb. vi. 18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' And therefore by acting faith on these declarations of his will, we may have the accomplishment of them. None that ever depended on God's word were disappointed: Ps. xviii. 30, 'The word of the Lord is a tried word.' God was never yet found worse than his word; he hath been tender of the credit of his word: Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'Thou hast

magnified thy word above all thy name.' Heathens have acknowledged that God hath never so much showed himself in the world, as in these two things ἀληθεύειν καὶ ἐνεργεῖν, in doing good and keeping promise. Above all that is named and famed of God, this is most conspicuous.

*Use.* To exhort us in all our straits, dangers, and troubles, to be contented with his word, and to delight in the promise, as if it were performed. I shall here show you how we are to carry ourselves towards the promises.

1. You must rest confident of the truth of what God hath promised, and be assured that in time the performance will come to pass, as if you saw it with your eyes : Heb. xi. 13, ' They were persuaded of these things.' This is the assurance of faith spoken of, Heb. x. 22. I know I shall find this to be a truth. Men are conscionable and faithful in keeping their word ; much more God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

2. You are to delight in the promise, though the performance be not yet, nor like to be for a good while ; neither performed, nor likely to be performed. Heb. xi. 13, they saw them afar off, and yet being persuaded of these things, they embraced them ; and John viii. 56, ' Abraham saw my day, and was glad.' You hold the blessing by the root, where you have the promise, Heb. vi. 18.

3. You are to take the naked promise for a ground of your hope, however it seem to be contradicted in the course of his providence. It is his word you are to go by, and stand by, and according to which you must interpret all his dispensations. It is said, Rom. iv. 18, that ' Abraham believed in hope against hope.' When faith dependeth upon God's naked word, then it standeth upon its own basis and proper legs. Everything is strongest in its props and pillars which God and nature hath appointed for it. He hangeth the earth upon nothing, in the midst of the air, but there is its place. So faith standeth fast upon his word, who is able to perform what he saith.

4. This faith must conquer our fears, and cares, and troubles : Ps. cxii. 7, ' He shall not be afraid of evil tidings ; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord ;' and Ps. lvi. 3, 4, ' In God I will praise his word, in God have I put my trust ; I will not fear what man can do unto me.' The force of faith is seen in calming our passions and sinful fears ; or else it is but a notion, and our reverence and respect to God will be weakened by it.

5. When faith hath done its work in the quieting of our own hearts, you must glorify God in your carriage before others : John iii. 33, ' Put to his seal that God is true ;' that is, when we confirm others in the faith and belief of the promises, by our joyfulness in all conditions, patience and contentedness under the cross, diligence in holiness, hope and comfort in great straits. You shall see, Num. xx. 12, that God was angry with Moses and Aaron because ' they believed not, to sanctify him in the eyes of the children of Israel.' We are not only to believe in God ourselves, but to sanctify him in the eyes of others ; as the Thessalonians by receiving the word in much affliction, much assurance, and joy in the Holy Ghost, were examples to all that believed in Achaia, 1 Thes. i. 5-7. Thus we should do, but how few do thus



believe! Some count these vain words, and the comforts thence deduced fanatical illusions or fantastical impressions; nothing so ridiculous in the world's eye as trust and dependence on unseen comforts: Ps. xxii. 8, 'He trusted on the Lord, that he should deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.' Ungodly wits make the life of faith a sport or matter of laughter. Some have more modesty, but as little faith; they are all for the present world, 2 Tim. iv. 9. Present delights please them, but present temptations altogether unsettle them, Heb. xii. 11; cannot bear present smart, nor despise the present world, Rom. viii. 19. Anything in hand is more than the greatest promise, of better things to come. They do not deal equally with God and man. If man promise, they reckon much of that; but cannot tarry upon God's security, count his promise little worth. They can trade with a factor beyond sea, and trust all their estate in a man's hand whom they have never seen; and yet the word of the infallible God is of little respect with them. The best build too weakly upon the promise, as appeareth by the prevalency of our cares and fears, Heb. xii. 4-6. If you did take God at his word, you would not be so soon mated with every difficulty; there would be more resolution in trials, more hardness against troubles. A man may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me.' If we had faith to believe it, it would more effectually quiet our hearts and minds in all our straits, necessities, and perplexities, it would calm our desires and fears: we would not desire the best things of the world, nor fear the worst.

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### SERMON CLXXXVIII.

*I have longed for thy salvation. O Lord; and thy law is my delight.*

—VER. 174.

WE now come to the second acceptation of the word *salvation*, as it implieth eternal salvation; and so the points are two:—

*Doct.* 1. That we should vehemently long and earnestly wait for eternal life.

*Doct.* 2. That we should not only long for salvation, but delight in the way which leadeth us to it.

For the first point, that longing for salvation is the duty and property of God's children—

The reasons are taken from—(1.) The object of these desires; (2.) The subject of these desires; (3.) The use of these desires; (4.) The state and condition of the present world.

1. The object. The object of desire is good, considered as absent and not yet obtained good. All desire that it should be well with themselves. This desire is confused and general; not the hundredth part longeth after the true good: Ps. iv. 6, 'Who will show us any good?' Some are carried by ambition, others by covetousness, others by sensuality: 1 John ii. 16, 'All that is in the world is either the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or pride of life;' and Isa. liii. 6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have every one turned to his

own way.' As the channel is cut, so corrupt nature finds a vent. But now God's salvation is the true good, and ought to be desired, and will be desired by all his children. It importeth a freedom from all misery, and an enjoyment of all good. A freedom from all misery : There sin and sorrow shall be no more, and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, Rev. xxi. 4. The blessed spirits above have none of our cares, and fears, and sorrows. Here we are sighing, and they are praising; we sinning, and they pleasing God; we full of infirmities, and they are perfect and without blemish, and in the full enjoyment of all good : Ps. xvi. 11, 'At thy right hand is fulness of joy, and in thy presence pleasures for evermore;' Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Alas! the preparations to this estate in the world are far above the vain delights of the flesh; much more the pleasures there; these the soul longeth for; though they are thankful for a refreshment by the way, yet they long to be at home.

2. The second reason is taken from the subject of these desires; and there we have—(1.) The suitableness; (2.) The experience; (3.) Our pressures.

[1.] The suitableness; they are suited to this happiness, wrought for this very thing, 2 Cor. v. 5. Everything hath a prepension to the place for which God framed it; it is the wisdom of God to put all things in their proper places, as every creature is placed in that element which is suitable and answerable to its composition and frame, as fishes in water, fowls in the air. God's children are framed for this very thing, therefore have an inclination and a tendency thither. As heaven is prepared for them, so in some measure they for it, Rom. ix. 24; aforehand prepared unto glory; and Col. i. 12, 'Made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.' They grow more dead every day to the interests and concernments of the animal life, and have a greater agreeableness to this happiness.

[2.] Experience: Rom. viii. 23, 'We that have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.' A Christian here is unsatisfied, and longeth for a better and purer state of bliss and immortality, light, life, peace, joy. One drachm of grace is more precious than all the world, but yet it setteth them a-longing for more. The first-fruits showeth us what the harvest will be, and a taste what the feast will prove. Here we get a little knowledge of God, a sight of him in the ordinances, a twilight discovery of Christ, a look through the lattice, Cant. ii. 9, a little glance of his face, when neither doth he let the believers in to him, nor doth he come out to them. This glance maketh them long for more, so that in effect they send up the same message to Christ which his mother and brethren did because of the press, 'Thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to see thee.' Tell him thou standest here without, but desirest to see him. So for the communion we have with Christ, it is but a taste: 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be ye have tasted the Lord is gracious;' but that taste is very ravishing and delightful. Here we get a little from him in an ordinance, but that little is as much as we can hold; but there he is all in all. Here our holiness is not perfect, the seed of God remaineth

in us ; but there it groweth up to perfection, as every spark of fire tendeth to the element of fire.

[3.] Our pressures and the miseries of the present life : 2 Cor. v. 4, ' Being burdened, we groan.' We are pressed under a heavy weight, burdened both with sin and misery, and both set us a-groaning and a-longing, as men in a tempest would fain be set ashore as soon as they can.

(1.) Sin, to a waking conscience and a tender gracious heart, is one of the greatest burdens than can be felt : Rom. vii. 24, ' O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from this body of death ?' If any had cause to complain of afflictions, Paul much more ; he was whipped, imprisoned, stoned, in perils by land and sea ; but afflictions did not sit so close to him as sins : the body of death was his greatest burden, and therefore did he long for deliverance. If others go away silently under their load, the children of God cannot. As light and love increaseth, so sin groweth a greater burden to us. They cannot get rid of this cursed inmate, and therefore are longing for their final estate, when sin shall gasp its last : they long for the parting day, when by putting off the flesh, they shall put off sin, and dwell with God.

(2.) Miseries : the children of God have not divested themselves of the feelings of nature, are not grown senseless, as stocks and stones. The apostle telleth us, Rom. viii. 20-22, that the whole creation groaneth, because it is under misery and vanity. It is a groaning world, and God's children bear a part of the concert : they groan and desire earnestly their full deliverance. ' Few and evil are the days of the years of my pilgrimage,' said holy Jacob, Gen. xlvii. 9. Our days are evil, therefore it is well they are but few ; that in this shipwreck of man's felicity, we can see banks and shores and a landing-place where we may be safe ; here is our travail, but there is our repose. We would sleep too much here, and take up our rest, if sometimes we did not meet with thorns in our bed.

3. The end and use of this longing and desiring.

[1.] It is an earnest desire, it maketh us industrious, and stirreth up and keepeth up our endeavours after another world : Phil. iii. 20, 21, ' But our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.' Where there is a lively expectation, there men drive on a trade for another country. Desire is the vigorous bent of the soul, and so beareth us out under all the difficulties of obedience. If we do not desire, we will not labour, nor seek it in the first place ; and if our desires be weak and feeble, they are controlled by every lust, abated upon every difficulty : whatever gets your hearts, that will command your endeavours ; for as a man's desire is, so is he.

[2.] To make us constant, notwithstanding troubles, reproaches, persecutions : Mat. xi. 12, ' The violent take it by force.' They will have no nay ; they must have it, whatever it cost ; though sore troubles and persecutions, yet if we may get heaven and glory at last, it is enough. But where a thing is coldly and carelessly desired, everything puts us out of the humour.

4. The state and condition of the present world; it is called, Gal. i. 4, 'The present world.' The pleasures of it are mere dreams and shadows, and the evils of it are many and real. God's children are pilgrims here, and hardly get leave to pass through; as Israel could not get leave to pass through Edom. Sometimes they meet with such bitter and grievous persecutions, which make them weary of their lives; as Elijah requested for himself that he might die, 1 Kings ix. 4, or as the spirits of the Israelites were filled with anguish because of their hard taskmasters. God will give his people rest hereafter, but before the rest cometh they are sorely troubled: 1 Thes. i. 6, 7, 'And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost, so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.' Nay, the company that we go with to heaven are apt to fall out by the way, and to deal perversely one with another, unministering, unchurching, unchristianing one another, impaling, enclosing the common salvation, and jostling one another out of the way to heaven; so that the church, which should be terrible like an army with banners, marching to heaven in order in one whole body, is like an army in rout, and most are forced to get home in straggling parties. Now every tender soul should long for God's salvation, to get up to that council of souls who with perfect harmony are lauding and praising God for evermore, Heb. xii. 23.

*Use 1.* To reprove them that are loath to leave this woful life, and do not long and prepare for a better. God driveth us out of the world, as he did Lot out of Sodom, yet we are loath to depart; as if it were better to be miserable, apart from God and Christ, than happy with them. Surely they are far from the spirit of true Christians who would live always here, at home in the world, and cannot endure to think of a remove. There are two causes of this—(1.) An unmortified heart; (2.) An unsettled conscience.

1. An unmortified heart; they are not yet weaned from the world, their hearts are set upon satisfying the vile lusts of the body; carry it as if their portion lay in this world, Ps. xvii. 14; sucking yet upon the world's dug; they have no longing nor desire for that happiness and glory which God hath provided for them that love him; they desire no other portion than what they have in hand.

2. And the other cause is an unsettled conscience. Some fear the state of the other world rather than desire it and long for it. There are two degrees—not knowing for certain it shall go well with us, and not knowing for certain but that it shall go ill with us; both suppress this desire, especially the latter.

*Use 2.* To rouse up our languid and cold affections, that they may more earnestly be carried out after heavenly things; that we may seek after them with more fervency, and constancy, and self-denial.

The motives to press us are these:—

1. God giveth heaven to none but to those that look and long for it. Men may go to hell against their wills, but none go to heaven against their wills. In a punishment there is a force offered to us, but not in a reward. We suffer what we would not, as Christ saith to Peter, 'Another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not,'

John xxi. 18. But happiness must be embraced, pursued, and sought after. Well, then, let the concernments of the other world more take up our hearts and minds, and stand as at heaven's gate, expecting when God will open the door and call you in: Christ will appear to them that look for him, Heb. ix. 28.

2. The children of God long to see God in his ordinances: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of God all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple;' and Ps. xlii. 2, 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?' Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2, 'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.' Now if there be so great and longing a desire to see the glory of the Lord in a glass, wherein so little of his glory is seen, with any comfort and satisfaction, how much more to see him immediately face to face! If a glimpse be so comfortable, what will the immediate vision of God then be? Surely if this be salvation, every one of us should long for this salvation.

3. If it be not worth our desire, it is little worth; the estate being so excellent, such a complete redemption from all our troubles, so perfect, and so full a happiness in body and soul, will not you send a groan, or a hearty act of volition after it? It is great ingratitude, that when Christ hath procured a great state of blessedness for us at a very dear rate, we should value it no more. He procured it by a life of labour and sorrow, and the pangs of a bitter cursed death; and when all is done, we little regard it. Surely if we choose it for our happiness, there will be longing and looking for it. No man will fly from his own happiness: a man's heart will be where his treasure is, Mat. vi. 21. If you prize it, you will sigh and groan after it. The apostle saith, Phil. i. 23, 'I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, which is far better,' *πολλῶ μάλλ' ὄν*. If you count it better to be there than elsewhere, you will be desiring to be there, and longing to be there; for we are always longing for that which is better, chiefly for that which is best of all. There is the best estate, the best work, the best company, all is better; if you count it so, it will be no difficult thing to bring you earnestly to desire it.

4. All the ordinances serve to stir up this longing after heaven, and to awaken these desires in us. The word is our charter for heaven, or God's testament wherein this rich legacy is bequeathed to us, that every time we read it, or hear it, or meditate upon it, we may get a step higher, and our hearts more drawn out after heavenly things. In prayer, whether in company or alone, it is but to raise and act these heavenly desires; there we groan, and long for God's salvation. In the Lord's supper, we come solemnly to put ourselves in mind of the new wine we shall drink in our Father's kingdom, Mat. xxvi. 29, to put a new heavenly relish upon our hearts.

5. The imperfection of our present estate. We are now imperfect, and straitened like a fish in a pail or small vessel of water, which cannot keep it alive; it would fain be in the ocean, or swimming in

the broad and large rivers. So we are pent up, cannot do what we would; there is a larger estate, when filled up with all the fulness of God. That holiness we have now maketh us look for it and long for it; and surely holiness was never designed for our torment.

6. We are hastening into the other world apace, and therefore we more desire it. Natural motion is *in principio tardior, in fine velocior*—the nearer to fruition, the more impatient of the want of it. When a man is drawing home after a long journey, every mile is as tedious as two. We are drawing nigh to the other world, let us leave this willingly, not by force; let not trouble chase us out of it, but love and desire draw us out of it. God doth loosen our roots by little and little, that we may now be fit for a remove; the pins of our tabernacle are taken down insensibly, and by leisurely degrees. Now as fast as we are going out of this world, we should be going into another; the inner man renewed day by day, that is, as it groweth more holy and heavenly. From our first renovation we should be dying to this world, and setting our affections on a better; much more when God beginneth to call us home, then draw home as fast as you can.

For means to this desire and longing, there is necessary—

1. A sound belief of this blessed estate, or a certain confidence of the truth of it: 2 Cor. v. 1, 2, 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.' Not a bare conjecture, but a certain knowledge. Surely heaven is amiable, and the object of our desires, if we be persuaded of the truth of it, we will long after it.

2. A serious preparation for it: 2 Cor. v. 3, 'If so be that, being clothed, we shall not be found naked.' They have made up their account between God and their souls, sued out their pardon, stand with their loins girt and lamps burning; then they long and wait when God will draw aside the veil of flesh, and show them his glory. A seafaring man desireth his port, especially if laden with rich commodities. Where there hath been diligent preparing, there will be serious waiting and desirous expectation. While we make provision for our fleshly appetites and wills, we dream of dwelling here; we take it for granted they have no thought of removing to another place who make no provision before their coming thither. When a tenant hath warning to be turned out of his old house, he will be providing of another, and be preparing and making it ready before he enter upon it.

We now come to the second clause, 'Thy law is my delight.'

*Doct.* 2. That we should not only long for salvation, but delight in the way which leadeth to it.

Here I shall speak to two things:—

1. That we must take the way that leadeth to it.

2. That we must delight in the way.

First, That we must take the way that leadeth to it.

1. Partly because of the nature of God's covenant, which is conditional. There is in it *ratio dati et accepti*, something required and something promised: Isa. lvi. 4, 'For thus saith the Lord unto the

eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant ;' 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 ;' Exod. xxiv. 4, ' And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel : and he took the book of the covenant and read it in the audience of the people, and they said, All that the Lord hath said we will do, and be obedient.' Surely in the covenant of grace God requireth conditions ; it is not made up all of promises. Now a condition is this, when one promiseth any good, or threateneth any ill, not simply, but upon covenant ; if the thing required be performed, or the thing forbidden be committed ; the performance of the thing required is the condition of the promise, the doing a thing forbidden the condition of the threatening : 1 Sam. xi. 1, 2, ' And all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee : and Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel ;' and Luke xiv. 32, ' While the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and desireth conditions of peace.' Now these conditions are twofold—making covenant and keeping covenant.

[1.] The conditions as to making the covenant arise from the law of grace, or the *lex remediensis*, faith and repentance. Faith performed or omitted : John iii. 36, ' He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.' So repentance performed : Ezek. xviii. 30, ' Repent ye, and turn from your transgressions ; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.' Omitted : Luke xiii. 5, ' Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.'

[2.] Then conditions of keeping covenant, which is conformity to the law of God, or new obedience performed : Ps. lxxxiv. 11, ' No good thing will be withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Omitted : Heb. xii. 14, ' Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Well, then, upon the whole we thus judge, that it is not enough to desire God's salvation, but we must also delight in his law ; that is to say, we must repent and believe, and so begin our acquaintance with God in Christ ; and we must also walk in the ways of God's precepts, if we mean at length to be saved, and to enjoy the vision of the blessed God. That which is propounded conditionally we must not presume of absolutely, and so make reckoning to go to heaven as in some whirlwind, or as passengers at sea are brought into the harbour sleeping, or to be crowned without striving.

2. From the nature of this longing and desire, which must be regular and according to the tenor of the covenant of holiness as well as happiness ; and it must be strong, so as to overcome contrary difficulties, lusts, and desires. Let us instance in Balaam. He said, Num. xxiii. 10, ' Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his.' He saw that the state of a righteous man at the end of it is a blessed estate, and this he longed for. But there was

a double defect in his desire ; it was not regular. Balaam desired to be saved, but he did not delight in God's law. He would be at the journey's end, but was loath to take the way ; there was a complacency and well-pleas'dness in the end, but a refusing of the means. Again, this desire was but a flash, a sudden motion, occasioned by contemplation of the blessedness of God's people, but no operative transforming desire ; a desire which the love of the wages of unrighteousness prevailed over. All men will long for salvation, but all men will not take a right course to obtain it ; and so it is a wish rather than a desire, if we long for salvation but have not a heart to use the means appointed thereunto. Where there is a true longing there will be a using the means, and a using the means with delight. They that will not submit to these conditions, or smuff at these conditions as troublesome, they do not long for his salvation, nor delight in his law.

Secondly, That we must delight in the way that leadeth to glory ; but this argument being handled in other verses of this psalm, it is omitted here.

### SERMON CLXXXIX.

*Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee ; and let thy judgments help me.*—VER. 175.

THIS verse containeth three things:—

1. David's petition for life, *let my soul live.*
2. His argument from the end, *and it shall praise thee.*
3. The ground of his hope and confidence, *and let thy judgments help me.*

1. David's petition for life, 'Let my soul live.' 'My soul,' that is, myself: the soul is put for the whole man. The contrary, Judges xvi. 30, 'Let me die with the Philistines,' said Samson: Heb. marg., 'Let my soul die.' His life was sought after by the cruelty of his enemies, and he desireth God to keep him alive.

2. His argument from the end, 'And it shall praise thee.' The glorifying of God was his aim. The fruit of all God's benefits is to profit us and praise God. Now David professeth that all the days of his life he should live in the sense and acknowledgment of such a benefit.

3. The ground of his hope and confidence, in the last clause, 'And let thy judgments help me.' Our hopes of help are grounded on God's judgment, whereby is meant his word. There are judgments decreed and judgments executed, doctrinal judgments and providential judgments. That place intimateth the distinction: Eccles. viii. 11, 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. There is *sententia lata et dilata.* Here God's judgments are put for the sentence pronounced, and chiefly for one part of them, the promises of grace. As also Ps. cxix. 43, 'I hope in thy judgments. Promises are the objects of hope.'



The points are two:—

*Doct.* 1. That we may beg the continuation of life for the honouring of God.

*Doct.* 2. That God's judgments are a great help and relief to his people, who desire to praise him, even when they are in danger of their lives.

For the first, that we may beg the continuation of life, for the honouring of God. This point must be divided into two parts:—

1. That the principal end for which a man should live and desire life is to praise and glorify God.

2. That we may desire life upon these ends.

First, That the principal end for which a man should live and desire life is to praise and glorify God. This appeareth—

1. By direct scriptures: Rom. xiv. 7, 8, 'For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth unto himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's;' and Phil. i. 20, 21, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or death: for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'

2. By the prayers of the saints; as Ps. cxix. 17, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live,' &c.; and Ps. cxviii. 17, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.' This was David's hope in the prolongation of life, that he should have farther opportunities to honour God. But of this more at large, ver. 17 of this psalm.

3. By the arguments urged in prayer: Ps. vi. 5, 'For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?' and Ps. xxx. 9, 'What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?' Ps. lxxxviii. 11–13, 'Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise, and praise thee, Selah? shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness,' &c.; and Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19, 'For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth: the living, the living, he shall praise thee,' &c. A man may praise God in heaven, but from their bodies no service is performed for a long while in the other world. There is no such service there as here; as reducing the stray, instructing the ignorant, propagating godliness to others who want it, by our counsels and example.

4. By reasons.

[1.] Life is given us by God at first: Acts xvii. 25, 'He giveth to all life and breath, and all things;' and ver. 28, 'In him we live and move, and have our being.' Now all things that come from God must be used for him: Rom. xi. 36, 'For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things,' &c., angels, men, beasts, inanimate creatures. He expecteth more from men than from beasts, and from saints than from men. Life was given for this end, and therefore not to be desired

and loved but for this end, even God's glory. How grievous a thing is it to go out of the world ere we know why we came into the world! We live not barely to eat and drink, as brute beasts live; we live not to live as heathens. The end of our life is service and obedience to God; yea, and it is the life of our lives, the perfection of them. Well, then, since we live by God, we must live to him.

[2.] It is preserved by him. It is God's prerogative to kill and to make alive; to wound and to heal, Deut. xxxii. 39. Our life dependeth wholly on him. It is said, Job xii. 10, 'In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.' God hath a dominion over all his creatures, over every living thing, and man in especial, to dispose of them according to his pleasure; not an hair of our heads can fall to the ground without him, Mat. x. 29, 30. Our life is wholly in his hands; we cannot add one cubit to our stature, make one hair white or black at our pleasure. Life cannot be taken away without him, how casual soever the stroke is: Exod. xxi. 13, 'If a man lie not in wait for his brother, but God delivereth him into his hand,' &c. Well, then, in all reason we should serve and glorify him who by his providential influence continueth life to us every moment: Deut. xxx. 20, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and obey his voice, and cleave unto him; for he is thy life, and the length of thy days.' It is a charge against Belshazzar, Dan. v. 23, 'God, in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.' We must not look upon ourselves as made for ourselves, but for God. He gave us life, and keepeth it, that we may wholly be at his disposing. While we have it, we must have it for God, that he may be glorified in the use of it; and when he cometh to take it away, he may be glorified by our submitting to his dominion. It is a presumption and encroachment on God's right to seek satisfaction to ourselves in any state, without a subordination and subserviency to his glory. He that giveth and preserveth life may dispose of it at his pleasure; and our life so continually preserved by him ought to be devoted to him.

[3.] When he preserveth it in any imminent danger, it is twice given. I say, in such preservations our life is twice received from God—in our birth, and as spared in the danger; and therefore, in all justice it ought to be dedicated to his service; 2 Cor. i. 9, 10, 'But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' Many times there is but a step between us and death, as if God were putting the old bond in suit, and executing the sentence of the law upon us. Deliverance in such a case is called a pardon and remission; and even in the case of the wicked and impenitent: Ps. lxxviii. 38, 'He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not.' It was but properly a reprieve for the time, a forbearance of the temporal judgment, not executing the sentence, or not destroying the sinner presently; much more to a godly man: Isa. xxxviii. 17, 'Loved my soul from the grave.' To be loved out of a danger, and loved out of a sickness, that is a blessed thing, a great obligation upon us.

[4.] We must surrender our life to him again ; and therefore, while we have it, we must employ it for him, Luke xix. 23 ; into his hands we must resign our spirits. Every one must give an account of himself to God, what honour he hath by our lives.

[5.] We shall never glorify him in heaven unless we glorify God on earth first, or carefully serve him : John xvii. 4, 5, 'I have glorified thee on earth ; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do : and now, O Father, glorify me, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.' Here is our trial, our present service. Saints above are ἐξὼβελεῖς ; that is our reward, to glorify God in heaven.

Secondly, That we may desire life upon these ends ; as Ps. xxxix. 12, 'O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more.' A little time of relaxation, to serve and glorify thee ere I die.

1. Long life is in itself a blessing, taken into the promises, though more frequently in the Old Testament than in the New. Of this, see more at large, ver. 17.

2. It is well sought when this is our scope, for then the request is lawful both for matter and end : James iv. 3, 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.' Life should not be loved but for further glorifying of God, for all our natural interests must be subordinate to our great end.

Well, then, we may lawfully pray for long life, with submission to the will of God, and that death may not come upon us suddenly, but according to the ordinary course of nature.

But how will this stand with the desires of dissolution, and willingness to depart and to be with Christ, which certainly all Christians that believe eternity should cherish in their hearts ?

To this I answer—(1.) By concession ; (2.) By correction.

1. By concession. It is true we are to train up ourselves in an expectation of our dissolution, &c. See ver. 17 more fully. But—

2. By correction. Though it be expedient to desire death, yet we are not anxiously to long after it, till the time come. For—

[1.] They do not simply desire death for itself, but as a means to enjoy those better things which follow after death : Phil. i. 23, 'For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.' It is not our duty to love death as death. No ; so it is an evil which we must patiently bear, and may holily deprecate it ; but because of the good beyond it, it is our duty to love God, to long after communion with him, and to be perfected in holiness. Had it not been an evil to be avoided and dreaded, Christ had never prayed against it ; and 2 Cor. v. 4, 'For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened : not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.' It were an unnatural desire to desire death as death. A creature cannot desire its own destruction. Jesus Christ, before he manifested his submission, did first manifest the innocent desires of nature : 'Father, let the cup pass.' The separation of the soul from the body, and the body remaining under corruption, is in itself evil, and the fruit of sin : Rom. v. 12, 'And so death passed upon all men, for that all have

sinned.' Grace is not given to reconcile us to corruption, or to make death, as death, desirable, or to cross the inclinations of innocent nature. But—

[2.] Upon these terms, death is sweetened to them, and they readily submit to it. Though it be not to be desired as it is death, yet heaven and eternal happiness beyond it is still matter of desire to us. Death is God's threatening; and we are not threatened with benefits, but evils; and evils of punishment are not to be desired, but cheerfully submitted unto for a higher end. Nature abhorreth and feareth death; but yet grace desireth glory. The soul is loath to part with the body, but yet it is far loather to miss Christ, and be without him. A man is loath to lose a leg or an arm, yet, to preserve the whole body, he is contented to part with it. In short, the soul is bound to the body with a double band—the one natural, the other voluntary, by love and affection, desiring and seeking its welfare. The voluntary bond is governed and ordered by religion till the natural bond be loosed, either in the ordinary course of nature, or at the will of God.

[3.] There are certain circumstances in death which do invite us to ask longer life in order to this end; as—

(1.) God's children would not have the occasion of well-doing or self-denying obedience taken from them too soon; so great is their love and desire of gratitude to God, that they would yet longer praise God in this self-denying way. Death would shut their mouths.

(2.) They would not be taken away in a cloud, or before they see the issue of some present trials on the church or them. They have no will to die till the sense of wrath be removed: Ps. xxvii. 13, 'I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.'

(3.) They may have some design a-foot for God, and therefore are desirous of a little more time to attain this design; therefore pray to God to prolong their lives a while: Rom. xv. 31, 32, 'Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea: and that my service which I have done for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints, that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.'

(4.) To breed up their children in the nurture of the Lord, and that they may be useful in their families, as Jacob desired to see Joseph.

(5.) We may beg it that we may not fall into the hands of men, lose our life by murderers: Ps. xxxi. 15, 'My times are in thy hand; deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.' The dispensation of all mercies, comforts, troubles, life, death, are in God's hand, not in man's power; therefore we pray that it may rest there, that we may not be given up to the will of those that hate us.

All these desires have a respect to the glory of God, and if conceived with submission and trust, that God will do what is for the best, they are all lawful.

*Use of all.* 1. Exhortation. It presseth you—

1. To consecrate yourselves to God: Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you

therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' Under the law the bodies of beasts were to be slain; yours is a living sacrifice. Both were set apart for God, the one to die, the other to live to God.

2. Having given up yourselves to God, use yourselves for God: there will be an inquiry what share God hath in your time: Acts xxvii. 23, 'The God whose I am, and whom I serve.'

3. Praise the Lord with heart, mouth, and life. A Christian's conversation is nothing but a hymn to God: 1 Peter ii. 9, 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' The virtues of God, his attributes.

4. Whenever you pray for continuance of life in any danger or distress, either for yourself or others, propound this as the end, not so much your own satisfaction as the honour of God. A Christian is not content to have the use of the benefit to himself alone.

[1.] For self. Every man desireth life. The whole world would all and every of them put this request to God, 'Let my soul live;' but very few consider why they should live. Some desire life only to please the flesh, and that they may enjoy the delights of the present world, a brutish wish. A heathen could say, he doth not deserve the name of a man, *qui unam diem velit esse in voluptate*, &c., certainly not of a Christian, that would desire life merely to enjoy the delights of the flesh. These would not leave their hog's trough to go home to their father. Some there are who desire life to see their children well bestowed, or to free their estate from incumbrance, and are loath to part from their natural relations, wife, children, friends. This is a natural respect, and should be subordinate to a higher end. Though this desire, keeping its place, may be lawful, yet, out of its place, sinful. We use to profess, Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.'

In short, two motives I will urge why the glory of God should have the chief respect in our affections:—

(1.) The benefit it giveth, hope of prolonging life, if this desire be true and real; and it giveth certain assurance of not perishing for ever. The one it doth, for God doeth all things with respect to his glory, Ps. cxix. 94. The other also, for he will glorify those that glorify him.

(2.) This is the temper of a sincere Christian. Surely to a believer it is a piece of self-denial to be kept out of heaven longer; therefore it must be sweetened with some valuable compensation; something there must be to calm the mind, and contentedly to spare the enjoyment of it for a while. Now next to the good pleasure of God, which is the reason of reasons, there is some benefit we pitch upon; there is nothing worthy to be compared but our service: if God may have glory, if our lives may do good; a gracious heart must be satisfied with gracious reasons.

[2.] For others. If we make it our request, we must have the same aims in this case, that the faith and grace of others may benefit them: Mark ii. 5, 'When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee.' Now in such requests bare natural

reasons should not move us, but that God may not lose an instrument of his glory, and that his power and providence may be more seen in the world in the recovery. It is good to beg of God for God: Ps. cxv. 1, 'Not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.' It should be accounted as a mercy unto us: Phil. ii. 27, 'For indeed he was sick nigh unto death, but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.'

5. This end is known by the use in having and submission in asking.

[1.] The use in having, how we use a mercy when we have it, if we do indeed live to the glory of God, and the rather for these experiences.

[2.] Submission in asking, whether we fight or are crowned, work or receive our reward; for God is the best judge of what is most for his own glory.

Use 2. Direction; but of this see ver. 17.

I come now to the second point.

Doct. 2. That God's judgments are a great help and relief to his people, who desire to praise him, even when they are in danger of their lives.

Here I shall show—(1.) What are God's judgments; (2.) How they are a help.

First, What is the meaning of *misphalim*, judgments here?

1. God governeth the world; that is called judgment: Ps. ix. 7, 8, 'He hath prepared his throne for judgment, he shall judge the world in righteousness; he shall minister judgment in uprightness.' So John v. 22. When the government is put into the hands of Christ, it is said, 'For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.'

2. God governeth the world according to this word; there is his judgment concerning things and persons, stating what is good and evil; the reward of the one, and punishment of the other: Ps. xix. 9, 'The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.' The precept is the rule of our duty, the sanction of God's process. Therefore in scripture the punishments of the wicked are sometimes called judgments; so also the rewards of the righteous, as ver. 43 of this psalm. The word pronounceth concerning every man's condition. His delivering of the righteous: Ps. lxxviii. 8, 9, 'Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the Lord arose to judgment, to save the people of the earth.' The moderation of their affliction: Jer. x. 24, 'Correct me, but with judgment;' that is, his merciful judgment, according to the new covenant dispensations. Punishment of sins, that they are judgments we are sufficiently convinced of and sensible of it. Well, then, he prayeth that that of the word may be executed either—(1.) By breaking his enemies, and giving them the merit of their doings; or, (2.) That his promises may be accomplished by sending him help and relief in his troubles.

3. This government is to be observed, for it confirmeth the word: Heb. ii. 2, 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect?' &c.; and he punisheth them 'as the congregation have heard.' Carnal men attribute all to chance, but God's people observe his word.

Secondly, Now these judgments must needs be for a help to God's people, because the word of God speaketh more good to them than it doth to others; and if God judgeth according to his word, they may conclude that his children are never finally forsaken, nor will their enemies escape unpunished. There will be an accomplishment of promises, and an execution of threatenings, which is a comfort to them that walk uprightly.

1. In the general case, it is a relief to us; for God hath a provident care over all those that desire to honour and glorify him; their hopes will not altogether be frustrate. Keep his commandments, and it will turn to good. They shall have seasonable preservation according to God's promised and wonted mercies.

2. In the particular case of contests and conflicts with the wicked, he will punish enemies and reward the faithful. This is the tenor of the word. And to this word of God he ascribed his deliverance. Not this power, or this means, but thy judgments held me. God doth not deceive us with vain promises; when matters are strangely carried on in the world, here is our comfort.

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### SERMON CXC.

*I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.*—VER. 176.

THESE words are the close of the whole psalm. In them observe—

1. A representation of his case, or, if you will, a confession of his sin, *I have gone astray like a lost sheep.*

2. A petition for mercy, *seek thy servant.*

3. A protestation of obedience by way of argument, *I do not forget thy precepts.*

The chiefest matter that needs to be opened is the representation of his case, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep.' Sheep are *animalia gregalia*, such kind of creatures as naturally gather together and unite themselves into a flock. Many other creatures live single and apart; they may sometimes sort together, yet are oftener severed and kept asunder: but the property of sheep, and their safety, is to come together in a flock. But now, when they are out of the flock, then they are exposed to all manner of misery, and therefore a strayed sheep is usually put in scripture for misery and sin, Isa. liii. 6; Mat. xv. 24. Lost sheep are represented as those that are ready to perish. Now the business is whether this similitude here mentioned be to be interpreted of David's misery or his sin. Interpreters are divided, both ancient and modern. The similitude itself is applicable to either, and accordingly used in scripture. Sometimes it is put for sin: Isa. liii. 6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' Sheep are creatures very subject to stray and wander, especially if driven by wolves or dogs; and sometimes by a disease, a sort of madness incident to them, follow not the rest of the flock: the Arabians call it *tsunall*—(*Bochart*). And so they would

have it signify here his going astray out of infirmity, from the way of God's commandments. Or else sometimes the condition of strayed sheep is put for misery; as Hosea iv. 16, 'The Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place.' A lamb that is out of the fold goes up and down bleating to seek the fold again, and some company with which it may join itself. It is spoken of them that affected liberty; the Lord by his prophet tells them they should have liberty enough, but little for their profit and comfort; leave to wander in the world, and should bleat alone, bewailing their solitude and danger, and be exposed as a prey to the next wolf. He would not feed them in the flock and body of the Israelites together, but would scatter them by exile and banishment, so that there should be Israelites amidst many Assyrians, like a lamb bleating up and down that is gone out of the fold. Some think David here represents his misery, when he was a banished exile from the assemblies of the faithful; not living like a prince in his palace, but wandering from place to place to shift for his life, as a poor sheep doth that is driven from the flock, exposed to beasts of prey; and thus it befell him in the case of Saul's and Absalom's persecution. If this be the meaning, the following clauses must be suitably expounded: 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant;' that is, consider my affliction, and in thy good time relieve me and restore me; and the last clause, 'For I do not forget thy precepts:' he did not forget his duty, whatever his condition was.

If we should follow this sense, it yields us these points:—

1. That a believer may be driven from place to place, in perpetual hazards and distresses, wandering up and down like a strayed sheep, driven by the wolf, and scattered from the fold: 1 Cor. iv. 11, 'We have,' saith the apostle, 'no certain dwelling-place.'

2. In such a case we may with confidence go to God, the good shepherd, who hears the bleating of the poor wandering sheep, takes care of them, seeks them, and reduceth them into the fold.

3. That whatever befalls us, we should still go on in the way of obedience: 'I have gone astray,' &c.; driven up and down, and yet, 'I do not forget thy precepts.' When God seems to forget us, we should not forget his precepts. These points might profitably be insisted upon.

But because many ancient and modern, both Jewish and Christian interpreters, understand it of sinful errors, and the words will commodiously enough bear this sense, and it being a similitude very frequently used in scripture, to compare the faithful to sheep, and God to a shepherd, I shall handle the words with respect to this interpretation: 'I have gone astray,' &c. We may all of us make this confession to God, we are too apt to straggle from our duty, and we all of us need to make this petition to God, to beg his watchful providence and shepherd-like care over us; and we may do it with encouragement to be heard of God, if our hearts are unfeignedly set to keep his law, that God will hear us, and keep us from our wandering.

*Doct.* That a Christian that is obedient for the main, yet may run into many failings and errors of life.

David was right for the main course of his life. He professeth here he did not forget God's precepts, he did not cast off the yoke of his law;



but yet in particular acts he acknowledgeth he did err and fail, and went astray like a lost sheep. And so many who are God's own servants, that do not forget his precepts, may thus err and go astray.

First, In our natural estate, man is of a straying nature, apt to turn out of the way that leadeth to God and true happiness. The Holy Ghost sets forth the degeneration of mankind by the similitude and emblem of a strayed lost sheep: Luke xv. and Isa. liii. 6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.' Mark, he speaks of our estate by nature collectively and distributively. Collectively and in common, 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' And distributively, 'Every man to his own way.' We all agree in forsaking the right way of pleasing and enjoying God, but we disagree, as each one hath a bypath of his own. Some are running after this lust, some after that, and so are not only divided from God, but divided from one another, whilst every one makes his own will his law, *quicquid velit, licet*. As the channel is cut, so corrupt nature in every one finds an issue and passage: Ps. xiv. 3, 'They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one.' Some run this way, some that way; some are enslaved by pleasures, others are captivated by the honours of the present world, and some are oppressed by the cares of this life. Every man hath his way of sinning and running away from God. But, however, the emblem and similitude of the Holy Ghost is to be considered, that our departing from God and his ways is like the straying of a sheep. What doth that note?

1. In general it implies this, that we are brutish in our sin and defection from God, led by sense, fancy, and appetite; and therefore our condition could not be expressed but by a comparison fetched from the beasts. Silly sheep are carried away by their fancy and appetite from the flock: Ps. xlix. 12, 'Man being in honour, abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish;' that is, he abode not in the honour of his creation. Some would render it 'for a night.' Adam 'abode not for a night.' What we translate *man*, is *Adam*: the excellency and dignity wherein God had set us; he became like a beast. How is man like a beast? We are governed by our senses and lower appetites. The senses are grown masterly and inordinate, so eagerly set upon their objects, that they will not be reclaimed, and man's life just like that of the brutes; it is things of the same nature we value and adhere unto, terrene and earthly things, the comforts of the animal life; and as we have the same objects, so the same ends, to enjoy our sensual pleasures, and satisfy our fleshly minds as long as we may; now what is this but to suffer the beast to ride the man; to put reason and conscience in vassallage, and subjection to sense and appetite?

2. This similitude is used to show our proneness to err. There is no creature more prone to wander and lose its way without a shepherd than the sheep. Sheep are creatures subject to straying if they be not kept in the pasture; so all men are obnoxious to erring and straying: Jer. xiv. 10, 'They love to wander.' It is a delight to us to be pleasing our flesh and gratifying our carnal senses. So Ps. xcvi. 10, 'It is a people that do err in their hearts.' We do not only err in our minds, but err in our hearts. To err in our mind is to err out of

ignorance, but to err in our heart is to err out of sensual obstinacy ; so are we carried away with the desires of the flesh, think ourselves never better than when we run away from God. Ah ! the best of us is soon out of the way. If God takes off his guidance, and leaves us to ourselves, we are apt to transgress the bounds wherewith God hath hedged up our way, and make it our business still to be running away from the chief good, into the bushes and thickets of carnal error, wherein we are entangled.

3. Our inability to return, and set ourselves into the right way again ; for we stray like sheep, not like swine and dogs. Swine and dogs, though they wander, they will find the way home again ; but a sheep is irrecoverably lost without the shepherd's diligence and care : Jer. l. 6, ' My people have been lost ; they have gone from mountain to mountain, they have forgotten their resting-place.' So should we run, and keep running away from, and forget our resting-place. I remember Austin in his meditations hath this passage, *Domine errare potui, redire non potui*—Lord, I could go astray by myself, but I cannot return of myself. The sheep easily straggle, but it is the shepherd must bring home the lost sheep upon his own shoulders, Luke xv. 5. And to this we may apply that of the prophet, Hosea xiii. 9, ' O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help.' We could destroy and ruin ourselves, but we cannot recover and save ourselves. The shiftless infant can defile himself, but it is the nurse must cleanse it, and we ourselves can fall from God, but to recover us to God, that is the shepherd's care.

4. It shows our readiness to follow evil example. A sheep is *animal sequax*, a creature that runs after the drove, they run out of the gap one after another, and one straggler draws away the whole flock. When the apostle speaks of the sinful state of mankind, Eph. ii. 2, 3, he reckons up example as one : ' Walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.' In that place there is the devil, the world, and the flesh. There is the prince of the power of the air, and there is the course of this world (that I quote it for now), there is Satan, corrupt example, and evil inclination, all which are depravers of mankind, and all concur to our ruin and destruction. We easily swim with the stream and the torrent of common example, do as others do, and so mutually propagate and receive taint from one another. Imitation is not the whole cause of sin, but propagation and inclination of nature, yet imitation and example doth much to the perverting of the world, and increasing wickedness and fleshly-mindedness makes us addicted to worldly vanities, and so we run with the fowl into the snare, walking according to the course of this world, Eph. ii. 2 ; Isa. vi. 6, ' I am a man of polluted lips, and I dwell among a people of polluted lips.' We have sin within, but it is mightily increased by example without ; by dwelling among those that are polluted, we are more defiled ; we catch sickness one of another, we do not get health one from another ; as in the law, by touching an unclean thing a man was made unclean, but not on the contrary. We, being polluted ourselves, are more defiled by others, by conversing with them. We live among them that are

neglectful of God, and unmindful of heavenly things, and we come also to grow more so ourselves.

5. To represent the danger of straying. Sheep when they are out of the pasture, are in harm's way, exposed to a thousand dangers: Jer. l. 7, 'All that find them have devoured them.' So are we in danger to become a prey to the roaring lion, who goes about seeking whom he may devour, and to the dogs and wolves that are abroad. In his sinful state man is a sheep, whom no man taketh up, out of God's protection, and a ready prey for Satan, taken captive by him at his pleasure, 2 Tim. ii. 26, till the Lord recover him by repentance. Thus God forms, represents, and points out our condition before conversion. Certainly before we were converted to God we were as sheep wandering in our ignorance and sinful ways to our own destruction, and in hazard to be preyed upon continually by the roaring lion.

Secondly, See if it be better with us after conversion. For here is a man of God; he saith, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep.' Now, after grace received, though our heart was set to walk with God for the main, yet we often swerve from our rule through ignorance or through inadvertency, and sometimes are blinded by worldly desires and fleshly lusts, and so transgress our bounds and neglect our duty: Ps. xix. 12, 'Who can understand his errors?' Our errors are so many, who can bear them all in mind? who can know and remember them all? I say, even the best, who are tender of displeasing and dishonouring God by sin, they have their errors, yea, and sometimes too their foul faults.

Let me a little show this.

1. There are some unavoidable infirmities and frailties which we cannot get rid of though we fain would; as Rom. vii. 15, 'What I hate, that do I;' and ver. 19, 'The good that I would, that I do not; and the evil that I would not, that do I;' and Gal. v. 17, 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.' A true Christian would love God more perfectly, delight in him more abundantly, and bring every thought into subjection to his will. He would get rid of the fountain of sin, of natural concupiscence, and of the stirrings of envy, lust, pride, anger; but alas! the spirit that worketh in us lusteth to envy, and bewrayeth itself in these carnal affections. These are aberrations from the strict law, which God hath given to us, but such as men are subject unto in this state of frailty. Though they be hated, resisted, though they be restrained in a great measure, that they do not break out into gross acts, yet a child of God cannot get rid of them; though this fire is not blown up but smothered, yet in some degree it burns in our bosoms; there is life in it still.

2. There are other things which they might get rid of if they would, and yet they are not always so happy as to withstand it; certain sins that are avoidable by the ordinary assistances of grace which God vouchsafes to his people, yet a believer may relapse into them many times. Men are not always so watchful, nor is the bent of their hearts so strongly fixed in them; and there is very much security in the saints, and they run into the snare till they be awakened either by some powerful convictions or some smart affliction; as David saith,

Ps. cxix. 67, 'Before I was afflicted, I went astray.' The best of God's children many times in their peace and prosperity they fall asleep and forget themselves, and so let some infirmity still be upon them, before God doth awaken them, and bring them to themselves again. Hezekiah was no sooner settled in a peaceful estate, but presently he forgets himself, and suffers pride to steal upon his heart, till the Lord humbled him for the pride of his heart, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26. When all things went happily with him, he was recovered out of his sickness, and had congratulatory messages from the princes of the nations round about him, and lived in great prosperity, then his heart was lifted up. Some carnal distemper may grow upon us, or evil practice we may fall into. David, when he had gotten a carnal pillow under his head, he lay down and slept, and dreamt of nothing but prosperity, a perpetual uninterrupted temporal happiness, Ps. xxx. 6. He was full of carnal complacency, until God made him look about him. Thus by our carelessness do we often provoke God to use sharp remedies. There are some are not avoidable, but left for humiliation; but those that are avoidable by such ordinary assistances of God's grace to his people, yet many times, through our folly and inadvertency and sleepiness of conscience, we run into them.

Having showed the kinds of these sins, let me now show the causes, why many times those whose hearts are right with God, that do not forget his precepts, yet they go astray like lost sheep.

1. The first cause is their present imperfection. Though grace doth heal all the faculties, yet it doth not totally heal them, or wholly overcome the weakness which is in them. God promiseth to put his law into their hearts and minds, yet both the understanding and will, and all the inferior faculties, they are but in part sanctified. You know our soul is divided into two parts, into the *ἡγήμονικον*, and the faculties which should command and direct, and into the faculties which should be commanded and directed. The commanding faculties are called spirit, and the faculties which should be commanded are called soul. The reason, or the incitation, the affections, the dispositions, which incline us to things good for us, there is a weakness in all these. Whence comes all the weaknesses and errors of the saints? There is a defect in the leading or commanding part of the soul, which is the understanding and the will. In the understanding is the directive counsel, and in the will is the imperial power. Now the understanding, which should direct and guide us, is blind and sleepy, and not so vigilant and watchful as it should be; and so in many cases it proves but a dark and imperfect guide and director to us, and so we err like lost sheep. We have not always so clear and so deep a sense of our duty as we ought, and find not such lively, powerful, and effectual thoughts of God and heavenly things, and so clear a sense, so that the directive part fails us. Then for our wills, which should command us where the imperial power resides, they are imperfect. There is, I confess, in the regenerate a sincere will to please God in all things, but it is not a perfect will; so that our willing and nilling, our consent and dissent, is not so powerful as it ought to be; but the will being tainted by the neighbourhood of a distempered sense, it yields a little, and bends to the flesh, and gives way to

evil, and many times it opposeth that which is good; at least we are often overtaken in a fault, being inconsiderately and suddenly surprised, as the apostle useth that expression, Gal. vi. 1, 'If a man be overtaken in a fault.' Though a regenerate man hath a new light put into his mind, he is renewed in the spirit of his mind, though he hath a new bent and bias put upon his heart, yet the imperial and directive power have flesh in them still, and the wisdom of the flesh is so ingrained and kneaded into our natures, that it cannot be totally dispossessed, no more than we can sever the leaven and the dough when once they are mingled together. If there be a defect in the governing and leading part of the soul, there will be disorders in the life and conversation.

Come we now from the *ἡγῆμόνικον*, the leading faculties, to the faculties which should be commanded and directed. Alas! they are by sin grown obstinate and masterly, and are so eagerly set upon their objects (carnal vanities) that they will not be reclaimed, but rebel against the direction of conscience and inclinations of the renewed will. The apostle speaks of a law of his members warring against the law of his mind, Rom. vii. 23. In the lower, in the most sensitive faculties, there is much headstrong opposition against the directions of the will. We have but a slender feeble guide. The leading part of the will is defective, and there is much of the wisdom of the flesh there. It is a trouble to the flesh to be restrained from what it desires and inclines us to, as a headstrong horse is loath to be governed; therefore we yield and suffer ourselves to be transported and led away by our passions and carnal affections. Now, though the rebellious and disobedient disposition of the appetite and senses is in a great measure broken and subdued in us by the power of grace, yet the best have somewhat of inordinate sensuality and weakness, and being imperfect, are tempted by the world and sense, as well as others. Well, then, ever weigh in your mind for your direction these two grand reasons of all the weakness that is in the saints,—there is the debility and the weakness of the leading and commanding part, and the rebelling of the inferior faculties, which should be ruled and commanded. (1.) The debility and weakness of the leading and commanding part of the soul. And thence is it that we are so inconsiderate, so dull of apprehension, have such dark and ineffectual thoughts of God and heavenly things; and thence is it that the will doth not so potently and rulingly command the directive faculties, but is apt to yield to, that it doth not stand upon its authority as it was wont to do. (2.) The other part is the rebellion of the inferior faculties, and stubbornness of our sensual and carnal inclinations. Look, as in a kingdom and commonwealth, where are rebellious subjects and a feeble empire, things must needs run into disorder, so here the reins are managed very weak; there is a feeble empire in the soul, and here are strong rebellious desires not easily controlled, and so draw the soul away. To make this more evident a little, I shall show the order of all human operations, if rightly constituted. Their actions are governed in this manner:—The understanding and the conscience, they are to guide and direct the will; the will, according to right reason and conscience, moves the affections; the affections, according to the counsel and command of the under-

standing and will, move the bodily spirits; the bodily spirits, they move the senses and members of the body. But now by corruption there is a manifest inversion and change, for bodily pleasure doth affect the senses, the senses corrupt the phantasy, the phantasy moves the bodily spirits, and by them the lighter part of the affections. The affections by their violence and inclination captivate the will, and blind the mind, and so the man is carried headlong to his own destruction. Now, though this servitude be in a great measure broken in them that are called unto the liberty of God's children, they are not slaves to their lusts, and the vain pleasures of this life; yet too too often the senses are too masterly, and too too often transmit objects into the soul in a rebellious way, against the command of sanctified reason and conscience. Affections are stirred by thoughts, and thoughts by objects thus represented. I am the larger in this, that you may more perfectly understand the reason of the weakness of the saints.

2. The violence of temptations. As sheep may be driven out of the pasture by the wolf, so is a poor soul hurried into evil to commit known sin, or omit known duty, by the incursion and shock of temptations, though for the main he doth adhere to Christ by faith, love, and new obedience. Thus Peter was drawn to deny Christ, and many are drawn in the violence of a passion to do things which their hearts do utterly condemn and disallow. In a storm it is hard for a skillful pilot to steer aright; and though it be dangerous to dash against the rocks, yet Christians come off without a total shipwreck, though they may be sore bruised and battered. In such hurries God's children may go astray, but God will not suffer them to be totally lost. David wandered far as well as Saul, but God sought David again; he would not lose him so. A strong temptation may drive us out of the way, as sheep when thieves come are driven out of the fold, whither else they would not have gone.

3. The Lord may withdraw himself for just and wise reasons, and then, when the shepherd is gone aside, we have neither wisdom to direct ourselves nor strength to defend ourselves; as when Moses went away for a while, how soon did Israel corrupt their way! So if God be gone, we see how little we can keep ourselves. God left Hezekiah to try him, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. God will show us what is in our hearts, and that our standing is not of ourselves. We represent ourselves to ourselves in a feigned likeness, and therefore God will truly show ourselves to ourselves. We do not know what pride and passion and carnality lies hid in our hearts when he is present, warming, comforting, quickening, guiding, directing the soul in the way to life. Now, God, by withdrawing, will show us the folly of our wisdom, and the weakness of our strength, and the pride of our humility, and the passionateness of our meekness. Divines distinguish of desertion; they say that there is *desertio correctiva*, and *desertio erudativa*—a desertion by way of correction, and a desertion by way of instruction. Sometimes, by way of correction, because of former sins, or some unkindness, or ungracious dealing with God—God withdraws; and there is a desertion by way of instruction, to teach us to know the sovereignty of grace, and to know our own weakness. Usually both go together in the same dispensation. It is very hard almost to imagine that the same dispensation

should not be both instructive and corrective. But the reason why they distinguish thus is this, because some dispensations are more clearly for correction, and others more clearly for instruction, but usually they go together. We provoke the Lord by some slight or unworthy dealing with him, and then the Lord corrects us, and corrects us that he may instruct us, to see our all depends upon him, and how he should be prized in these things.

4. The fourth reason is some special disease, it may be not yet cured, in our going astray like a lost sheep, even though our hearts be right in the main with God. It may be some corruption too that they cherished, some carnal interest which is too near and dear to us; either worldly, ambitious, or sensual lusts. Though these reign in the unconverted, yet they dwell too much in a heart that is gracious, and so may prevail sometimes to turn us away from God; something there is which we may call our iniquity, Ps. xviii. 23. Though in the general we keep ourselves from it, as an upright heart will, yet it may sometimes foil us.

*Use 1.* Let us stand upon our guard. Oh! let us not leave the boat to the stream, for there is an erring straying disposition in a great measure left in the people of God. Consider, Satan is subtle and assiduous in tempting: 1 Peter v. 8, 'He goes about like a roaring lion;' he is searching up and down after the prey, and an unwary and unmortified soul soon falls into his snare. The flesh is ready to close with the temptation as soon as it is presented; and therefore the best of God's children had need be circumspect and diligent: 'Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation,' Mat. xxvi. 41, lest you be surprised unawares by some sin or other. There is enough corruption in every one of you to betray you to it, if you be not aware; and your resisting graces are very weak and imperfect in degree, and (which is one consideration more) the danger of a fall is very great, for thereby God is dishonoured, 2 Sam. xii. 14, and your own peace is mightily ruffled: Ps. xxxii. 3, 4, 'My moisture was turned into the drought of summer, and I was filled with roaring all the day long.' Yea, and a stumbling-block is laid before others, and you may destroy those for whom Christ died; and woe be to men by whom offences come, Mat. xviii. 7. Under the law, the Lord ordered that if two men strove and hurt a woman with child, that her fruit departed from her, he should surely be punished. To hinder birth was counted murder, so to hinder those that are coming on by any sins of yours in a way to life. If the offence be foul, you may feel it long afterward, as an old bruise is felt upon every change of weather; and this sin may cost you dear, though your salvation be secured. This should make us stand upon our guard; it shows that a Christian should live in constant vigilancy and daily conflict with sin, and deny the desires of the flesh, that he may love God, and live to him.

*Use 2.* It shows us the need of the new covenant, wherein the pardon of sins is established. All the saints that ever lived have had their failings, and what would become of them, even of God's own children, if there were not a forgiving God, and a gracious covenant, a way found out to remit their offences? Ps. cxxx. 3, If the righteous God should call us to a strict account, how could the best of his chil-

dren stand before him? So Ps. cxliii. 2. It would go ill with all the world if strict justice of law were still in force. All are guilty, and all must perish, the holy, humblest soul cannot abide the trial of that court; not only God's enemies, but his servants cannot. The good they do, it cannot be laid in balance against the evil; it would yield no relief as to remission and pardon. Plainly, if the guilt of sins remain upon us, our duties will not compensate with our sins. But such was the Lord's mercy, that when we all like sheep had gone astray, the Lord found a ransom for us, and laid upon Christ the iniquity of us all, Isa. liii. 6, that there might be pardon for poor creatures.

*Use 3.* It teacheth us, again, the necessity of dependence upon God's care and power for our spiritual preservation. Of all creatures sheep need a shepherd, so do we a spiritual shepherd to keep us from straying, to reduce us from our wanderings, to weaken our distemper, to drive away the wolf. In short, these two considerations will enforce the necessity of dependence, the indefatigable malice of Satan, and the unknown weakness and imperfection of the saints.

1. The indefatigable malice of Satan, and his unwearied diligence in tempting us to sin; his hatred and envy against God and mankind is such that he leaves no man untempted. He would not leave the Lord Christ untempted. Especially in some regards above others he labours to draw the children of God into sin, because he knows their sins, by reason of their profession, will give great occasion of scandal to the weak, and blasphemy to the profane and wicked. Now, as his power is very great, so is his subtlety and diligence. That which Hannibal said of Marcellus perfectly agrees with him; whether he gives or takes the foil, he ever renews and reinforceth the fight. When Job had carried it very innocently in his prosperity in a dangerous time, yet try him in adversity, Job i. 12. Nay, when he had carried it off in a very grievous trial, as the loss of his goods and children, Job ii., &c.

2. The weakness and imperfection of the saints. How easily, if we take not more diligent heed and care, may we fall into sins, both with respect to the weakness of our understandings and perverseness of our affections!

[1.] Our understanding is so weak that we are ignorant of many things necessary to be known; for we know but in part, 1 Cor. xiii. 12; and if we know something in general, we do not know it as we ought to know it, 1 Cor. viii. 2. How is that? Either we fail in particular application, as the heathens that knew there was a divine, an eternal, and almighty power in general, yet were vain in their imaginations, in their discourses, and practical inferences. Or if we should know how to use these truths, if we know them habitually, yet we do not actually consider. Here is a great part of man's misery, being hurried by a multitude of business or violence of temptation, that being laid asleep by the pleasures of the flesh many times fall off. Though men have a perfect knowledge of their duty, and how to apply it habitually, yet actually do not consider; their sin carries them away: 'They consider not that they do evil,' Eccles. v. 1. Thus for the understanding.

[2.] Our affections are so apt to be led by sense and not by right reason, that there is many times great danger that in seeing we should



not see, lest seeing, knowing, and approving that which is better, we should embrace and follow that which is worse, act contrary to our knowledge and conscience, Rom. ii. 18. Thou approvest the things that differ, yet doest thus and thus. Many have an approbation, yet cannot bring forth grace to victory, cannot govern their hearts according to their speculative approbation. Now if a man be such a blind indigent creature, it is his wisdom still to look out off himself, to lift up his eyes to God; that is, the God of our salvation and our guide, and defence; all our confidence must be in him.

*Use 4.* We learn hence the encouragement which one hath who is right for the main, but hath run into some errors of life, to apply himself to God to remedy that evil, as the good shepherd who must seek the lost sheep, and reduce him into the right way.

Here let me show two things:—

1. Who are those that are right for the main, and may look upon their sins as particular errors and frailties.

2. What encouragement they have to apply themselves unto the Lord.

First, Who are those that are right for the main, and whose sins are infirmities, such as David's are represented to be here in this text? (for I will go no further than the text). To represent that in five things:—

1. Such as have a conscience, an awful sense of their duty: 'I do not forget thy precepts.' He had transgressed some of God's commandments, but still he had a sense of his duty; that was kept alive in his heart, that awakened him to return again to the Lord.

2. Such as have a habitual will to keep the commandment of God, though there be failings; as David, when he asks for his servant, 'Seek thy servant,' he acknowledged his duty still. God's children may sometimes go astray, but not totally and finally; they never fall so but there remains something that maintains God's interest in the soul: 1 John iii. 9, 'He that is born of God doth not commit sin,' he cannot sin, &c. He doth not sin so as to lie in sin; the seed of God still remains, and so is more easily reclaimed than others. Look, as in Nebuchadnezzar's vision there was represented a tree that was to be cut down by the watchman, but yet the stump of the roots remained in the earth, Dan. iv. 23, that is in his melancholy, when he crept on all four, like beasts (I suppose there was not a transformation into a beast), he did lodge in the forest among beasts, and ate their kind of food; yet there was a stump of this great tree that should bud and scent again, there was a stock of human nature that should recover and show itself again; so here, though a child of God behave himself like a brute beast, and be mastered by his sense, yet the root of the matter is still in him; there is something that will put forth itself again. Or as a spinster leaves a lock of wool to draw on the next thread, so there is something left; they do not wholly cast off the fear of God, nor the yoke. No; their souls are habitually bent to please God more than they are to sin: 'I am thy servant.'

3. As here is a conscience of his duty, and a habitual will to serve God, so here is a broken-hearted confession of his error: 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep;' and so a repentance of the sin committed.

It is grievous to a child of God in the remembrance of it; the sin is thereby more mortified and subdued.

4. Here is an unfeigned desire to return to his duty, and grace humbly sought that he may be set in joint again: 'Lord, seek thy servant.' He would not remain in this condition still; his desire was to do the will of God, and to live in no neglect; and therefore he complains of his straying disposition, and would fain have it cured: 'Lord, seek thy servant.'

5. The conscience of his sincerity was not wholly lost. Mark, not only the conscience of his duty, but of his sincerity; for he prays still to be sought as a sheep belonging to the fold. I am thine, though I am gone astray: John x. 3, 'The sheep hear his voice.' Now this evidence was yet left, I am, Lord, thy servant, and I do not forget thy precepts. He was willing to hear the voice of God. In grievous falls it is otherwise. If a man fall grievously (this doth not relate to any grievous fall), then all were to begin anew. That robs all our peace; as David, 'Lord, create in me a clean heart,' Ps. li. 10. After his grievous fall he speaks as if all was lost. David here professeth still his devotedness to God as his servant, his love and respect to his law as his rule; he could own such a thing in it; it was an evil that annoyed him, but it had not rifled his peace.

Secondly, To speak of the encouragement that we have to go to God if this be our case, as the man of God here desires the Lord to seek him out, and to bring him again into the right way. Those that have gone astray, yet should not keep off, but run to their shepherd: 'Seek thy servant.' Why?

1. We have a shepherd that loves us, whereof he hath given full proof and demonstration in that he died for us: John x. 11, 'I am the good shepherd, that lay down my life for the sheep.' He is not only the great shepherd, as called sometimes, but the good shepherd gave his life in a way of ransom to expiate our sins. When he came to seek and save that which was lost, his first work was to redeem them by his blood. If he could find in his heart to redeem us by his blood, and expiate all our faults, he will recover us.

2. It is one great part of his office to reduce his people from their straggling: Ps. xxiii. 1, 'The Lord is my shepherd.' What then? Ver. 3, 'He restoreth my soul.' If the Lord be our shepherd, it is a great part of his work to restore our souls. We fall into the disease of sin, sometimes wander out of the path, in which we should perish, if God did not reclaim us from our wandering. Now, it is his work to restore our souls, that is, to keep us from going on still in our bypaths; therefore we may come and press it. He is inclined to show favour to those who confess their errors, and for the glory of his grace, and constant love, and sworn covenant, he will not be unmindful of us.

3. He delights to guide us in our wanderings, Luke xv. 4, 5. The good shepherd leaves the ninety-nine, and seeks out the strayed sheep upon the hills and mountains, and brings it home upon his own shoulders rejoicing. It is a pleasing thing to Christ to be reducing strayed souls, Ezek. xxxiv. 4. He was angry with the under-shepherds, and rebukes them because they discharged not their duty: 'The dis-

eased have you not strengthened,' &c. ; and he promiseth his own care : ver. 6, ' I will seek that which was lost.'

4. He will bear with our infirmities, and if humbly sought to, will take care of us. We straggle sometimes out of weakness, and out of vanity of spirit, and lose ourselves through our own folly ; therefore Christ saith, ' I will seek that which was lost.' Sometimes we are driven away by wolves. Christ will fetch us back again, that we may not be meat for their mouth. If sin be as a breach upon conscience, he will heal that wound and bind up the broken. If we be weak, ready to straggle, he will confirm us, and strengthen us more and more. Having such a shepherd, this should encourage us more to go to him.

*Use 5.* Here is caution ; take heed not to run into infirmities, as if it were matter of nothing. Why ? They must be repented ; and it is part of willfulness voluntarily and allowedly to do that which he must undo again, and necessarily be repented of ; as David confesseth his error. Little sins allowed and customarily committed, on the presumption of a pardon, they are not infirmities, but are of a dangerous nature. If you indulge iniquity, you lose your claim as those that are devoted to God ; you will hazard this if you indulge your straying humour. And consider, even infirmities may cost us dear, for though they do not make void the eternal reward, yet usually God reduceth us not by internal grace, but by some smart providence ; as David, Ps. cxix. 67, ' Before I was afflicted I went astray.' God will teach you your duty by briars and thorns, by sharp affliction. And where the distemper is more rooted in us, if it be not an act only, but a kind of rooted distemper, then the dispensation of God's providence may be very sharp. As Paul's thorn in the flesh, when he was apt to be lifted up in pride, he prays thrice : the Lord was terrible to him ; possibly it was the stone, or gout, some racking pain, 2 Cor. xii. Though he prays, God would not release him, but still keeps the pain and trouble upon him. So our strayings will cost us dear. To be sure they must cost us repentance, but they may cost us a great deal of sorrow in the world. We should not incur the hazard of God's temporal displeasure. Again, you have no assurance and command of the time and measure of the Spirit's assistance ; and therefore, if you give way to little failings, they may become grievous enormities in the end, and when you grieve the Spirit, you do what lies in you to drive him from you, and provoke him to suspend his assistance the longer ; and therefore, ' Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption,' Eph. iv. 30.