

SERMON XXXVII.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.—ROM. viii. 28.

IN the former verse the apostle telleth us how the Spirit maketh intercession for the saints, what God liketh and thinketh best for them, not what they like themselves—most profitable, though not most pleasing. Green fruit is most pleasing to the appetite of the child, but the parent knoweth it is not so wholesome; on the other side, medicinal potions are bitter, but they tend to health; therefore, though the afflictions continue, God may hear our prayers, for we find this best for us in the issue, 'And we know,' &c.

In the words—

First, A privilege. *Secondly*, The persons qualified.

In the privilege, observe—*First*, The certainty of it—*And we know*. *Secondly*, The nature of it; and there—

[1.] The extent of it—*All things*; prosperity, adversity, all the varieties of conditions we pass through.

[2.] The manner of working—*Work together*, with the Spirit say some, *cooperantur, non per se operantur*. This is a truth, but not of this place. The poisonous ingredients which are used in a medicine do good, not of themselves, but as ordered and tempered by the skill of the physician. Rather 'work together,' *omnia semel adjuncta sunt*, as Beza paraphrastically rendereth it; singly they are against us, if we look upon providences by pieces, as there is no beauty in the scattered pieces that are framed for a building till they are all set together; so men look upon God's work by halves.

[3.] The end and issue; *for good*. Sometimes for good temporal, for our greater preservation; but rather for good spiritual, the increase of grace; chiefly for eternal good, to fit us and prepare us for the blessedness of the everlasting estate: this is the privilege.

Secondly, A description of the persons who enjoy it.

1. By their act towards God—*To them that love God*, believing his mercy and goodness in Christ. They love him above all things, and are willing to hazard and venture all things for him.

2. God's act or work upon them; they are effectually called—*To them who are the called according to purpose*. There is a distinctive term by which God's purpose is intended; they are called; not *obiter*, by the by, as they live within the hearing and sound of the gospel, but according to God's eternal purpose, and the good pleasure of his grace.

I begin with the privilege.

Doct. That all things that befall God's children in this life are directed by his providence to their eternal happiness.

First, I shall explain this point with respect to the circumstances of the text. *Secondly*, Give a more general state of the case. The first will be done—

1. By opening the nature of the privilege.

2. The certainty of it.

1. The nature of it ; and there we begin with—

[1.] The extent—‘All things.’ It must be limited by the context, which speaketh of the afflictions of the saints.

(1.) All manner of sufferings and trials for righteousness’ sake, such as reproaches, stripes, spoiling of goods, imprisonment, banishment, death, all such kind of things. Reproaches are as dung cast upon the grass, which seemeth to stain it for a while, but afterwards it springeth up with a fresher verdure. Stripes are painful to the flesh, but occasion greater joy to the soul ; as Paul and Silas after they were scourged sung at midnight in the stocks, Acts xvi. Spoiling of goods stirreth up serious reflections on a more enduring substance ; the hopes whereof we have in ourselves, Heb. x. 34. Imprisonment doth but shut us up from temptations, that we may be at liberty for a more free converse with God ; as Tertullian telleth his martyrs—‘You went out of prison when you went into prison, and were but sequestered from the world for more intimacy with the Holy Ghost.’ So banishment ; every place is alike near to heaven, and the whole earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof. They know no banishment that know no home here in the world ; but because we have an affection to our natural comforts, especially to the place of our service, God is wont to recompense his exiles with an increase of spiritual blessings ; as John had his revelations when banished to Patmos, Rev. i. 9. Death doth but hasten our glory ; if the guest be turned out of the old house, you ‘have a building of God, eternal in the heavens,’ 2 Cor. v. 1, and so do but leave a shed to live in a palace. Though your life be forced out by the violence of men, the sword is but the key to open heaven’s doors for you, and you are freed from hard task-masters to go home to your gracious Lord.

(2.) Ordinary afflictions incident to men. Are you pained with sickness, and roll to and fro on your bed, like a door on the hinges, through the restless weariness of the flesh ? Many times we are best when we are weakest, and the pains of the body help to the invigorating and renewing the inward man, 2 Cor. iv. 16. In heaven you shall have everlasting ease, for that is a state of rest. Have you lost children ? If God give you a better name than sons and daughters, you have no cause to complain, Isa. lvi. 5. It is honour enough to you that you are children of God ; if poor and destitute, yet if rich in the gifts and graces of the Spirit, it is made up to you : Rev. ii. 9, ‘I know thy poverty, but thou art rich.’ But it is not expedient to name all cases ; whatever the calamity and affliction be, God knoweth how to turn it to good, so that though we restrain ‘all things’ to the context, it is large enough for our consolation.

But is there not more in it?—for men are always given to over-gospelizing and enlarging their privileges—doth it not comprehend sin ?

Answer, No, not in the intention of the apostle. God hath not made a promise that all the sins of believers shall work for their good. It is true God made advantage of the sins of the world for the honouring of the grace in Christ, Rom. v. 16, 17. It should be our care that Satan may be a loser, and Christ have more honour by every sin we commit. True repentance can draw good out of sin itself, to be a means of our hatred and mortification of it ; so love and gratitude to our Redeemer : Luke vii. 47, ‘Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved

much ; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.' Sin doth not do good as sin, but as repented of ; it is not the sin, but the repentance. But for the proof of this—1. Then it would destroy the qualification mentioned in the text—'Those that love God.' Our love is a love of duty ; none love God but those that obey him and keep his commandments. 2. To assure us beforehand that our sins would turn to our good would open a gap to looseness, and is contrary to the usual methods of God in his word, who commands obedience, with a promise of increase of grace, and threateneth disobedience, and punisheth it also, by hardness of heart, and a tradition, or giving us up to vile affections. Now there would be no reconciling these passages if God assured us by promise that our sins should turn to good, and yet sins be punished with blindness of mind and hardness of heart. 3. If any should object, they mean infirmities, not grievous and heinous sins ; yet even then they see a reason to limit this universal participle, *πάντα*, and so have lost the advantage. But whether they limit it enough, let us see. It is one thing to say they shall not hurt us ; it is another to say they shall conduce to our good, or are means appointed to that end. 4. If God make use of our infirmities for our good, it is to be ascribed to his grace, who bringeth good out of so great an evil ; as David by his fall got wisdom, Ps. li. 6 ; it was the Lord's mercy that made him thereby more sensible of his duty, watchful over a naughty heart. But this is no natural effect of sin ; and to say God hath promised it, it would tempt us to omit our caution, and so we should lose this benefit. God, of his wonderful grace, may do many things which he does not think fit to assure us of by promise. 5. We see many christians fall from some degrees of grace which they never afterwards recover again, though preserved in the state of grace for the main. God will not vouchsafe to them such a liberal portion of his Spirit as they had before. Jehoshaphat is said, 2 Chron. xvii. 3, to have 'walked in the first ways of his father David ;' his first ways were his best ways, when he kept himself free from those scandalous crimes he fell into in his latter time.

But doth it not imply that our prosperity shall turn to good, as well as adversity ?

Answer, Though it be not formally expressed in this place, which speaketh only of sufferings and afflictions, yet it is virtually included. For, 1. God keepeth off, or bringeth on the cross as it worketh for our good ; and all providences wherein the elect are concerned are overruled by his grace for their good : Cant. iv. 16, 'Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices therein may flow out.' Out of what corner soever the wind bloweth, it bloweth good to the saints, the sharp north wind or the sultry south wind. 2. It is a threatening to them that do not love God, that their prosperity tendeth to their hurt : Ps. lxxix. 22, 'Let their table become a snare, and that which should be for their welfare become a trap.' Their worldly comforts serve to harden their hearts in sin. 3. The sanctifying of their prosperity is included in a christian's charter : 1 Cor. iii. 21–23, 'All things are yours, life or death, the present world and the future world, because you are Christ's, and Christ is God's ;' their prosperity cometh from the love of God, and tendeth to

their good. Therefore let this be included, though afflictions are chiefly spoken of in the context.

[2.] The manner of bringing it about—‘They work together.’ Take anything single and apart, and it seemeth to be against us. We must distinguish between a part of God’s work and the end of it. We cannot understand God’s providence till he hath done his work; he is an impatient spectator that cannot tarry till the last act, wherein all errors are reconciled; as Christ told Peter, John xiii. 6, 7, ‘What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.’ We are much in the dark; we look only to present sense and appearance; his purposes are hidden from us; for the agent is ‘wise in counsel and excellent in working.’ His way of working is under a veil of contraries, and unperceivable to an ordinary eye; he bringeth something out of nothing, light out of darkness, meat out of the eater. His end is not to satisfy our sense and curiosity, but try our faith, John vi. 6, to exercise our submission and patience, as in the case of Job, and our dependence and prayer. God knoweth what he is a-doing with you, when you know not: Jer. xxix. 11, ‘For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.’ When we view providence by pieces, and see God rending and tearing all things in pieces, we are perplexed; therefore we must not judge of God’s providence by the beginnings, till all work together. When we apprehend nothing but ruin, God may be designing to us the choicest mercies: Ps. xxxi. 22, ‘For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless, thou heardest the voice of my supplication;’ so Ps. cxvi. 11, ‘I said in my haste, All men are liars,’—Samuel, and all that had told him he should enjoy the kingdom. Haste never speaketh well of God and his promises, nor maketh any good comment on his dealings; we must stay till all causes work.

[3.] The end and issue—‘For good.’

1. Sometimes to good temporal, or our better preservation during our service: Gen. i. 20, ‘But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring it to pass as it is at this day, and to save much people alive.’ Both the Egyptians and themselves had wanted a preserver, if he had not been sold and sent into Egypt. We often find by experience that God ordereth our disappointments for good. Suppose a man’s heart were much set upon a voyage to sea, but he is hindered by many impediments, and before he cometh the ship is gone; and afterwards he heareth that all that were in the vessel were drowned: this disappointment is for good. Crassus’s rival in the Persian war, when he heard how that army was intercepted and cut off by the craft of the barbarians, had no reason to stomach his being refused. Many of us, whose hearts are set upon some worldly thing, have cause to say we had perished if we had not perished, and suffered more if we had suffered less. In the story of Joseph there is a notable scheme and draught of providence; he is cast into a pit, there to perish; thence, upon second thoughts, drawn forth to be sold to the Ishmaelites; by them brought into Egypt; sold for a slave again. What doth God mean to do with poor Joseph? While a slave, he is tempted to adultery; refusing the temptation, he is falsely accused, kept

a long time in ward and duress ; all this is against him. Who would have thought that in the issue all should have turned to his good ? Who would have thought that the prison had been the way to preferment ? that by the pit he should come to the palace of the king of Egypt ? that he should exchange his party-coloured coat for the royal robes of a king's court ? Thus in temporal things we gain by our losses ; and God chooseth better for us than we could have chosen for ourselves.

(2.) Spiritual good. So all affliction is made up and recompensed to the soul ; it afflicts the body, but bettereth the heart : Ps. cxix. 71, ' It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.' There is more to be learned in affliction than in the vastest libraries ; no book will teach us so much as experience under God's discipline. Madmen are kept in the dark, and under hardship, to bring them to their wits again ; so God is forced to use us a little hardly to cure us of our spiritual frenzy. Thou darest not pray, Lord, let me have my worldly comforts, though they damn me ; let me not be afflicted, though it do me good ; and if thou darest not pray so, wilt thou murmur when God ordereth it so ? If a man break an arm or a leg in pulling us out of the water, wherein otherwise we should certainly be drowned, would we be angry with him ? And shall we fret against the Lord when he takes away the fuel of our lusts, which will certainly drown us in perdition and everlasting destruction ? Is it not a good exchange to part with outward comforts for inward holiness ? Certainly that will be of more gain to us than all the affliction, pain, and loss which we suffer will do us hurt. Certainly we lose nothing but our rust by scouring. If God will take away our peace, and give us peace of conscience—our worldly goods, and give us true riches, have we any cause to complain ? If outward wants may be recompensed by an abundance of inward grace, and we have the less of the world that we may have more of God, and be kept poor and destitute that we may be rich in faith, James ii. 5, who is the loser ? If we have a healthy soul in a sick body, as Gaius had, 3 John 2, and an aching head maketh way for a better heart, doth not God deal graciously and lovingly with us ? In short, afflictions are compared to fire, that purgeth away the dross, 1 Peter i. 7 ; to the fan that driveth away the chaff, Mat. iii. 12 ; to pruning, that cuts off the luxuriant branches, and maketh the other that remain the more fruitful, John xv. 2 ; to physic, that purgeth away the sick matter, Isa. xxvii. 9 ; to ploughing and harrowing the ground, that fitteth it to receive the good seed, Jer. iv. 3. And shall we be troubled when God cometh to make use of this fire to purge out our dross ? this fan to winnow away our chaff ? this pruning to lop off the luxuriances of our souls ? this plough to break up our fallow ground, to destroy the weeds that are in our hearts ? this sharp medicine to cure our sick souls ? Should we not rather rejoice that he will not let us alone in our corruption, but refine us as metal is by the fire ? and fan and winnow us, that we may be pure grain ? and prune us, that we may be fruitful in holiness ? and use medicine, to cure those distempers which otherwise would destroy us ? and suffer the ploughers to make long furrows upon our backs, that we may enjoy the richer crop ? This is for good.

(3.) For our eternal good. Heaven will make us complete amends

for all that we suffer here : 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'Those light afflictions which are but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ;' these afflictions are so far from infringing our happiness, that they do promote it. How promote ? and how work ? Partly as the patient enduring doth secure our interest. God will not fail to reward them that patiently suffer for his sake, or submit to his discipline ; for these transitory light afflictions and sufferings are so accepted by him, that they are sure to be rewarded by him : Mat. v. 12, 'Great is your reward in heaven ;' and James i. 12, 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptations, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him.' Partly as they are a means which God useth to draw us off from the love and esteem of the world, and to awaken in us an earnest desire and serious pursuit after heavenly things, Gal. vi. 14. They conduce to mortification, and kill the lust of the flesh ; so that our title is not only more secured, but our hearts prepared. Partly because here is the full recompense, the good that answers all objections ; if cast out by men, you are received by the Lord ; if calumniated by the world, approved by God ; if you have lost the love of all men for your faithfulness and sincerity, you shall enjoy the love of God ; if imprisoned, you shall shortly be in your Father's house. There all your fears and sorrows will be at an end, your desires accomplished, and your expectations satisfied ; it is heaven that turneth pain into pleasure, death into life. And partly because, though we fail in particular conflicts, yet God secureth our everlasting estate. *Romani prælio sæpe victi, bello nusquam.* So christians. We cannot say that always there is such sensible benefits by afflictions ; but this is the sense of the place, as the following verses show, that the general issue of things is determined and put out of controversy by it. The infallibility of God's conduct cannot be discerned by every particular event ; for a christian may not gain by every trouble he falleth into, but by all together his eternal estate is promoted ; they all are means to preserve us till we come to heaven. Thus you see how he that could turn stones into bread, water into wine, can extract a blessing out of our saddest miseries and afflictions, and make the bitterest herbs to yield honey to the saints.

2. The certainty of this—'We know.' Not by an uncertain and fallible conjecture, but upon sure grounds. What are they ?

[1.] The promise of God, by which he hath secured the salvation of his people, notwithstanding their troubles : Heb. vi. 17, 18, 'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.' God's resolved purpose declared in his covenant cannot be altered ; his promises in time are his eternal purpose before time ; he hath undertaken by promise and oath to be their God, the God of their salvation.

[2.] By the experiences of the saints, who have found it so : Ps. cxix. 67, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I learn thy statutes ;' they have been persuaded of it : Phil. i. 19, 'I know that

this shall turn to my salvation.' All the troubles he endured should be so ordered by God, as they at length turn to his eternal happiness.

[3.] From the nature of the thing: Two considerations enforce it—

(1.) All things are at God's disposal, and forced to serve him. Men, devils, crosses, and comforts, nothing can fall out against or without his will. Angels, devils, men, have no power to null and frustrate his decrees, for he is the supreme and universal lord: Ps. xxxiii. 11, 'The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever; the thought of his heart to all generations;' and therefore he blasts and frustrateth all the devices of the wicked, and what he decreeth shall immutably come to pass.

(2.) His special care over his people. He hath carried them in the womb of his decrees before the foundation of the world; he loveth them more than a mother loveth her tender infant: Isa. xlix. 15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, but I will not forget thee.' If the mother be so tenderly affected to the child whom she carried in her womb for some few months, will not God much more? He is as tender of them as the apple of his eye, Zech. ii. 8. He hath secured his covenant-love by promise: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able;' he will never leave you to insupportable difficulties.

Secondly, To give a more general state of the case.

1. This good is not to be determined by our fancies and conceits, but by the wisdom of God; for God knoweth what is better for us than we do for ourselves. We judge according to present appearance, but he hath a sight or inspection of our hearts, and a prospect or foresight of all future events; and therefore his divine choices are to be preferred before our foolish fancies; what he sendeth or permitteth to fall out is fitter for our turn than anything else. Could we once be persuaded of this, a christian would be prepared for a cheerful entertainment of all that should come upon him. Besides, he is a God of bowels, and loveth us more dearly than we do ourselves; therefore we should be satisfied with his dispensations, whatever they are. Should the shepherd or the sheep choose his pastures? the child be governed by his own fancy or the father's discretion? the sick man by his own appetite or the physician's skill? It is necessary sometimes that God should displease his people for their advantage: John xvi. 6, 7, 'Because I have said these things to you, sorrow hath filled your heart; nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away.' We are too much addicted to our own conceits; Christ's dealing is expedient and useful, yet very unsatisfactory to his people. He is to be judge of what is good for us, his going or tarrying, not we ourselves, who are short-sighted, distempered with passions, whose requests many times are but ravings, and ask of God we know not what. Peter said, Mat. xvii. 4, 'Master, it is good for us to be here;' he was well pleased to be upon Mount Tabor, but little thought what work God had to do by him elsewhere. So Jer. xxiv. 5, the basket of good figs was sent 'into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.' What good in a dispersion! but God foresaw worse evil would befall the place where they then lived. The selling of Joseph for a slave was to appearance evil, but God meant it for good, Gen. 1. 20. God

may keep us low and bare, expose us to difficulties, prejudices, reproaches, bitter sufferings, yet all is for good.

2. Good is to be determined by its respect to the chief good or true happiness. Now what is our chief happiness but the vision and fruition of God? It consists not in outward comforts—riches, liberty, health, honour, or comfortable relations, but our acceptance with God; other things are but appendages to our felicity: Mat. vi. 33, *προστεθήσεται*, 'But first seek the kingdom of God, and these things shall be added unto you.' Affliction taketh nothing from our solid and essential happiness, rather helpeth us to the enjoyment of it as we increase in grace and holiness. That is evil that separateth us from God, that is good which bringeth us nearer to him; sin separateth us from God, therefore always evil, Isa. lix. 2. But afflictions are not always evil, but make us more earnestly to seek after him, Hos. v. 15; and so to be trained up under the cross, in a constant course of obedience and subjection to God, is good: Lam. iii. 27, 'It is good that a man bear the yoke from his youth,' because it keepeth him modest, humble, and sober.

3. This good is not always the good of the body, or of outward prosperity; and therefore our condition is not to be determined by the interest of the flesh, but the welfare of our soul. If we had the world at will, we cannot be said to be in a good condition if the Lord should deny us spiritual blessings; we are more concerned as a soul than a body: Heb. xii. 10, 'He verily for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.' He doth not call the good things of this world, that pelf which all desire, profit, but the participation of the divine nature. Affliction is good if it be sanctified; holiness wrought by affliction should be more to us than all our outward comforts.

4. It is not good presently enjoyed and felt, but waited for; and therefore our condition must not be determined by sense, but faith, Heb. xii. 11. Affliction for the present is not pleasing to natural sense, nor is the fruit for the present evident to spiritual sense; but it is good because in the issue it turneth to spiritual good. While under the affliction, we feel the smart, but do not presently find the benefit; physic must have time to work; that which is not good may be good; though it be not good in its nature, it is good in its use; faith should determine so, though we feel it not: Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'Yet God is good to Israel.'

5. A particular good must give way to a general good, and our personal benefit to the glory of God and the advancement of Christ's kingdom. It was good, yea, much better, for Paul to be in heaven; yet if it was needful for the saints to continue in the flesh, he submitteth, Phil. i. 24. We must not so desire good to ourselves as to hinder the good of others; all elements will act contrary to their particular nature for the conservation of the universe; that may be good for the glory of God which is not good for our personal contentment and ease: John xii. 27, 28. The sense of our duty, and the desire of glorifying God, should overcome our natural inclination.

6. In bringing about this good we must not be idle spectators, but assist under God. When we are diligent to exercise ourselves unto godliness, then evil is turned into good, and all crosses and afflictions into means of salvation. Besides the elective love of God at the bot-

tom of all, there is the actual power and influence of the Spirit, and prayer on our part: Phil. i. 19, 'Through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus;' and Heb. xii. 11, 'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.' It is not the bare nature of the cross doth it; we must labour for that we look for; the saints are not only passive objects, but active instruments, of providence; there is an exercise on our parts; we are to make use of all things, then God will bless us.

7. If it be true of particular persons, it is much more true of the church; all is for good: Ps. lxxvi. 10, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.' Christ many times gets up on the devil's shoulders; all providence is for the elect's sake: 2 Tim. ii. 10, 'Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain salvation by Christ, with eternal glory.' The sufferings of the apostles conduced to the good of true Christians; God considered the good of the whole church.

Use 1. Is information.

1. That the exception against God's providence from the evils that abound in the world is vain and frivolous. It was an old doubting question, If there be a God, how are there evils? If there were not a God, how is there good? One part answereth the other; the text more fully; he turneth evil unto good. That there are devils: God knoweth how to make use of them, to punish the wicked and exercise the godly. That there is sin: if there had been no sin, no Christ. That there are miseries: if no miseries, many graces would be lost; there would be no fortitude, no patience, no earnestness in prayer. That there are wicked men: it showeth God's distinguishing mercy, that when so many are drowned in the common shipwreck of mankind, it is the greater mercy that we escape; if others are bad, let us bless God that made us better. Lastly, that there is death, that there might be a passage out of this world, and a period to our labours and sorrows.

2. It teacheth us how to interpret prayers. We have prayed for the continuance of a blessing, and lost it; for the riddance of a trouble, yet it continueth upon us. This is the very case here; if God heareth them, how come they to suffer such hard things? The Spirit teacheth us to pray. Now the denial of either suit turneth to good. We often come to God with carnal requests, which being interpreted, sound but thus, Give me that wherewith I may offend thee, or have my flesh pleased, or lusts fed. God findeth us doting on the creature, and we take it ill to be interrupted in our whoredoms. We must distinguish between what is really best for us and what we judge best; other diet is more wholesome for our souls than what our sick appetites craveth; we are best many times when weakest, worst when strongest.

3. It giveth us a reason of waiting. Though we do not presently know why everything is done, let us wait. Providence doth not work without a cause; we see it not now, but we shall see it when God turneth it to good. We must not judge of God's work by the beginning; God seemeth an adversary for a while to them that indeed enjoy his eternal love. Let patience have its perfect work, and when providence is come to a period, you will know more.

4. What reason to trust God with events. Some things fall under our duty, others are a mere event. Our care is about events rather than duty, and so we take God's work out of his hands; and so it is not care, so much as carking; we inquire what shall become of us, rather than what we shall do. 'Do you do your duty, and God knoweth how to turn all things for good, Phil. iv. 6, 7. Nothing can go amiss to him that is found in the way of duty.

5. It informeth us of the happiness of God's children. We may put in for a share; when we are sanctified to God, all things are sanctified to us; and things that otherwise would be snares prove helps, and discouragements prove furtherances. The creature is as if it were another thing to the saints; if they are advanced, their hearts are enlarged to God: 2 Sam. vii. 2, 'And the king said unto Nathau the prophet, See, now I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains;' Nehem. i. 11, 'O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants who desire to fear thy name; and prosper, I pray thee, this day thy servant, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man; for I was the king's cup-bearer;' meaning he had improved this place for God. When they are afflicted, they do not fret or faint, but humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, and so meet him at every turn. Oh! what a blessed thing is it to be under the special care of God, and to have all things about us ordered with respect to our eternal welfare! It is not so with the wicked; if God make Saul a king, Judas an apostle, Balaam a prophet, their preferment will be their ruin; Haman's honour, Achitophel's wit, Herod's applause, turned to their hurt. If in prosperity they contemn God, in adversity they deny and blaspheme God—'This evil is from the Lord, why should I wait on him any longer?' As the salt sea turneth all into salt water, so a man is as the constitution of his heart is.

Use 2. Is caution. 1. Against misconstruction of providence; 2. Against non-improvement.

1. Against misconstruction of providence. There may be a seeming harshness in some of God's dealings, but, all things considered, you will find them full of mercy and truth, Ps. xxv. 10. If there be a seeming contradiction between his word and providence, you must not always interpret the word by providence, but providence by the word: Ps. lxxiii. 17, 'Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I understood their end.'

2. Against non-improvement. Let us not lose the benefit by our negligence and folly; let us observe how we may profit of everything; God would not send this affliction, did he not know how it would be good for me. Therefore to this end—

[1.] Take these motives.

[2.] Consider what profit is to be gotten by afflictions.

[1.] Motives.

(1.) It is not enough to be good in the affliction, but we must get good by the affliction. Carnal men are somewhat good in the affliction; more modest when God's hand is heavy upon them, and they are somewhat disabled or discouraged from following their lusts; yea, and may make great promises of reformation when God hath them under; but as soon

as they are delivered, they encourage themselves in the practice of their old sins; as metals are melted while they are in the furnace, but as soon as they are taken out they return to their natural hardness again. But the godly are the better afterwards; they cannot forget their old smart by sin: Josh. xxii. 17, 'Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed unto this day?' They remember what was the great burden in their troubles, and what was the great comfort and support under them, and are the better all their lives. But others are of another temper: Ps. lxxviii. 34, 'When he slew them, then they sought him, and inquired early after God.' The sense of present smart, and the terror of an angry God, may frighten them into a little religiousness for the present, or drive them into a temporary repentance and seeking friendship and favour with God, and they leave off their sins for a time; but as soon as they are delivered, are as bad as ever. When affliction produceth temporary repentance, we are good in it; but when it produceth constancy of obedience, then we get good by it; it hath but some weak effect on us when we are good in it, but a saving effect when good by it.

(2.) The affliction cometh as a blessing where it is improved to good. It is a great advantage to observe whether our afflictions come as a cross only, or as a curse. Where they leave us worse rather than better, they are the beginnings of sorrows either in this life or the next; sometimes in this life, the cross goeth with a mind to return, or else some worse thing cometh in its place: John v. 14, 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.' God, that letteth a sinner escape one trouble, can easily reach him again, if he neglect God and his soul's good. If when the smart of the rod is gone, we return again to our old vanity, the Lord can easily put us into a worse condition than before; he can heat the furnace seven times hotter, and that which cometh after is the most grievous. But especially in the next world, when God sendeth eternal punishments instead of temporal; as sometimes God breaketh up the course of his medicinal discipline, letteth a people go uncorrected and unreclaimed for their greater condemnation: Isa. i. 5, 'Why should you be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more;' that is, it is in vain to seek to amend you by chastisements. When men wax the worse for all their afflictions, and will not be brought home to God, they are given over as incorrigible; a brand is put upon Ahaz: 2 Chron. xxviii. 22, 'In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord; this is that king Ahaz'—mark him for an obstinate and obdurate sinner. Now such God leaveth to themselves: Hosea iv. 17, 'Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.' They are desperate and irrecoverable, and reserved for eternal torments; this is the sorest judgment, to be given up to our own ways, without any check from divine providence. On the other side, God doth correct us in love, not in anger, when he doth bring good out of it and by it; if it produce a thorough repentance and change, it is a pledge of God's love, and our eternal glory. God's faithfulness may be then observed: Ps. cxix. 75, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me;' that he is pursuing his covenant-love, and carrying on your salvation, though by a way not so pleasing to the flesh.

(3.) That it is your part to get benefit by the affliction, but God's to remove it. For the getting benefit by the affliction falleth within the compass of our duty, but the removing the affliction is a bare event belonging to God's providence. We must do what is our part, and then God will do what is his; not but that God helpeth us in the improvement, for we obtain this grace by prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Christ; but the removal is wholly God's work, and must be referred to him. Therefore your inquiry should be, What am I obliged unto in such a condition? and charge yourselves with you own proper work. Elihu telleth you what reflections you should have: Job xxxiv. 31, 32, 'Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more; that which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.' This is work proper for us: what sins will God have to be mortified? what vanities left? what duties more effectually performed? what graces strengthened? and then let God alone to take off the trouble when it hath done its errand; for surely he delights not to grieve and displease his people further than is for their profit, and he would not continue the affliction if he had not more work to do; his pity moveth him to spare the wicked when they relent under his strokes, much more to deliver the godly when they seriously profit by it.

(4.) If the constitution of our hearts were right, we would desire to profit by the affliction rather than to get rid of it. This is everywhere represented as the temper of the godly: 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day;' 2 Cor. xii. 10, 'I will rejoice in infirmities.' Surely spiritual and heavenly things should be valued above earthly and carnal, not by a bare speculative approbation, but by a practical esteem. Now a practical esteem is manifested by three solid effects: by our caring or seeking for the one rather than the other: Mat. vi. 33, 'But first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;' by quitting the one for the other when necessity so requireth: Mat. xiii. 45, 46, 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls; who, when he hath found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it;' by our submission to God's dispensation, when he blasteth and taketh away the one, to promote the other. We should be glad that it goeth well with the inward man, by the loss and decay of the outward; the lowest degree of sincerity is that the loss of outward concernments should trouble us the less; but surely if grace be in any good degree of strength, we should rejoice and be abundantly satisfied that God thinketh fit to take away earthly things, that thereby he may make us more mindful of that which is heavenly, and doth lessen us in the world, that he may thereby excite us to a more lively exercise of grace, and retrench the interests of the flesh, that the spirit may be enlarged and kept in good plight. Therefore to a child of God an exemption from troubles is not so good as an improvement of them. Our Lord, when he taught us to pray, would have us indeed deprecate the temptation; but our chief request by way of reserve: Mat. vi. 13, 'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;' so in his prayer: John xvii. 15,

'I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil;' teaching us our desires should be not so much to be delivered from the world as the evil of the world, from sins rather than afflictions, and that we should seek grace rather than deliverance. The deliverance is a common mercy, the improvement a special mercy; carnal men may escape out of afflictions, but carnal men have no experience of grace in sanctifying afflictions; and bare deliverance is no sign of special love, but improvement is. Paul rejoiced in this, that God would deliver him from every evil work, 2 Tim. iv. 18. Therefore we should submit to endure the evil of chastisement that we may escape the evil of the sin; it is worse to be sinful than miserable, to be unclean than to be sick, to be voluptuous than to be poor; and so the affliction bringeth greater good than it taketh from you. Therefore christians should be careful that they murmur not against God's dispensations, for there are two evils that we bewray thereby—(1.) A despising of God; (2.) A despising of holiness; and a christian should be tender of either.

First, A despising of God, as if he knew not what was fittest and best for you, and would send any trouble upon you that he knoweth not how to turn to good: Job xxxiv. 33, 'Should it be according to thy mind? He will recompense it, whether thou refuse or whether thou choose.' Should our condition be at our own disposal? and should God ask of us whether we like it or no? Is it not better to be satisfied in his will, and say, Surely God would not send this affliction if he did not know how it should be good for me? We would carve out our own condition, and have our will in everything; but is this wise or just? must God be subject to our passions and affections? No, whether we will or no, he will take his own way.

Secondly, It is a lessening the value of holiness, as if this profit did not countervail our loss. We profess we esteem grace more than wealth, and spiritual things more than carnal; but when we are put to the trial, we little regard holiness, but only mind the ease of the flesh, and therefore are so hardly reconciled to the cross. Surely that which doth us good should not be entertained with such impatient resentment; it is worse in christians, who are more obliged to count all things dung and dross: Phil. iii. 7-10, 'But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but 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, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death.' But we may say as Moses to God, 'Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me, how then shall Pharaoh hear me?' We cannot hope to convince a worldly man of this, that loss of estate or poverty is good; the ambitious man, that it is good to be despised and contemned; and the voluptuous man, that pain is sometimes better than ease, and sickness, that checketh the desires of the flesh, is better than health, that gratifieth them. Alas! the

children of God are hardly convinced that mortifying affliction is better than carnal prosperity; how then will the world believe it?

[2.] What profit is there to be gotten by afflictions? It is hard to instance in all particulars, because God hath several ends in our afflictions, according to the distempers that need cure; but the usual profit of afflictions is seen in these things—

(1.) That the time of affliction is a serious thinking time: 1 Kings viii. 47, 'If they shall bethink themselves in the land of their captivity.' We have more liberty to retire into ourselves, being freed from the attractive allurements of worldly vanities; and for the present there is some restraint on the delights of the flesh, which use to besot the mind, and hinder better thoughts. Adversity maketh men serious; the prodigal came to himself when he began to be in want, Luke xv. 17. Sad objects make a deeper impression on our souls than delightful do; they help us to consider our ways, and God's righteous dealings, that we may behave ourselves wisely, and suitable to the dispensation we are under: Eccles. vii. 14, 'In the day of adversity consider.' See from what hand it cometh, to what issue it tendeth, what is thy duty under it, how little thou canst mend thyself without submitting to God, that to hope to escape by ill means is but like an attempt to break prison. It is better to make supplications to our judge; these providences are not to be lightly passed over; the author of them is God, the occasion sin, the end repentance.

(2.) It is an awakening, quickening time. Some are awakened out of the sleep of death, and are first wrought upon by afflictions. This is one powerful means to bring in souls to God, and opening their ears to discipline, Job xxxvi. 10; they had still slept in their sins if God had not awakened them by the smart discipline of the cross. But others are quickened and awakened to more carefulness of their duty, more watchfulness against sin; and the graces of the Spirit, which lay dormant in us through neglect, are more set a-work. Sense-pleasing objects deaden the heart; God's best children sleep when they have a carnal pillow under their heads: Ps. xxx. 6, 'And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.' But now, because they do not stir up themselves, God stirreth them up by a smart rod, that faith may be working, love fervent, hope lively, prayers carried on with warmth and zeal; prayers otherwise are dead, thoughts of heaven cold, or none; wherein all these graces are acted: Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord, in trouble they have visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them;' and Hos. v. 15, 'I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early.' When our gust and taste of spiritual and heavenly things is recovered, then we are awakened and in good earnest.

(3.) It is a learning time. This the scripture witnesseth everywhere: Ps. cxix. 71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes;' Ps. xciv. 12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law.' God teacheth us, though he teach us as Gideon did the men of Succoth, with briars and thorns; and we read of Christ Jesus himself, Heb. v. 8, 'He learned obedience from the things which he suffered;' he did experimentally understand what obedience was in hard and difficult cases,

and so could the better pity and help sinners when they obey God at a dear rate. In affliction we have an experimental knowledge of that of which but a notional knowledge before. We come by experience to see how false and changeable the world is, what a burden sin is, what sweetness there is in the promises, what a reality in the world to come, how comfortable an interest in God is. Luther said, *Qui tribulantur sacras scripturas melius intelligunt; securi et fortunati eas legunt sicut Ovidii carmen*—‘The afflicted see more in the scriptures than others do; the secure and fortunate read them as they do Ovid’s verses.’ Certainly, when the soul is humble, and we are refined and purified from the dregs of sense, we are more tractable and teachable, our understandings are clearer, and our affections more melting. Now spiritual learning is a blessing that cannot be valued enough. If God write his law on our hearts by his stripes on our backs, we have no reason to complain.

(4.) It is a repenting time, to stir up the hatred of sin by the bitter effects of it: Jer. ii. 19, ‘Now know what an evil and bitter thing it is that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee.’ Weigh with thyself what hath brought all these evils upon thee. Experience teacheth fools: so Lam. iii. 39, ‘Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?’ He hath no reason to murmur against God, when he considereth his own deserts, and that he suffereth nothing but what he hath produced to himself by his sins; and therefore we ought to have deep shame and sorrow for our former miscarriages. It conduceth to breed true remorse to consider our folly, and the misery brought upon us thereby: Jer. xxxi. 18, ‘Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.’

(5.) It is a weaning time, from the pleasures and conveniences of the present world. First, The pleasures of the world. Pleasure is the great sorceress that hath enchanted all mankind; they all court pleasure, though in different shapes; it is deeply engrained in our nature, and the cause of our many miscarriages: Titus iii. 3, ‘Serving divers lusts and pleasures;’ and because we have divers pleasures, God sendeth divers afflictions. The soul is almost so sunk in flesh that it ceaseth to be spirit, John iii. 6. Pleasure is that which draweth us off from God, and engageth us in the creature: James i. 14, ‘But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.’ Now, among the divers afflictions, diseases are natural penances which God hath put upon us to reclaim us from vain pleasures. The gust of the flesh would be too strong, if God did not check it by embittering our portion in the world. Secondly, The conveniences of the present life—riches, honours, friendships. Afflictions are sent to cure our carnal complacency, and increase the heavenly mind. Riches: Heb. x. 34, ‘And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.’ Relations, possessions: 1 Cor. vii. 29–31, ‘The time is short; it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none, and they

that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy as though they possessed not, and they that use this world as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away.' Friendship, John xvi. 32. Doting on the creature is spiritual adultery: James iv. 4, 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.' If an image of jealousy be set up, God will blast it; he turneth the world loose upon us, so that friends prove as broken reeds. It is easy for God to prosper his people in the world, and suit all things to their own desires; but he knoweth our proneness to carnal love, and how easily our heart is enticed from himself. Our temptations would be too strong if the world did appear in an over-amiable, tempting dress; therefore he doth exercise us sometimes with the malicious, envious world; sometimes with the cares, griefs, pains, disappointments, which are incident to the present life; and will show us what a restless, empty world we have here, that we may the more earnestly look after those peaceful regions which are above.

(6.) It is a time of increasing our love to God, upon a twofold account.

First, Affliction showeth us that nothing is worthy of our love but God; whatsoever robbeth God of it soon proveth matter of trouble and distress to us. Our hearts are the more averse from God because they are inclined to the creature: Jer. ii. 13, 'For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that will hold no water.' Men bestow their hearts on something beneath the chief good, which becometh an idol and false god to them, and which they respect and love more than God. Now the love of God cannot reign in that soul where the love of the world and fleshly lusts reigneth: 1 John ii. 15, 'If any man loveth the world, how dwelleth the love of the Father in him?' It is not in him. Now the great work of grace is to cast out the usurper, and to give God the possession of what is his own; and therefore the heart must be circumcised before it be true to God: Deut. xxx. 6, 'The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.' First the foreskin and fleshliness that sticketh so close to us must be taken off, before we can adhere to God as our proper and chief happiness. Now this is God's own work by his internal grace; but yet he useth external means, and amongst the rest sharp afflictions, to wean us from the creature, and to show us that we do but court our own trouble and infelicity when we bestow our affections elsewhere; for hereby God plainly demonstrateth that he is our all-sufficient and indeficient God. All-sufficient, as answering all our necessities and desires; indeficient, our never-failing good, when all things fail about us: Hab. iii. 18, 'Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.' And thus, by desolating the creature, doth he drive our foolish hearts to himself, that we may have the solid delights of his love.

Secondly, This love of God is the comfort by which we are supported in all our distresses. The servants of God have never so much of the joy in the Holy Ghost as in their great sufferings; their delight in God is

then purest and unmixed. God comforteth them when they have nothing else to take comfort in : Job. xvi. 20, 'My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears to God.' When all friends forsake us but one, that one is sweeter to us than ever. Humble moans to God giveth us ease and comfort, notwithstanding the neglect and contempt of man ; and when the world undervalueth, it is enough that God approveth. Our delights in God are often corrupted by a mixture of sensual delights, so that we cannot tell what supporteth us, God or the creature, our remaining comforts, the help or pity of friends, or God alone. Therefore, that the affliction may pierce the spirit, the Lord causeth it to be sharpened and pointed by the scorn and neglect of men, and their strange carriage towards us, that we may fetch our supports from him alone. That still we are not barred from access to the throne of grace, there is our cordial ; that we have a God to go to, to whom we may make our moan, and from whose love we may derive all our comforts ; so David speaketh feelingly in deep afflictions : Ps. lxxiii. 3, 'Thy loving-kindness is better than life.' This supplieth all his wants, and sweeteneth all his troubles, and giveth more comfort than what is most precious and desirable in the creature. I will show you how it helpeth to raise our love to God. There are two acts of love—desire after him, and delight in him ; for we love a thing when we desire to enjoy it, and find contentment in it, being enjoyed.

1st. Desire is the pursuit of the soul after God, *desiderium unionis*. The great act of love is an affecting of union with the thing beloved. Now, because of our imperfect fruition of him in this life, love mainly bewrayeth itself by desires of the nearest conjunction with God that we are capable of ; and the motions of grace tend to this end, to conjoin us to God, or to bring God and us together ; and to this end tend faith and hope, and ordinances and means, the word and prayer ; and so sacraments, that we may get more of God. When a house is a-building, there are scaffolds and poles and instruments of architecture used ; but when the house is finished, all these are taken away. So here are many means to bring us to God—there is faith and hope and ordinances ; but when we come to the vision and fruition of him, all these cease, and love only remaineth. In the heavenly Jerusalem love is perfect, because there God is all in all. But while the distance continueth, see how the hearts of the saints worketh : Ps. lxxiii. 8, 'My soul followeth hard after thee!' All acts of the spiritual life are a further pursuit after God, that we may meet him here and there, and we may find more of him in every duty, and be united to him in the nearest way of communion that we are capable of : Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in his temple.' This was David's great desire, above all earthly desires whatsoever. But have the saints always this ardent and burning desire ? No, it is mightily quenched by the prosperity of the flesh ; when they have something on this side God to detain their hearts, they forget him, suck on the breasts of worldly consolation. You will find their desires are most earnest in affliction ; as David, when in a wandering condition : Ps. xlii. 1, 2, 'As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God ;

my soul thirsteth for God, yea for the living God; when shall I come and appear before thee?' Naturalists tell us that the hart is a thirsty creature, especially when it hath eaten vipers; they are inflamed thereby, and vehemently desire water. This emblem David chooseth to express his affection thereby, and his longings after God, and the means to enjoy God when he was in his troubles; so the prophet Isaiah, Isa. xxvi. 9, 'With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit will I seek thee right early.' He speaketh this in the person of the church during the time of their troubles. When God's judgments are abroad in the earth, then they had continual thoughts of God, and their endeavours were early and earnest. At other times you will find the church flat, cold, and more indifferent as to the testimonies of his favour: Jer. ii. 31, 32, 'O generation, see ye the word of the Lord; have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords, we will come no more unto thee? Can a maid forget her ornaments? or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number.' They had something whereon to live apart from God; therefore afflictions are necessary to quicken these desires.

2ndly. The other affection whereby love bewrayeth itself is by a delight in God; the cream of it is reserved for heaven, but now it is pleasing to think of God, if the soul be in good plight: Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet, I will be glad in the Lord.' It is the solace of their hearts to entertain thoughts of God; to speak of him and his gracious and wondrous works, is the contentment and pleasure of their souls: Eph. v. 4, 'Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.' There is their jesting, to draw nigh to him: Ps. cxxii. 1, 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord!' This is their heaven upon earth, to obey him and serve him: Ps. cxii. 1, 'Praise ye the Lord: blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments!' Now this delight is flagged, and we even grow weary of God and weary of well doing. We dote upon the world, and grow estranged from God and cold in his service, till we are quickened by sharp afflictions; then we begin to mind God again, and a serious religiousness is revived in us. The hypocrites never mind God but in their troubles; Job xxvii. 10, 'Will he always call upon God?' But the best saints need this help, and would grow dead and careless of God were it not for sharp corrosives. Well now, seeking after God and delighting in God being our great duties, we should observe how these are promoted by all the troubles that befall us.

SERMON XXXVIII.

To them that love God.—Rom. viii. 28.

Now we come to the character and notification of the persons to whom this great privilege doth belong. First, Their carriage towards God—*To them that love God.*

Doct. The elect are specified by this character, that they love God. Here I shall show you—

First, What is love to God.

Secondly, Why this is made the evidence of our interest.

1. What is love to God? Love in the general is the complacency of the will in that which is apprehended to be good. The object is good, and love is a complacency in it. The object must be good, for evil is the object of our displicency and aversation. And apprehended as good, for otherwise we may turn from good, as evil to us. Now love to God is the complacency of the will in God, as apprehended to be good. And therefore we must consider—

[1.] The object.

[2.] The act.

[3.] The properties.

[1.] The object. We consider God as good. There is a double motive in the object to excite us to love God: because he is good, and doth good, Ps. cxix. 68, from his nature, and from his work.

1st. The excellency of his nature—he is good. There is a threefold goodness in God—

[1st.] His essential goodness, which is the infinite perfection of his nature.

[2dly.] His moral goodness and holiness, which is the infinite perfection of his will.

[3dly.] His beneficial goodness, which is the infinite propension that is in him to do good to the creature. All these are the object of our love.

[1st.] His essential goodness should make him amiable to us; partly because the glorious perfections of his nature are the object of our esteem, and esteem is the ground of love—we affect what we prize and value, or else we do not really esteem, prize, and value it; and partly because they are the object of our praise—now we praise God for his excellences, to increase our love to him and delight in him; otherwise our praise is but an empty compliment; and partly because the angels and blessed spirits do admire and adore God for the excellences of his nature, not only for the benefits they have received by him, but as he is an infinite and eternal being, of glorious and incomprehensible majesty; they are represented as crying out, Isa. vi. 3, 'Holy! holy! holy! Lord God of Hosts!' Now God must in some measure be served on earth as he is in heaven. Surely we should not speak, or think, or worship the infinite eternal God, without some act of love, holy delight, and pleasure: Ps. cxlvii. 1, 'Praise ye the Lord; for it is good to sing praises to our God, for it is pleasant, and praise is comely;' so Ps. xcvi. 1, 'Come let us sing unto the Lord, let us make a joyful noise

to the rock of our salvation' (and all this is the acting of love), 'for the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods' (there are the motives); Ps. v. 10, 'Let them that love thy name be joyful in thee.' So that you see it is a great duty to delight ourselves in God's essential perfections.

[2dly.] His moral goodness, or his righteousness and holiness. Surely this is an amiable thing, and therefore the object of our delectation. I prove it thus—First, If holiness be lovely and pleasant in the creature, why not in God? In the saints holiness doth attract our love: Ps. xvi. 3, 'My delight is in the saints, the excellent ones of the earth;' and Ps. xv. 4, 'In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.' We are to love saints as saints, reduplicative; why not God as holy and righteous? We are to love the law of God as it is pure, Ps. cxix. 140; therefore we are to love God, a copy of whose holiness the law is; the same reason that doth enforce the one doth enforce the other. Secondly, I argue, We are to imitate his holiness and righteousness, therefore we are to love and delight in it: Eph. v. 1, 'Be ye followers of God, as dear children;' and 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory.' Now love begetteth likeness; it is the greatest demonstration of God's love to us to make us like himself, and the greatest expression of our love to God to desire it, to endeavour after it, to value and prize it as our happiness; see Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.'

[3dly.] His beneficial goodness or benignity: Ps. c. 5, 'For the Lord is good; for his mercy is everlasting;' therefore all his saints should love him. We are first led to the Lord by our own interest, and the benefits we have, or may have, by him: Ps. lxxxvi. 5, 'Thou, Lord, art good, ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all that call upon thee.' This doth first attract the heart of guilty sinners to seek after God, but afterwards we look upon him as a lovely object in himself. While we look upon benignity as a moral perfection in God, without the fruits which flow thence to us, it is an engaging thing; as it was observed heretofore that Caesar's virtues were more amiable than Cato's virtues. Caesar's virtues were clemency, affability, liberality; Cato's virtues, rigid justice and fidelity in his dealings: both were amiable, but the one more taking than the other. There is somewhat a like observation, Rom. v. 7, 'Scarcely for a righteous man would one die, but for a good man one would even dare to die.' By the righteous man is meant one of a severe and rigid innocency; by a good man, a man bountiful and useful. To apply it: God's benignity is a thing amiable, though it be considered but as an attribute in God, not exercised and acted on us. Because this most suiteth the necessities of the indigent and fallen creature, therefore the scripture doth much insist upon it, to move us to return and seek reconciliation with him.

2dly. He doth good, or hath been good to us.

[1st.] As in creation; he made us out of nothing, after his own image, we must remember him as a creator, so as to consider the obligations which lie upon us to love, please, and serve him: Eccles. xii. 1, 'Re-

member thy creator in the days of thy youth.' All that we are and have, we have it from God and for God.

[2dly.] In redemption, where we have the greatest representation of the goodness of God; 1 John iv. 10, 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins;' it is the signal instance; and Rom. v. 8, 'Herein God commended his love, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly;' the fullest discovery.

[3dly.] In the mercies of daily providence: Deut. xxx. 10, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; for he is thy life, and the length of thy days.' Especially in his tender care about his people: Ps. xxxi. 33, 'Oh! love the Lord, all ye his saints, for the Lord preserveth his saints, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.' His hearing prayer is one instance: Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I will love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.'

[4thly.] In the rewards of the other world, which are provided especially for them that love him: 1 Cor. ii. 9, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him;' and 1 John iii. 1, 2, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. Behold now we are the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' Thus God is an object of our love.

[2.] The act. It is the complacency and well-pleas'dness of the soul in God as an all-sufficient portion. This implieth—

(1.) A desire or earnest seeking after God in the highest way of enjoyment we are capable of here; and so those mercies are most valued which are nearest to himself, and show us most of God, and do least detain us from him, his favour, and image; or to mention but one, his sanctifying grace and Spirit; and therefore his saints are described to be those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, Mat. v. 6; they earnestly desire to be like God in purity and holiness. And his sanctifying Spirit is the surest pledge of God's love: Rom. v. 5, 'Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given us;' and doth most help us to love him again: Rom. viii. 15, 'And have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.' Other gifts, that conduce to please the flesh may keep us from him, as wealth, honour, and pleasures; but saving grace, as it cometh from God, so it carrieth us to him.

(2.) A delight in him. So far as they enjoy God, they delight in him: Ps. iv. 6, 7, 'Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us; thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time when their corn and wine increased.' His favour is life, his displeasure as death to their soul—'Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled,' Ps. xxx. 7. They look upon God reconciled as the best friend, and God displeas'd as the most dreadful adversary.

(3.) It is their comfort and solace that they shall more perfectly see him and be like him in the other world to which they are tending, when they shall behold their glorified Redeemer, and their own nature united to the Godhead, and their persons admitted into the nearest

intuition and fruition of God they are capable of, and live in the fullest love to him and delight in him : Rom. v. 2, 'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.'

(4.) They are so satisfied with this that their great business is to please God and be accepted with him : 2 Cor. v. 9, 'Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted with him.'

[3.] The properties of this love.

(1.) It is not a speculative, but a practical love. Some please themselves with fancies and airy religion, that consist in lofty strains of devotion, and fellow-like familiarity with God ; but the true love is seen in obedience : John xiv. 15, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments ;' and 1 John v. 3, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.' Our love is a love of duty ; we have such a deep sense of the majesty of God, such an esteem of his favour, that we dare not hazard it by doing anything which may be a breach of our duty, or a grief to his Spirit, or a dishonour to his name.

(2.) It is not a transient, but a fixed love ; not a pang of zeal for the present, but a radicated inclination towards God, or a deep impression left upon the heart, which disposeth it to seek his glory and do his will ; the bent of the mind is to God and heaven. They do not choose him for their portion only, but cleave to him ; all their desire and endeavour is to please, glorify, and enjoy God. Some have good inclinations, but they are as unstable as water, being divided between God and the world, James i. 8 ; but these allow no rival and competitor with God in the soul : Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee.'

(3.) It is not a cold, but a fervent love. We are not to love God after any sort, remissly, coldly, but with the greatest vigour and intension of affection ; so it runneth, Mat. xxii. 37, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.' Many words are heaped together to increase the sense that our love may be a growing love, quickened and heightened to a further degree.

1st. It is God that is loved, not the creature. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, but God with all thy heart. In a moral consideration there are three beings—God, neighbour, self. There is a law that you should love God, and a law that you should love your neighbour ; but where is the positive law that you should love yourselves ? Turn over the scriptures, and you will find nothing of this. There are laws to restrain self-love, none to excite it ; in this we need no teacher ; there is something in our bosoms to prompt us to love ourselves, therefore it is rather supposed than enforced. Paul's adverbs are emphatical, Titus ii. 12, 'that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly.' What is it to live godly, but to esteem, love, reverence, and serve God with all our heart and all our strength ? And to live justly as to our neighbour, what is it but to love our neighbour as ourself ? 'What ye would that men should do unto you, do ye the same to them.' What is it to live soberly as to ourselves, but that our self-love should be moderated, that we should abstain from all unlawful and superfluous pleasures, and use the lawful ones sparingly, as meat, drink, clothing, recreation, unless we would have our souls choked or snared ? Self-

love hath so filled the hearts of men that there is no room, or little room, left for the love of God or our neighbour; but yet there is a measure set how we should love our neighbour, but we cannot over-love God; there all the heart, all the soul, all the might; it is *modus sine modo, mensura sine mensura, et terminus sine termino*; here no excess or hyperbole hath any place.

2dly. The nature of the object loved. God is infinitely and eternally good, therefore we must love God without any exceptions and restrictions. As the object of love is goodness, so the measure of the goodness is the measure of the love: a greater good must be loved more, and a lesser good must be loved less. Somewhat besides God may be good, but it is finite and limited; the creature is a particular good, and our love to it is a particular limited love. God only is a sea of goodness without banks and without bottom; therefore our love to God is not limited by the object, but the narrowness of the faculty. God in this life is seen darkly, and so also loved, for our love doth not exceed our knowledge. That is our defect: God deserveth more.

3dly. God is loved *ut finis*, as the last end, and all other things *ut media ad finem*. Now common reason will tell us that the end is desired without measure, and the means in a certain respect and proportion to the end. As, for instance, when you are sick you send for the physician, the end is health; the medicaments and prescriptions are the means; the end you intend absolutely, but the means you would have used in a just measure, and with respect to the end. Fasting is prescribed in measure, and blood-letting in measure; the potions neither too bitter nor too strong, nor in too great quantity. You do not fear to be made too well, or too healthy, or too strong; this is your end. A man that giveth up himself to a scholar's life, his end is learning, he doth not fear to be too learned; yet too much reading is a weariness to the flesh, and dulleth the mind. There is a greater largeness about the end than about the means. Now God is the chief good, and so the last end; therefore all the heart and all the soul and all the mind. Surely not a cold, but a high and strong love is due to him.

4thly. Because of the wonders of his love towards us. The highest angel doth not love God with such a love as he loveth the meanest saints; and shall we love him coldly and faintly who hath loved us at so high a rate? I will not speak of his love which he showed us in creation, when as yet we had no being: he made us after his own image, and lords of the visible world, with bodies so exactly contrived, and souls endowed with such excellent faculties; but I will speak of the wonders of his love in our redemption, that when we were enemies he sent his Son to die for us. I urge this, I press this; this is enough for my purpose: God so loved the world, so much above the conception or thought of men and angels, that his Son came in the similitude of sinful flesh, and died for us. Now, as one fire kindleth another, so should this love beget a like love in us—'We love him, because he loved us first,' 1 John iv. 19.

(4.) I need scarce add that it must be a superlative love—that God must be loved above all other things; above the creature, above ourselves; not to be respected as an inferior good, nor merely as equal

unto any, but above all, or else we do not at all love him. We cannot love him so much as he deserveth to be loved, for so God only loveth himself; we cannot love him so much as the glorified saints and angels love him, for we are not yet perfect; we do not love him as some eminent saints in flesh, because we, it may be, are novices, or because of our negligence; but we must love him more than any other thing is loved; we must love him above all, and all in and for God, or else we are not sincere: Mat. x. 37, 'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.' Some have a partial half-love to God when they have a greater love to other things; then religion will be an underling, and God's interest least minded. If anything be nearer and dearer to us than God, and the advantages we expect from men are preferred before the conscience of our duty to him, we cannot be upright and faithful to Christ.

Secondly, Why is this made the evidence of our interest in this privilege? Why those that love God, rather than those that believe in him, especially since faith is the immediate fruit of effectual calling?

I answer, 1. The apostle speaketh of the children of God, and children will love their father. What more natural? what more kindly? They are regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit for this end: Gal. iv. 6, 'Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' An heart inclined to God cannot keep away from him.

2. Of children that belong to the gospel dispensation. Now they that love God are the only gospel christians, being deeply possessed with that love which God hath showed to us in Christ: 1 John iv. 19, 'We love him because he loved us first.' Now we see greater reasons of loving God, and are taught a more perfect way of loving God. We know God more, and feel more and taste more of his love: Luke vii. 47, 'Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'

3. This gospel estate we enter into by faith. Now faith is such a believing of God's love to us in Christ as giveth us a lively sense of it in our souls. It is not a bare apprehension, a hearsay-knowledge, but a taste that we have by faith: 1 John iv. 16, 'And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us;' and 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' Whatever of the love of God faith apprehendeth and feeleth, begetteth love again, Gal. v. 6. Knowledge and faith and hope are but the bellows to keep in this holy fire, to work our hearts to love God.

4. This faith is the fruit of effectual calling, which is a great expression of God's love to us who were so unworthy, 2 Tim. i. 9, and passing by thousands and ten thousands who were all as good as we, and we as deep in the common pollution as they, and in outward respects were far better and more considerable, great, wise, and learned: 1 Cor. i. 26, 'Ye see your calling, brethren, that not many wise men after the flesh, not many noble, are called.' And called us to such dignity and honour and blessedness: 1 Peter iii. 9, 'Knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing;' 1 Thes. ii. 12,

‘That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory.’ It was not our will nor our worth that moved him, but his own love. Now this love calleth for love again: God loveth first, best, and most; but yet we should love as we can, love to our utmost; that which was begun in love on God’s part should be accompanied with love on ours.

5. This effectual calling is the fruit of God’s eternal purpose, which he purposed in himself, to save us by Christ. Vocation is actual election, the first eruption and breaking out of his eternal purpose. For as God distinguished us from others who lay in the same polluted mass of mankind by the purpose of his grace before time, so he actually calleth us out from others in time, to be a people to himself; therefore vocation is called election, John xv. 19. Now in God’s free election we have the clearest view of his love and our great obligations to God. And therefore what should more excite our love and gratitude? This was ancient love before we or the world had a being; it was the design God travailed with from all eternity. And who are we, that the thoughts of God should be taken up about us so long ago? It is love purposed and designed; his heart is set upon it to do us good; it was not a thing of chance, but forelied and fore-ordained. If one doth us a kindness that lieth in his way, and when opportunity doth fairly invite him, he is friendly to us; but when he studieth to do us good, it is more obliging. This is a feast long in preparing, to make all things ready for our acceptance, therefore this calleth for love.

6. This purpose is followed with his watchful and powerful providence, guiding and ordering all things, that it may not miscarry and lose its effect, which is as great and sensible an argument of the love of God as can be propounded to us: Job vii. 17, 18, ‘What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? and that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?’ If a prince should form the manners of a beggar’s child, and watch him at every turn, it would be a great condescension. When others are spilt on the great common of the world by a looser providence, they are a peculiar people, who have a special interest in his love and care, and his charge. Now the scripture delighteth in suit qualifications and privileges: Ps. xxxi. 14, ‘I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my God;’ Isa. lviii. 13, 14, ‘If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, not finding thine own pleasure, not speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it;’ Ps. xci. 1, ‘He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.’ So here, God’s love, expressed in his mindfulness and vigilancy over our affairs, should excite our love to him again, and our love will be highly recompensed by his care and mindfulness of us.

7. These believers and called ones are considered as afflicted, and his purpose is to arm them against the bitterness of the cross. Nothing

so fit for this use as love; if we did love God, the burden of afflictions would be light and easy to be borne, because it is from God it cometh, John xviii. 11. Love is the fittest grace to bring the heart to submit to God. Love God once, and nothing that he saith or doth will be unacceptable to you; his commands will not be grievous, nor his providences grievous; our desires will be after him when his hand is most smart and heavy upon us; and when sense representeth him as an enemy, yet we cannot keep off from him: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, we have waited for thee: the desire of our soul is unto thee, and to the remembrance of thy name.'

8. Not only with ordinary afflictions, but troubles for their fidelity to Christ; love will endure much for God, as well as receive much from him: James i. 12, 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptations; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which he hath promised to them that love him.' Mark, it is not said to them that fear him or trust in him, but them that love him; because it is love that maketh us hold out in temptations, love that engageth us to zeal and constancy, that overcometh all difficulties and oppositions for God's sake. *Nihil est quod non tolerat, qui perfecte diligit*; he that loveth much, will suffer much. He cordially adhereth to God with courage and resolution of mind, and is not daunted with sufferings: Cant. viii. 7, 'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.' Love is not bribed nor quenched. Where love prevaileth upon the heart, we shall esteem nothing too much or too dear to be parted with for God's sake. As in these troubles God's love is best known and discovered to us, so our love to God is best known and discovered also; the more we love God, the more sensible do we find it, and are persuaded that all things shall work together for good; your title is clearer, experience greater: 1 Cor. viii. 3, 'If any man love God, the same is known of him;' that is, owned by him in the course of his providence. If we are sanctified to God, all things would be sanctified to us. It is otherwise with hypocrites: if God endow them with gifts, they prove a snare to them; but if you love God above all, count his favour your happiness, and make pleasing of God your constant work, and resolve to obey him at the dearest rates, you will soon find this testimony of God's love; then all the influences of his eternal love and grace shall be made out to you, and his external providence doth help you on in the way to heaven; for a man that loveth God as his chief good shall never be a loser by him.

9. This is a sure and sensible note of effectual calling; for as sincere faith is the immediate fruit of it, so true faith cannot be severed from love. This is that which maketh us saints indeed; but without it, whatever gifts and parts we have, whatever knowledge and utterance, we are nothing, 1 Cor. xiii. 1-3. There may be many convictions, and purposes, and wishes, and good meanings in those who are yet but under a common work; but till there be a thorough fixed bent of heart towards God, as our last end and chief good, we have not a sure evidence of grace, or that our calling home to God is accomplished. Many a thought there is of the goodness of God, the necessity of a saviour, the love of Christ, and the joys of heaven; yet after all this, the heart

may be unrenewed and unsanctified till this addictedness and devotedness to God; for it is not every wish or minding of Christ, but a hearty, sincere affection, which is required of us as to our title: Eph. vi. 24, 'Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;' not for a time, not with an ineffectual love, or upon some foreign motives, but have this habitual love which constituteth the new heart. Well then, this is a sure mark of one that hath interest in the love of God, and one of those marks which is best known to the person that hath it; for love to Christ cannot be well hidden, but will be easily discerned.

Use, To inform us that these are for the present excepted out of this privilege that do not sincerely love God, and love him above all.

They are of two sorts—

1. Some have a weak and imperfect motion of their wills—a wish, a faint desire to please God in all, and above all things; but being overcome by their own lusts, they do not simply and absolutely desire it, and had rather please their fleshly lusts than please God; at least the event doth so declare it. You give God nothing, if you do not give him all the heart. We are so to love God and seek his glory and do his will when it is cross to our carnal interest; his favour must be valued as our happiness, and the pleasing of him made our greatest work; and for his sake we must be content to suffer anything, though never so hard and difficult and contrary to our nature. Let not such say they love God that cannot deny a lust for him, nor will not for his sake venture the loss of anything that is dear to them, either goods, or liberty, or favour of men, or preferment, or credit. Pilate was loth to venture the Jews' displeasure; the Gadarenes would part with Christ rather than their swine; surely if we put the love of God to hazard upon light occasions, we do not love him, nor count his favour our supreme happiness.

2. Others have a deliberate resolution, and seem for the present absolutely and seriously to please God in all things, and keep his commandments; but they do not verify it in their conversations. Their purposes and resolutions are not dissembled for the present, but yet soon changed; they neither keep the commandments of God nor study to please him; there is a moral sincerity in them, but not a supernatural sincerity. Wherein differ they? The moral sincerity is a dictate of conscience, but the supernatural sincerity is a fruit of heart-changing grace. What shall we do, then? Beg such a heart of God: Deut. v. 29, 'Oh that there were such a heart within them, that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always.' God showeth what we should do; convinced conscience showeth what purposes and resolutions we should make, but a converted heart is only able to keep them. That must be sought of God, and all good means must be used that these purposes that we conceive to be sincere may be found to be so. And God will not fail the striving and endeavouring soul, that seeketh to persevere in its holy will and purpose to obey and please God; but by internal grace and external providence will help us onward in our course to heaven. But if we depend upon our purposes and resolutions made in solemn duties, with a clear conscience, and with a deliberate and seemingly resolved will, without those subsequent

endeavours which evidence they come from a renewed heart, alas ! they will soon come to nothing.

Use 2. To exhort us to the love of God. The more you love him your title is the clearer, experience greater, hopes of eternal life stronger.

1. Consider these two things—God is lovely in himself, and hath loved us.

[1.] That God is lovely in himself, because of his wisdom and greatness, as well as because of his benignity. We are, or may be, soon persuaded that we ought to love him as the fountain of all goodness ; but the other attributes should attract and draw our hearts also. I shall add this argument to all the rest : Whatever engageth us to adhere to God as an all-sufficient portion, that is certainly a motive of our love ; for love is nothing else but a delightful adhesion to God. Now his infinitely glorious essence, dominion, and power, engage us to adhere to him ; therefore we must press you to consider the excellency of his nature, evidenced in the absolute dominion of his providence and holiness of his laws. We would have you consider neither with the exclusion of the other ; not his greatness without his goodness, nor his benignity and goodness without his greatness, neither of both without his holiness ; all maketh our love more strong and regular.

[2.] He hath loved us in what he hath done already, in what he hath prepared for us.

(1.) In what he hath done already in Christ, which showeth that God is love: John iii. 16, ‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son ;’ 1 John iv. 10, ‘Herein is love, not that we loved God, but he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.’

(2.) In what he will do. He hath greater benefits to give us than what he hath already given : James ii. 5, ‘God hath chosen the poor of the world, rich in faith, and heirs of a kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him ;’ not to learned, rich benefactors, but to them that love him, and are willing to do and suffer anything for his sake : 1 Peter ii. 9, ‘But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people ; that you should show forth the praise of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.’

2. That love runneth a-wasting on the creature. That is ruinous and destructive, this conduces to our good ; if we suffer loss here, it will be recompensed by a greater benefit.

I come now to the last clause—*Who are called according to purpose.*

Doct. The effectually called are those that love God, and are beloved by him.

Let me speak—

1. Of the several kinds of calling.
2. The properties of effectual calling.
3. The ends of it.

First, Let us distinguish the several kinds of calling—

1. There is a twofold calling—proper and improper.

[1.] The improper call is the general and common invitation of all men in the world, by the works of creation and providence, by all which God inviteth men to seek after him. The work of creation, Acts xvii. 27. All God’s works have a tongue, and a voice proclaiming

and crying up an infinite and eternal power, who is the fountain of our being and happiness; so Rom. i. 20, 'The invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood from the things which are made;' Ps. xix. 1, 'The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork.' No man can look seriously upon the works of creation, but this thought will arise in his mind, that all this was made by a powerful, wise, and good God. He telleth us, ver. 3, 'There is no speech and language where their voice is not heard;' though it be not an articulate, yet it is a very intelligible voice. They in effect speak to every nation in their own language, that there is an eternal God, who must be sought after and worshipped and served. And as the works of creation, so the works of providence, whether for good or evil. Good: Acts xiv. 17, 'Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good.' The comfortable passages of providence are a pregnant, full, and clear testimony that the government of the world is in the hands of a good God. So afflictive providences; some of God's works have a louder and more distinct voice than others: Micah vi. 9, 'The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name; hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it;' or if you suppose that concerneth the church, take Rom. i. 18, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.' God doth discipline and instruct the world by his judgments, that he is holy, just, and true. God's works speak to us, only we must take heed of a deaf ear; non-attentiveness to God's providence made way for the prevalency of atheism and idolatry in the world. There are two propositions, that, if well minded and improved, would preserve a lively remembrance of God in the hearts of men—that all good cometh from God: James i. 17, 'Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights;'—and all evil from God: Amos iii. 6, 'Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?' and that any notable effect in either kind is a sign and witness of an invisible power. If men would not look upon all things that befall them as mere chances, they could not sleep so securely in their sins; but God would have a greater testimony in every man's bosom that he hath a care of human affairs, and is a rewarder of such as please him, and an avenger of such as do offend him. The question about this improper calling is, What is the use of it? or whether it be sufficient to salvation?

(1.) Though the works of creation and providence reveal a God, yet these natural apostles, sun, moon, and stars, say nothing of Christ, and there is salvation in no other, Acts iv. 12. They did teach the world that there is a God, and that this God must be served, and will be terrible to those that serve him not; and possibly that God was placable, or willing to be appeased, because of the continuance of the creation, and the manifold mercies we lost or forfeited by our apostasy and defection from him. The apostle saith it is an invitation to repentance, Rom. ii. 4. Yet the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Son of God, and of redemption purchased to lost sinners through him, is a mystery which the greatest wits in the world could not understand but by God's revealing it in his word.

(2.) The use of this call to those that have no other, but barely it, is to leave men without excuse, Rom. i. 20; and that it might prevail to work some restraint of sin, and to promote some external reformation in the world, for the good of mankind, Rom. ii. 14.

(3.) Those who have a louder call in the word are the more obliged to regard this call and invitation by the works of God's creation and providence. The call by the word is more perfect and more pressing, and suited more to work upon our thoughts, the object being more clearly and fully propounded to us. Yet this latter call is not privative, but accumulative; it doth not null the duty of the former call, or make it wholly useless to us, but helps us to interpret it the better, and we need all helps. Faith doth not withdraw itself from natural knowledge, and make it useless to us. Though we are to exercise ourselves in the law of God day and night, yet we must not overlook the works of creation and providence, and whilst we study his word, neglect God's works; for they are a confirmation of our faith, and a great occasional help to our love, as appeareth by the instructions which the holy men of God gather thence; witness David's night meditation, Ps. viii., 'Thy moon and thy stars;' and his morning meditation, Ps. xix., 'The heavens declare the glory of God.' The glories of God which we read of in the word are visible in the creation; and though David preferreth the book of scripture, yet he doth not lay aside the book of nature. We must use the world as a glass, wherein to see the glory of God. He hath not the heart of a man in him who is not stricken with admiration at the sight of these things—the glory of the heavenly bodies, and the wonderful variety of all creatures; and besides, there is none so good, but he needeth the mercy and direction of God to invite him to a more frequent remembrance of him. How happy are they that have such a God for their God! How miserable they that make him their judge and avenger!

[2.] The proper calling is the voice of God in the word of his grace inviting sinners to Christ. This is called distinctly his calling: Eph. i. 18, 'That ye may know what is the hope of his calling;' and the 'high calling of God in Jesus Christ,' Phil. iii. 14; and again, 'That our God would count you worthy of his calling,' 2 Thes. i. 11; and explained, 1 Cor. i. 9, 'Faithful is he which hath called you into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.' Now this is a more close and full discovery of God than is to be found elsewhere; God calleth and inviteth some by the creatures only, others by his grace in Christ.

But this being calling most properly taken, why is it not vouchsafed to all? I answer—

(1.) God is not obliged to send the gospel to any; it is his free dispensation: Rom. xi. 35, 'Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?' God doth not send the gospel by necessity of nature, or any pre-obligation on the creature's part, but merely of his own grace, which worketh most freely, and sendeth it where it pleaseth him.

(2.) All have more knowledge of God by nature than they make good use of: Rom. i. 21, 'When they knew God, they glorified him not as God.' And till men improve a lower dispensation, why should

they be trusted with a higher? If a vessel will not hold water, you will not trust wine, or any more precious liquor in it.

2. God's gracious invitation of lost sinners to Christ, which properly is his calling them, is either external or internal; external by the word, internal by his Spirit.

[1.] External, by the commands and promises of the word, requiring such duties from them, and assuring them of such blessings upon obedience. Thus Wisdom's maidens are sent forth to invite guests to her palace, Prov. iv. 2; and the king's servants to call them to the marriage-feast, Mat. xxii. 9; and so far they prevail in their message, that many present themselves. God would not leave us to a book, but hath appointed a living ministry, 2 Cor. vi. 10.

[2.] Internal, not only by the word, but by his Spirit, and the checks of their own conscience, which is a nearer approach of his grace and power to us. By the motions of his Spirit; how else could it be said, Gen. vi. 3, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man'? and Acts vii. 51, 'Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost'? And also by their consciences soliciting them to the performance of their duty, and challenging them for the neglect of it. It is natural duty: Rom. ii. 14, 15, 'The Gentiles do by nature the things contained in the law; these, having not the law, are a law to themselves, which show the works of the law written in their hearts; their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts in the meanwhile accusing or excusing one another.' And for acceptance of the gospel-covenant: 1 John iii. 20, 21, 'If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things; if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.'

3. This external and internal calling may be ineffectual or effectual.

[1.] The ineffectual call consists in the bare tender and offer of grace, but is not entertained. God may knock at the door of the heart that doth not open to him; knock by the word, knock by the motions of the Spirit and checks of conscience; so, 'many are called, but few are chosen,' Mat. xxii. 14. There is not the fruit of election, nor are these the called according to purpose.

[2.] The effectual call is when God changeth the heart, and bringeth it home to himself by Jesus Christ. We are not only invited to Christ, but come to him by the strength and power of his own grace: John vi. 44, 'No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.' When we yield to the call; as Paul, who was extraordinarily called, saith, Acts xxvi. 19, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision;' we have his consent and resignation recorded: Acts ix. 6, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' He yieldeth up the keys of his heart, that Christ may come and take possession. In an ordinary call: 2 Cor. viii. 5, 'They first gave themselves to the Lord;' it is in other places expressed by our receiving or embracing Christ, John i. 12, both are implied—our thankful accepting of Christ, and our giving up ourselves to him; they both go together, and where the one is, the other is also. In every covenant there is *ratio dati, et accepti*, something given and something required: Christ and his benefits, and what we have, are, and do, both are an answer to God's call.

Secondly, The properties of effectual calling.

1. It is a holy calling: 2 Tim. i. 9, 'Who hath called us with an holy calling;' and it is also a heavenly calling: Heb. iii. 1, 'Partakers of the heavenly calling:' because we are called to duties and privileges, these must not be severed; some are forward to the privileges of the calling, but backward to the duties thereof. A good christian must mind both, the privileges to take him off from the false happiness, and the duties that he may return to his obedience to God; the one is the way and means to come to the other; for it is said, he hath 'called us to glory and virtue,' 2 Peter i. 3; meaning by glory, eternal life, and by virtue, grace and holiness. In the way that God offereth it we embrace it; we heartily consent to seek after eternal glory in the way of faith and holiness; and so by it the heart is turned by Christ from the creature to God, from sin to holiness.

Thirdly, The ends of effectual calling, both on God's part and the creature's.

1. On God's part, that God may show his wisdom, power, and goodness.

[1.] His wisdom is seen partly in the way and means that God taketh to convert sinners to himself. There is a sweet contemplation and mixture of wisdom and power; there is no violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor the liberty of second causes taken away, and yet the effect is obtained. The proposal of good to the understanding and will, by the secret power of the Lord's grace, is made effectual; and at the same time we are taught and drawn: John vi. 44, 45, 'No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him; as it is written in the prophets, They shall all be taught of God; every man therefore that hath heard, and learned of the Father, cometh to me.' There is opening blind eyes, and turning a hard heart, Acts xxvi. 18. He worketh strongly like himself, sweetly with respect to us, that he may not oppress the liberty of our faculties; and the convert, at the same time, is made willing by his own choice, and effectually cured by God's grace; so that Christ cometh conqueringly into the heart, and yet not by force, but by consent. We are transformed, but so as we prove what the good and acceptable will of the Lord is, Rom. xii. 2. The power of God and the liberty of man do sweetly consist together; and we have at the same time a new heart and a free spirit, and the powerful efficacy of his grace doth not destroy the consent and good liking of the sinner. The will is moved, and also changed and renewed. In the persuasive and moral way of working, God taketh the most likely course to gain the heart of man, discovering himself to us as a God of kindness and mercy, ready to pardon and forgive: Ps. cxxx. 4, 'But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;' for guilty creatures would stand aloof off from a condemning God. No, God hath laid the foundation of the offer of his grace in the highest demonstration of his love and goodness that ever could come into the ears of man to hear, or could enter into the heart of man to conceive—viz., in giving his Son to die for a sinful world: 2 Cor. v. 19, 20, 'To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we

pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.' And not only in the offers of pardon, but eternal life and blessedness, so infinitely beyond the false happiness that our carnal self-love inclineth us unto, that it is a shame and disgrace to our reason to think that these things are worthy to be compared in any serious debate, or that all the pleasures and honours and profits we dote upon should come in competition with that blessed immortality and life which is brought to light in the gospel, 2 Tim. i. 10. And powerful grace goeth along with all this, to make it effectual, partly in the time of conversion, taking us in our month, and that season which is fittest for the glory of his grace. Some are called in the morning, some at noon, some in the evening of their age; as Mat. xx. 3-6, &c., some were hired to go into the vineyard at the third, some the ninth, some the eleventh hour. That any believe in Christ at all is mercy; that some believe in him sooner, some later, is the Lord's wise ordering. He that is called betimes may consider God's goodness, which broke out so early, before he longer provoked him, and contracted a habit of evil customs, and that God instructed him betimes to take heed of sin, and spending his fresh and flowery youth in the service of the devil; whereas, otherwise, lost days and months and years would have been a perpetual grief to him. He that is called at the latter end of his days, having so many sins upon him, may be quickened to glorify God, that he would not refuse him at last, nor despise him for all his rebellions, nor remember against him the sins of his youth, that a long and an old enemy should be taken into favour. God knoweth how best to gain upon every heart. And partly in the means and occasions which God useth to convert us. It is many times dispensed in a contrary way to human expectation: Paul when pursuing the people of God, some when scoffing and mocking, at least when they dreamt of no such matter. But of that hereafter.

[2.] In this effectual calling God showeth forth his love and grace.

(1.) That the rise of all was his elective love. None are in time effectually called but those that before all time were chosen to life; for it is said here, 'called according to purpose.' From all eternity he had a purpose to be thus gracious to us. Those that were in the corrupt mass of mankind are distinguished from others in his eternal purpose before the foundations of the world, and were in time called out from others; and vocation is but election broken out, therefore called election. Trace the stream till you find the well-head, and you will discern that you can ascribe your calling to nothing else, but 'even so, Father, because it pleased thee,' Mat. xi. 26. God before time elected us; in the fulness of time Christ gave a ransom to provoked justice for us; and in due time the effects of God's eternal love and Christ's purchase are applied, and so we come to have a right to the blessedness we were chosen unto and was purchased for us. Oh! admire this grace!

(2.) God needed us not; he had an only Son to delight in, Prov. viii. 31; millions of angels to serve him, Dan. vii. 10. What loss would it be to him if the world of mankind had been destroyed? Acts xvii. 25, 'God is not worshipped with men's hands, as if he needed anything.' No, to the fulness of his happiness nothing can be added.

(3.) He was highly provoked and offended by us, for we had cast off the mercies of our creation, and from his creatures were become his rebels. And then, 'in due time Christ died for the ungodly,' Rom. v. 6; and upon his death and propitiation is the offer grounded. Sinners are called to repentance, Mat. ix. 13.

(4.) Great was our misery we fell into by reason of sin: Eph. ii. 3, 'Children of wrath.' Indeed we were senseless of our misery, careless of our remedy, loth to come out of that wretched estate into which we had plunged ourselves: John iii. 19, 'And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.' Oh! what mercy was this! that God had such pity and compassion upon us, when we had none upon ourselves. How freely then did he love us! How powerful did he work upon us! calling and conquering, ruling and overruling all matters wherein we were concerned, that he might convert us to himself.

(5.) That he should call us who were so inconsiderable, when others were left to perish in sins: 1 Cor. i. 26, 'Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh are called.' When so many were passed by who are before us in outward respects, learned, great, and wise, and God showed mercy to us,—we were as deep in the common pollution as they, and for many natural abilities and perfections came far short of them,—surely this is merely the love and good pleasure of God.

(6.) This calling bringeth us into such an estate as intituleth us to the peculiar and special protection of God. We are his charge, that he may guide all things about us for his own glory and our good. This is intimated in the text. When once you believe God's offers, and yield hearty obedience to them, you are a peculiar people. Why? Because called out of darkness into his marvellous light, 1 Peter ii. 9. All his creatures are the work of his hands, and under the disposal of his providence; but you have a special propriety and peculiar interest in his love and care, whom he will maintain, and never forsake.

(7.) By this calling you are interested in his kingdom and glory to be had hereafter; for it is said, 1 Peter iii. 9, 'You are called to inherit a blessing;' that is, a blessedness, which consists in the clear vision and full fruition of God. Surely they that were naturally under the curse should be more apprehensive of this great privilege.

[3.] It is an act of power: Rom. iv. 17, 'Even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.' God only can work so great a change by his creating power, which spake all things out of nothing. Certainly, he that can do what he will both in heaven and in earth, Ps. cxxxv. 3, can subdue the heart of man when he pleaseth. The will of man, though never so deeply engaged in a course of sin and wickedness, cannot resist it, but yieldeth to it: Ps. cx. 3, 'They shall be a willing people in the day of thy power;' of graceless they become gracious, of unwilling, willing. And God showeth more power in this than in his other works, for here is a principle of resistance; as to break a skittish horse is more than to roll a stone.

2. The ends with respect to man. It is a great mercy, this external, internal, and effectual calling, take it all together.

[1.] It giveth us notice of the remedy provided for us by the propitiation of Christ, and the covenant founded thereupon. Light is come into the world, John iii. 19—a sure way to direct us to true happiness; without it the world had been a dark dungeon, wherein guilty malefactors are for a while permitted to live.

[2.] This calling bringeth home this grace to us, and layeth it at our doors, and leaves it upou our choice; if we will accept it, well and good: Acts xiii. 26, 'To you is the word of salvation sent.' What say you to it? God hath sent a gracious message to you in particular, will you accept or refuse? And Acts iii. 20; 'And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you.' It doth excite us in particular to look after the remedy of our lapsed estate.

[3.] This calling is our warrant, plea, and claim, which giveth us leave to apply these privileges, if we consent to the duties required; as the apostle saith of an office, so it is true of the dignity of being christians, which is a spiritual priesthood: Heb. v. 4, 'And no man taketh this honour upon himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.' For a man to take or receive to himself honour and privilege which doth not belong to him, is usurpation, which will succeed ill with him; but by calling we have God's consent; or as those, Mat. xx. 7, 'Why stand ye here idle all the day? No man hath hired us.' Before we can with any tolerable satisfaction to conscience assume such great privileges, we must produce our warrant. It was encouragement to the blind man to come near to Christ, 'Arise, the Master calleth thee,' Mark x. 49. The same hath the trembling sinner: the Master calleth thee, and wilt thou draw back?

[4.] The internal effectual call giveth us a heart to come to Christ; for the power of God disposeth us to accept of his offer, and not only encourageth, but inclineth us to come to him; for his calling is sanctifying and changing the heart: Rom. ix. 25, 'I will call them my people which were not my people;' that is, make them to be so.

Use 1. Hearken to this calling.

1. From the benefit. Doth God call thee to thy loss? or do thee any wrong when he disturbeth thy sleep in sin, and invites thee to partake of the riches of his grace in Christ? No, he calls thee to the greatest happiness thou art capable of: 2 Thes. ii. 14, 'He hath called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.' God seeketh to advance you to the greatest honour can be put upon mankind; it is a blessed estate: 1 Peter v. 10, 'He hath called you to his eternal glory by Jesus Christ;' that glorious happiness for ever.

2. The great misery, if we refuse this call. 'None of those that were bidden shall taste of my supper,' Luke xiv. 24. They are not only excluded from happiness, but are under extreme wrath and misery: Prov. i. 24–26, 'Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, I will also laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.'

Use 2. Is to press you to make your calling and election sure, 2 Peter

i. 10. It cannot be more sure than it is in itself, but it may be more sure to us. This may be known by these signs—

1. Doth the word of God come to you with power, so as to produce its effect? It is a sign of election when the gospel cometh to us not in word only, 2 Thes. i. 4, 5. The Spirit accompanieth it, that this calling may have its effect, and convert you to God.

2. By your obedience to this call; attendancy, choice, and pursuit. [1.] A deliberate weighing, in order to choice: Acts xvi. 14, 'The Lord opened the heart of Lydia, so that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.' A deep and serious consideration of the offers of pardon and life by Christ, this maketh way for other things: Mat. xiii. 19, 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart,' &c.; Mat. xxii. 5, 'But they made light of it,' &c. Non-attendancy is the bane of the far greatest part of the world; a flash of lightning cometh into their minds, and is soon gone. [2.] A thorough choice; as Lydia is commended for attending, so Mary for choosing: Luke x. 42, 'But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.' [3.] A constant and earnest pursuit. A choice made in a sudden pang and humour may be as soon retracted: Phil. iii. 12, 'Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.' Seeking these things in the first place, Mat. vi. 33. That pursuit which is the fruit of calling must be speedy: Gal. i. 15, 16, 'But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood,' &c. The call of God must be obeyed without delay: Heb. iii. 7, 8, 'Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness.' The case is uncertain, we know not whether we shall ever get again such an offer; and our indisposition is the greater. And then it must be earnest: Phil. iii. 14, 'I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' It must be our scope and business, and accompanied with self-denial and dependence on God: Heb. xi. 8, 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went. [4.] By walking worthy of it: Eph. iv. 1, 'I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called;' 1 Thes. ii. 12, 'That ye walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.' That ye behave yourselves so as may beseeem the duties and hopes of christians—more holy, more heavenly. God is a holy God, and the happiness he hath called you unto a glorious estate; labour to get the heavenly mind and holy conversation; be deeply possessed with God's love in calling you, that you may love him again; it is not our will nor our worth, therefore it could not begin with us. (1.) Not our will. Besides a simple want of good-will, there is in us a carelessness—yea, an averseness, in closing with his gracious offers, Mat. xxiii. 37. If it did

depend on the choice of our will, we would refuse to be gathered, and would live and die estranged from God; when all things are ready, we are not ready. (2.) Not our worth. There is nothing in the elect more than in the reprobate to move God to bestow this blessing on us—yea, much why he should abhor us, Ezek. xvi. 6. Only, where sin abounded grace did much more abound, Rom. v. 20. The worthiest have no claim but grace.

We come now to the last clause—*To them who are the called according to his purpose.* The limiting term of this calling must be now considered—‘According to purpose.’ Surely it is not meant of our good purpose and resolution to turn to God, which is none at all, till God work it in us; and calling is God’s act, and therefore it is meant of his purpose. And presently his foreknowledge and predestination is spoken of: nothing plainer can be said to signify God’s purpose, which he purposed in himself. But if God’s purpose be meant, some think it is only his purpose concerning the way of salvation, or the saving of mankind by Christ, or the gospel-way: Eph. i. 9, ‘Having made known the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in himself;’ and Eph. iii. 11, ‘According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ The gospel was firmly resolved upon by God according to his eternal purpose. But this is not all, the word relateth to a degree concerning those persons in particular whom he intended to save by Christ. His revealed will holdeth forth the way of our duty, or the course agreed upon and purposed by him; but there are some persons whom he determineth to call to grace and glory. The word is often elsewhere applied to persons: 2 Tim. i. 9, ‘Who hath called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace;’ and Rom. ix. 11, ‘That the purpose of God according to election might stand;’ and Eph. i. 11, ‘In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the counsel of his own will;’ and so it suiteth with the text, which applieth this to persons. Three words are here used—purpose, foreknowledge, and predestination. Because there is wisdom in this decree, therefore it is called foreknowledge; because there is an ordination of means to a certain end, therefore it is called predestination; because it is fixed and unchangeable, therefore it is called purpose.

Many notes might be observed in this clause.

1. We are beholding to God’s eternal election and purpose for all the good that we get by affliction and other providences; for God’s purpose is the supreme reason assigned in the description of the persons who have an interest in this privilege. We love God because we believe his goodness in Christ; we believe his goodness in Christ because he hath called us; and he hath called us because of his eternal purpose; and thence it is that all this good cometh to us.

2. The purpose of God concerning our eternal salvation is manifested in our being called: that is the first eruption of God’s elective love; we are in the dark before.

3. Those that continue in their final unbelief and impenitency are called only by the bye; the elect, with a purpose to save them. God raineth on the rocks as well as on the new-mown grass.

But I will content myself with one point—

That there are certain persons before all time elected of God according to his mere good pleasure and grace, that in time they may be effectually called and saved.

For some persons here are said to be the called according to purpose. Let me explain, and then confirm it.

1. The object of this purpose are certain definite and individual persons ; Jacob, not Esau ; Peter, not Judas ; man by man, or by head and poll they are known to God, 2 Tim. ii. 19. Put into the hands of Christ, that he may redeem them, and give an account of them at the last day : John xvii. 6, ' I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world ; thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word ; ' John vi. 40, ' And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ' And they do all believe, and are infallibly converted : John vi. 37, ' All that the Father giveth me shall come to me ; and him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast off. '

2. The reason of this purpose is only the Lord's grace and good pleasure. Christ, debating the matter, giveth no other account of the gospel's being hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes, but this only : Mat. xi. 25, ' Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight. ' The cause is only God's pleasure ; the reason of this can be found nowhere else, but only in the bosom of God himself. There is nothing before, or above, or without his purpose, as the first cause of all that good which cometh to us ; he doth not foresee any merit or motive in us ; as Christ telleth his disciples, John xv. 10, ' I have chosen you, you have not chosen me ; ' his choice is antecedent to ours. The persons that are singled out to be objects of this special grace were a part of lost mankind, by nature the same that others are, some of the world that lay in wickedness ; but when God had all Adam's posterity under the prospect of his all-seeing eye, he chose some, and passed by others ; he found all guilty, but doth not punish all, but spare some ; and found nothing in the creature to cast the balance of his choice, or to determine it to one more than to another. Others were as eligible as they, God created them all ; all were alike obnoxious to him. The prophet argueth, Mal. i. 2, ' Was not Esau Jacob's brother ? ' It was grace alone did put the difference.

3. This purpose noteth the sure and powerful efficacy of this grace. God will not be disappointed in his purpose, for there is nothing that can be imagined that should occasion the alteration of it. Men are forced to alter their purposes, either out of a natural levity that is in them, or some impediment falleth out which they foresaw not, or through defect of power they cannot do what they intend to do ; but none of these things are in God, no levity and instability, for he is Jehovah that changeth not, Mal. iii. 6. And the apostle speaketh of the immutability of his counsel. God's purpose is both an act of his understanding, and therefore called counsel, and also his will, therefore called his decree ; and therefore being once set, it cannot be altered or revoked ; no cause of revocation can be imagined either in God or out of God ; not in God, nothing can fall out but what God foresaw at first ; nor can be frustrated for any defect of power, for he is almighty,

angels, devils, and men being subject to him as the supreme and universal Lord.

4. This grace is brought about in a way most convenient for the honour of God and the good of the creature: in a way of faith and holiness. Faith: John iii. 16, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Holiness: Eph. i. 4, 'According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.' Now faith is his gift: Eph. ii. 8, 'We are saved by grace through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.' And holiness is wrought in us by the Spirit of sanctification, and that with a respect to his election: 2 Thes. ii. 13, 'He hath chosen you to salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.' God did not choose us because he did foresee that we should be believers, or would be holy, but that we might believe, and might be holy; he could not foresee any faith or holiness in us but what was the fruit of his own grace and elective love to us; all is still according to his purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ before the world began. Faith and holiness is the way and means of bringing about his purpose, not the foreseen cause and reason, or the end; the fruit of it, not the motive to induce God to show us mercy.

5. To promote this faith and holiness, and to preserve them till their glorified estate, God's providence about them is very remarkable.

[1.] He contriveth means to bring them into the world. Many of their parents may be wicked, and deserve to be cut off for their sins, but because there is a blessing in some of the clusters, they are not destroyed. Many times a slip may be taken from an ill stock, and grafted into the tree of life; though the grace of the covenant runneth most kindly in the channel of the covenant—'How much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive-tree?' Rom. xi. 24. But yet God will show the liberty of his counsels, and choose some out of families very opposite to his ways; and therefore many wicked men are spared, that they may be a means to bring into the world those that afterwards shall believe: Ahaz is let alone to beget Hezekiah, and a wicked Ammon Josiah; and there was one in the house of Jeroboam who made Israel to sin, one child only, in whom was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, 1 Kings xiv. 13, a godly young man, that had in his heart the true seeds of religion.

[2.] When they are born, God hath a special care of them, that they may not die in their unregenerate condition; from the womb the decree beginneth to take place and be put in act: Gal. i. 15, 'It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace;' Jer. i. 5, 'When thou camest out of the womb, I knew thee.' He took special notice that that child was a vessel of mercy, and to be employed for his glory, and used for such and such purposes as he had designed themselves unto; to fit them with such a constitution of body and mind, as might best serve for that use. If a man would trace the progress of providence, he would plainly see that

God still hath been pursuing his choice; and that that antecedent love, which is the fountain of all our mercies, is it which rocked you in your cradles, suckled you at your mother's breast, trained you up, and took care of your non-age, visited you with his early mercies, disposed of several providences for your safety and preservation. It is said in heaven—'We shall know as we are known,' 1 Cor. xiii. 12; compare Gal. iv. 9, 'But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God.' Then we shall understand how many several circumstances concurred to bring us home to God, and how the goodness of God hath gone along with you from time to time, to preserve you till the time of grace was come, rescued you in imminent dangers, when the thread of your life was likely to be fretted asunder.

[3.] The dispensation of means, and the directing of means to such a place and people, where, and among whom, the course of your life fell. Not only the doctrine, but the journeys of the apostles were ordered by the Spirit: Acts xvi. 7, 'They assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not;' Acts xiii. 26, 'To you is this word of salvation sent;' not brought by us, but sent by God; not only in regard of his institution, but providential direction. Certainly there is a special providence goeth along with ordinauces, and they are ordered and directed with respect to God's elective love; he sendeth, furnisheth, continueth able instruments: Acts xviii. 10, 'I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee, for I have much people in this city.' Wherever God lighteth a candle, he hath some lost groat to seek. He had much people belonging to his election in Corinth. God doth not say, Because *there are* much people (though it is good casting out the net where there is store of fish), but, *I have* much people. He understandeth not the Corinthians which were converted already; so there were few or none at that time in Corinth, but to be converted. They were God's people, elected and redeemed by him, though as yet wallowing in their sins. Therefore the first moving-cause of all this business was the election of God, or his purpose to call them; the persons never thought of seeking means for themselves, and have not a heart to entertain them for a long time; but God is at work for their good, when they intended no good to themselves. We read of saints in Nero's household, Phil. iv. 22. Who would look for saints in the family of so bloody a persecutor? yet the gospel could find its way thither, and seize on some of his menial servants; for God had strange ways and methods to convert those that belong to his grace. I cannot say to them, but to some others, Christ was made known to them by Paul's defence: 2 Tim. iv. 17, 'Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear.'

[4.] In blessing the means, quite besides the purpose and intention of the parties that receive benefit by them, as appeareth by the circumstances of their conversion and first acceptance of Christ; many times they come where they may hear of God and Christ, with careless and slight spirits, or drop in by chance, as Paul's infidel: 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25, 'There cometh in one that believeth not.' How many do thus stumble upon grace unawares to themselves, not minding or desiring any such matter; but God directeth a serious word that pierceth into their very

hearts. Sometimes God calleth them, when opposing and persecuting, as Paul, Acts ix., *Vergerius*. Many, when they came to scoff, have felt the mighty power and majesty of God in his ordinances; and what begun with scoffing ended in a more serious work: Isa. lvii. 18, 'He went on frowardly in the way of his own heart: I have seen his ways, and I will heal him.' The officers that came to attack Christ, John vii. 46, said, 'Never man spake like this man.' Sometimes men have been loth to come, drawn with much importunity against their inclination and prejudices: John i. 46, 'Can any good come out of Nazareth?' saith Nathanael to Philip. 'Come and see;' and there he met with Christ. The Galileans were a ruder part of the Jews, a gross and blockish sort of people. It was generally conceived no prophet was of that country where Jonah was; thus Nathanael held off out of a prejudicate opinion. Many of these things which come as it were by chance to us, and without our foresight, are well foreseen and wisely ordered by God; as Augustine was carried besides his purpose, that God's purpose might come to pass in the conversion of Firmus a Manichee.

[5.] In suiting all his dealings with them, so after conversion, that they may be kept blameless to his heavenly kingdom, John x. 3. Christ calleth his sheep by name; knoweth all his flock particularly; taketh notice of all their persons and conditions; hath a special affection to them and care of them; so Ps. i. 6, 'The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous;' knoweth their necessities, straits, hopes, burdens, and temptations. His business in heaven is to order his providence for their good, 2 Chron. xvi. 9; sometimes giveth seasonable correction: Ps. cxix. 75, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me;' 1 Peter i. 6, 'Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness;' sometimes to lessen the affliction or remove it: Ps. cxxv. 3, 'For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands to iniquity;' and 1 Cor. x. 13, 'But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will also with the temptation make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.' God considereth who needeth chastening, and who needeth protection and deliverance: thus I have stated it.

Secondly, I shall give you an argument or two to confirm it—

1. That there is a difference between man and man is plain and obvious to sense; some are good and holy, others are naught and wicked; some understand the gospel, others are ignorant of it; some scoff, others believe; some have a dead faith, others a lively and deep sense of the world to come, and make preparation accordingly. Ask the reason of this difference, whence is it? You will say their choice and inclination: some choose the better part, others abandon themselves to their lusts and brutish satisfactions. True; but whence cometh this different choice and inclination? Experience showeth us that man from his infancy and childhood is very corrupt, and more inclinable to evil than to good, to things earthly than heavenly, carnal than spiritual; and you may as well expect to gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles, as that man of his own accord should become good and holy, and that we should be able to bring our own hearts to love God and delight in God: Job xiv. 4, 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an

'unclean? not one.' Well, then, since all are not good, but some are, whence cometh the difference? Is it from a better temper and constitution of body? that is a benefit and gift of God; but this is not the whole cause. Many besot brave wits, and spoil an excellent temper and constitution of body, by their intemperance and incontinency; and, on the other side, many of crabbed and depraved tempers master their natural inclination by grace; and God doth often choose beams and rafters for the sanctuary of the most crooked timber. Is it education, and setting their inclinations right from their infancy? It is, I confess, a great advantage to be brought up in the nurture and information of the Lord, in a course of virtue and religion: Prov. xxii. 6, 'Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' The first infusions stick by us, and conduce, if not to conversion, yet to conviction; but many wrest themselves out of the arms of the best education, and turn the back upon all those godly counsels and instructions which are instilled into them. Is it the ordinances and means of grace? These certainly have great force and efficacy this way. God knoweth what keys will fit the wards of the lock; if anything, the doctrine of the gospel will do it. But they have not all believed: Rom. x. 16, 'For Isaiah saith, Who hath believed our report?' We see the same seed that thriveth in the good and honest heart is lost in highway, stony, thorny ground; the difference is not in seed, but soil; whatever means and helps you can imagine, all is nothing till God puts a new heart into us. Is it a good temper and disposition of mind, so that grace is represented to us congruously, so that it findeth us fitly prepared? Certainly seasons should not be over-slipped, but yet this is not the adequate cause of conversion, that some believe, others not, because we are so happy to find them in a disposition of mind to obey the word. We see that many that come with an ill disposition and temper of soul to hear the word of God, yet God taketh them by the heart. People should bring a prepared mind, free from distractions and prejudices. But that is not all that is necessary: we are to use the means, but the success is from God, who will take his own time. Christians, when they think themselves best prepared, find not that efficacy in the word they could desire.

2. All good is of God: 1 Cor. iv. 7, 'Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou, that thou hast not received?' and Jer. xxiv. 7, 'I will give them a heart to know me.' It is his grace maketh the difference: Mat. xiii. 11, 'It is given you to know the mystery of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.' The cause of putting a difference between the one and the other is in the will of God the giver; the advantages in the means of better temper, better ministry, somewhat there is in that: Acts xiv. 1, 'They so spake, that a great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed.' All this is to be imputed to God's external providence. One way of preaching may be more apt to convert souls than another; a dart, headed and feathered, and sent out of a strong bow will pierce deeper than falling of its own weight; pure solid doctrine, rationally enforced, is more likely to do the deed; but yet the thorough cause of the difference is internal grace changing the heart, and powerfully inclining it to God: Acts xi. 21, 'The hand of the Lord

was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.' It is God's mighty power maketh the difference.

3. Whatever God doth in time, he purposed to do before all time; for God doth nothing rashly and by chance, but all by counsel and predestination. It is according to his purpose, especially in man's salvation; nothing is done but what he decreed to be done; even the least circumstance, time, means, and occasion, it is all according to purpose, not of yesterday, but from all eternity: Acts ix. 11, God's sending Ananias to Paul, and was not that foreknown and determined?

Use. Is to press us to admire grace. Nothing moved God to let out his love upon us but his free, eternal, distinguishing love; nothing keepeth the heart so right with God as a due sense of his free grace and love; for the glory of his grace was the great thing God aimed at in all his dealings with us: Eph. i. 6, 12, 'To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved; that we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ;' Rom. ix. 23, 'And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.' This is the study of the saints: Eph. iii. 18, 19, 'May be able with all saints to comprehend what is the breadth and length, and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.' It is the great excitement to duty: 2 Cor. v. 14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us;' Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God;' 1 John iv. 19; Titus ii. 11, 12. It breedeth a good spirit if love is at the bottom of all our duties.

2. We have the truest view of our obligations to God in his elective love; *dulcius est ipso fonte*. Nothing will so much excite our love and gratitude as to consider—

1. That God all-sufficient, who needeth nothing, should choose us. He might have possessed himself if he had never created anything without himself. If you remove all creatures from him, you detract nothing from God; if you add all to him, you increase nothing in God. It is the creature's indigent condition that maketh him go without his own compass for the happiness of his being. Man cannot be happy in loving himself, nor be satisfied in his own intrinsic perfections, therefore seeketh supplies from abroad; but God's happiness is to love himself and delight in himself.

2. That when God would look abroad among the creatures, he would choose us whom he found in the polluted mass of mankind, and make us objects of his grace, and when he came to call us, found us entangled in other sins, as Abraham, the father of the faithful, an idolater, Joshua xxiv. 2; every one that looketh into himself will find they were in temper to choose anything rather than Christ, unless the Lord had prevented us by his goodness, and turned our crooked wills. And if we consider why we taken and others left: Jer. iii. 14, 'I will take you one of a city, and two of a family.' And lastly, if we consider this powerful prosecution of his eternal purpose, this certainly will excite our love and gratitude.