

A SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE SONS OF THE CLERGY.

The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.—Ps. cii. 28.

THE context speaketh of God's unchangeableness. The world changeth, and we change, but God changeth not; in the midst of all confusions he is where he was at first. Now this is a great comfort to God's people, both as to their persons and to their posterity. For their personal happiness, whatever breaches are made upon them, they cannot perish utterly that have an interest in an unchangeable God. When engaged in a good cause, they may die, and fall in the quarrel; but God liveth for ever, and so their service will not be lost. His promises are mostly made good in the other world; therefore a poor mortal creature may find and enjoy happiness enough in a living God. Thus as to their persons. Now to their posterity: it is a comfort that when we go to the grave we have a God with whom to leave our children when we can provide for them no longer; he hath undertaken to look after them, and bring them up. This is the other part of the comfort—*The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.*

In which words observe—(1.) The persons; (2.) And then their privilege.

1. The persons—*The children of thy servants.*

2. Their privilege is set forth in two words—*They shall continue; they shall be established.*

And the ground or duration is specified in that word—*Before thee.* Let us open these circumstances, that we may see what aspect they have upon the present occasion.

First, The persons, 'The children of thy servants.' There two things will be explained—(1.) Who are the servants of God here spoken of; (2.) In what sense *children* is taken—

1. Who are the servants of God here spoken of? Men may be said to be the servants of God—

[1.] In a general sense; and so all that worship, fear, and obey him are his servants.

[2.] In a limited and more restrained sense; and so those that wait

upon him in the office of the ministry are said to be his servants: 2 Tim. ii. 24, 'The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, apt to teach;' and Ps. cxxxiv. 1, 'Bless the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord.' It is meant of the priests which watched by turns in the temple; and the prophets: Amos iii. 7, 'Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secrets unto his servants the prophets.' The one sort are as retainers, that wear his badge and livery; the other, as his domestics and menial servants, that have a nearer and constant attendance upon him. Now I cannot but say that the privilege here spoken of belongeth to all God's servants, but in an especial manner to his special servants; all are rewarded by God according to the degree of their service. Nebuchadnezzar, that was but a servant at large, a bare instrument of his providence, had his wages; but there is a special blessing descendeth upon the family of ministers, as their service is more eminent, and nearer about his person. In the whole course of their employment they are devoted to him. Their labour is great, so are their sufferings; they are called out upon the stage as the public factors for his kingdom, and so exposed to more hardships and losses; therefore God will make it up to their posterity. Often they are contemned, have no portion among their brethren; therefore God will be their portion. Certainly, though they be not principally intended, they cannot be excluded and shut out from this blessing.

2. In what sense is *children* taken? Either the children of their flesh or of their faith. Some say the children of the same faith with the godly teachers and servants of the Lord, begotten by them to God, as noting the perpetuity of the church, who shall in every age bring forth children to God. It is the comfort of God's people to see a young brood growing up to continue his remembrance in the world, that when they die, religion shall not die with them, nor the succession of the church be interrupted. This sense is not altogether incongruous; but rather, I think, the children of their body are here intended, it being a blessing often promised. See the next psalm, Ps. ciii. 17, 'The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, and his righteousness to children's children.'

Secondly, The privilege, 'Shall be continued; shall be established;' in what sense is it spoken? Some think only *pro more federis*, according to the fashion of that covenant which the people of God were then under, when eternity was but more darkly revealed and shadowed out, either by long life, or the continuance of their name in their posterity, which was a kind of literal immortality. Clearly such a kind of regard is had, as appeareth by that which you find in Ps. xxxvii. 28, 'The Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever.' How? since they die as others do. Mark the antithesis, and that will explain it: 'They are preserved for ever; but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.' They are preserved in their posterity. Children are but the parents multiplied and the parent continued. It is *nodosa aternitas*; when the father's life is run out to the last, there is a knot tied, and the line is still continued by the child. I confess, temporal blessings, such as long life, and the promise of a happy posterity, are more visible in the eye of that dis-

penation of the covenant; but yet God still taketh care for the children of his people, and many promises run that way that belong to the gospel administration, and still God's service is the surest way to establish a family, as sin is the ready way to root it out. And if it doth not always fall out accordingly, yet for the most part it doth; and we are no competent judges of God's dispensations in this kind, because we see providence by pieces, and have not the skill to set them together; but at the day of judgment, when the whole contexture of God's dealings is laid before us, we shall clearly understand how the children of his servants continue, and their seed is established. But of this by and by.

There is but one clause more that needeth explaining, and that is, 'Before thee.' Some understand it of the duration of the blessing; that is, so long as thou dost endure; as before the sun and moon is rendered, 'as long as the sun and moon endure,' Ps. lxxii. 5. And the Septuagint renders it, *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα κατευθυνθήσεται*, 'Shall be continued for ever,' or, 'Before thee;' God looking on, or they looking upon thee. But rather it noteth God's respect and favour. These blessings do not come by chance: Ps. xli. 12, 'Thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever.' In a like case, Lev. xxvi. 9, 'I will have respect to you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you; it is I will set my face to you;' *ἐπιβλέψω ἐφ' ὑμᾶς*; And the Chaldee paraphrase, 'Am I in the place of God?' Gen. xxx. 2. *A facie Domini debuisses petere?*—Oughtest thou not to seek them from the face of God?

The words are explained. The point is—That God hath a great care of and blessing for the posterity of his servants, that they may be established by his favour.

Here I shall show you—(1.) What privilege they have; (2.) The reasons; (3.) Reconcile it with common sense and experience; (4.) To whom the promise is most eminently fulfilled.

First, How far a blessing cometh on the posterity of God's servants.

1. Good men do convey many temporal mercies to their relations; that is the least. God cannot satisfy himself with doing good to the persons of his children, but he must do good to their relations; all about them fare the better for their sakes. A land fareth the better for them: 2 Kings ii. 12, 'My father, my father, the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof;' that is, the defence of the country; much more the vicinage and place of their abode. Sodom was in Lot when Lot was in Sodom: Gen. xix. 22, 'I cannot do anything while thou art there.' Nearer yet; they bring a blessing into their families. You know the offer made to Lot, Gen. xix. 12, 'Hast thou any here besides son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters? Whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place.' There was a fearful storm a-coming, and God would have none that had relation to Lot to perish by it. These sons-in-law were but so by contract and promise of marriage, for Lot's daughters were virgins, and knew not a man, yet God offereth them quarter for Lot's sake. Nearer yet; their own children, that are a part of themselves, do certainly enjoy many temporal blessings by their means. Ishmael, though the church was not continued in his line, yet a great part of the world fell to his share: Gen. xxi.

13, 'I will make of him a great nation, for he is thy seed.' There is the blessing of Isaac and the blessing of Ishmael; if they have not the blessing of Isaac, yet usually the blessing of Ishmael, Isa. lxxv. from ver. 19 to the last.

2. Where the parent is in visible covenant, the children also are in visible covenant with him as soon as born. I say, they are without scruple to be accounted children of the covenant, and belonging to the church, till they do declare the contrary. Let us see a few places to prove this: Rom. xi. 16, 'For if the first-fruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches.' It is an allusion to the law, where the lump was consecrated in the first-fruits, or the cake of the first dough that was offered in the heave-offering. So when a man is dedicated to God, his whole family and posterity is dedicated to God with him. There is a federal holiness descendeth to them by virtue of their parents accepting the covenant of God. So in the decision of that case that was brought to the apostle, where one of the yoke-fellows was an infidel: 1 Cor. vii. 14, 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.' The scope of that place is to hold forth some privilege to believers, which is not common to others; for it is for the believer's sake; for otherwise the unbelieving husband had been as much sanctified in himself as in the wife. Certainly, therefore, it is some special privilege not common to the marriage of an unbelieving couple. Mark again; this is propounded both negatively and positively. The Holy Ghost doth not mention both, when one is emphatical enough: 'Else were they unclean, but now are they holy.' Pray observe the gradation of the privilege; the unbelieving husband, to whom all things are impure, he is sanctified to serve God's providence to this holy end and use. But higher yet; the children, they are holy; he is sanctified, they holy; that is, instrumentally sanctified, to be a means that the believing wife may bring forth fruit unto God. But now they are holy; and because holy, not to be refused and rejected from the ordinances. Persons were called unclean that might not enjoy the privileges of the temple; holy, that were sanctified for worship. When God permitted ordinances to the gentiles, they are called holy: 'That which God hath made holy, call not thou common and unclean,' Acts x. 15, intending thereby the gentiles as capable of gospel worship. One place more: Ezek. xvi. 10, 'Sons and daughters born to me.' Those that are born during our being in covenant with God are born to God; as the children born in marriage are reckoned to the husband. This is the high privilege which God puts upon his servants, to beget sons and daughters to God, whilst others beget sons and daughters to men for civil uses, or only to people the world. Take, for instance, Seth and Cain, Gen. vi. 1, 2. To bring forth to God, to multiply the church; it will be your crown and rejoicing in the day of the Lord. It is a greater blessing than to see your children monarchs of the world, or if they had been born kings and queens; that had been beneath this of being members of the church. It is very notable that Moses, when he would set forth the dignity of Shem, he doth it thus: Gen. x. 21, 'Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth. the elder, which is

of the Hebrews.' This is his prerogative above all his brethren. The Syrians, Assyrians, Lydians, Persians, Armenians, Elamites, these all came of Shem; but because they were ignorant of the knowledge of the true God, he doth not take his title from them, though they were great and mighty nations; this was his prerogative, that Abraham came from him, and all Israel, the people whom God had chosen to himself, and among whom he would record his name, whilst all the rest of the world lay in darkness. A man would have thought that Moses should have set out his great ancestor in more magnificent terms. Another would have taken notice either of his long life (for he lived six hundred years), that he saw both worlds, both before the flood and after; that he was one of the heirs of Noah, one of the three great princes of the world; that Asia, the paradise of the earth, fell to his lot, and Shinar, a land rich in jewels, gold, and spices; another would have reckoned up the mighty kings descended from his loins, or have called him father of the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Persians, famous nations that made such a bustle in the world; but Moses only calleth him father of the children of Eber, a nation shut up within the precincts of a little spot of land; but theirs were the 'promises, and the adoption, and the glory,' Rom. ix. 4, 'and the covenant, and the law.' I tell you, to be a means to bring forth children to God, and to multiply the church, is as great an honour as can be put upon you.

3. If they die in infancy, we need not trouble ourselves about their salvation. God is their God, Gen. xvii. 1; and that is all the best of us have to show for his right to heaven. They are bound up in the same bundle of life with their parents, in covenant with God, and never lived to disinherit themselves. We judge of the graft according to the tree from whence it was taken, till it liveth to bring forth fruit of its own; so of children, according to their father's covenant. God knoweth how to instate them in the privileges of it; Christ died for the church, and they are part of the church, Eph. v. 26, 27.

4. If they live, and bewray the corruption of their natures, there is more hope of them than of others. The grace of the covenant runneth most kindly in the channel of the covenant: Rom. xi. 24, 'How much more shall those which be the natural branches be grafted into their own olive-tree?' They seem to lie more obvious to the Lord's grace. God followeth them with more calls and offers of grace. The Jews were to have the hansom and first offers of the gospel, though they killed the Lord of life, first at Jerusalem, because they were children of the promise, Acts iii. 25, 26. God followeth a covenant people to the last, and beareth with them time after time, till he can bear no longer. They have a greater holdfast upon God; they may plead promises; and if ever God touch their hearts with remorse, they may plead their father's covenant. After Solomon's warping, God remembers promises to David, 1 Kings xi. 12, 13, and 32, 34.

5. Among them salvation is most ordinary, though God leaveth himself a liberty to take men of an evil stock. A rose may grow upon a thorn; *viles virgulae pretiosa opobalsama sudant*; a slip of an ill stock may be grafted into the tree of life. Hezekiah was the son of Ahaz, and Josiah the son of Amon. Again, all the children of elect parents are not elect, to show the liberty of his counsels. In the very

line of grace God will make a distinction. Abraham had Isaac and Ishmael; and Isaac had Jacob and Esau: Josh. xxiv. 4, 'I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau;' intimating the distinction between the person and posterity of the one and the other. Though I grant all this, yet usually the children of godly parents are they that obtain the blessing; they are in a greater nearness to grace than others are, and there is more to be presumed of their children than of others, because of the ordinary practice of the Lord's grace, and because they have more means and helps, and in an ordinary course lie more obvious to the blessing, have more instruction, are nurtured and trained up in the knowledge of God, and have the prayers and examples of their godly parents. It is to be presumed that all godly men will thus do. God reckoneth upon it: Gen. xviii. 19, 'I know my servant Abraham, that he will command his children and household after him, that they shall keep the way of the Lord, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.' He presumeth that in these families God is known and honoured, that there is less temptation to sin, as lying out of the devil's road. A godly family is the suburbs of heaven, where the young brood is hatched to supply the church.

6. They are not cast off till they do even wrest themselves out of the arms of mercy. Cain excommunicated himself: Gen. iv. 16, 'And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.' The face of the Lord, in one sense it is everywhere; but it is meant of the church, where God is worshipped. Ishmael, for scoffing and malignity against the power of godliness, Gen. xxi. 9. He mocked Isaac, which the apostle maketh to be persecution, Gal. iv. 29. Esau, for profaneness or despising the birthright, that he may set his lusts a-work, Heb. xii. 15, 16; preferring the satisfaction of sensual lusts before the great privileges in Christ. The Jews were 'broken off for unbelief,' Rom. xi. 20. God bore with them after they had crucified Christ all along; as the branches of the covenant grew wild, God may be cutting them off. When God doth cast off a people, that is dreadful, Rom. xi. He speaketh to the Romans as a body and a church. God may break off a church as well as a person by scattering judgments, prevalency of error, and profaneness; the discouragements of his children; they withdrawing, all is broken to pieces. This is the spiritual judgment now upon us, and we are not sensible of it.

Secondly, The reasons.

1. That he may show the riches of his grace, which reacheth not only to the persons, but to the families of those that love him and serve him. God is resolved to act in the covenant according to the highest laws of friendship; as David: 2 Sam. ix. 1, 'Is there yet any left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?' So will God be a friend to us and our children after us. Yea, this love runneth down to thousands of generations, Rom. xi. 28. They are beloved for their father's sake. For so many years to love their seed, this is a friendship not to be paralleled, 2 Sam. i. 19. It is mercy that our persons, that the fruit of our souls should be accepted, spotted and speckled as it is; that the evil should not outweigh the little goodness that is in them; but the fruit of our bodies is much more, especially if you consider the natural leprosy and filthiness that

is in them. But grace, like a mighty river, will be pent within no banks, but overfloweth all that a man hath, all his relations.

2. Out of an indulgence to natural affection. God hath a son of his own, and he knoweth how he loveth him, and is acquainted with the heart of a father, and he hath planted an affection in parents to their children. Love, like a river, is descensive. Many are more sensible of a misery and curse in their seed than in themselves. Surely next to our eternal happiness their welfare is the most welcome blessing which we can receive; therefore, in an indulgence to good parents, God will bless them in their children. The charter runneth for them and their seed. Children are a part of them, the parent continued, as before, Ps. xxxvii. 24. We abide and live in them when we are dead and gone.

Thirdly, How can we reconcile the promise with experience, since the children of the servants of the Lord are reduced to great extremities, and are as naught and bad as others?

I answer, The blessing is invisible for a great measure, and we want faith to interpret this privilege, as well as any other mentioned in the covenant. Sometimes their outward portion may be small, but however, they are a holy seed unto God. We see the providence of God by pieces; for the present they may be in their natural condition, and the blessing doth not as yet break out in effects of grace, as it doth afterwards. We must leave the Lord to his own seasons. Sometimes for a while God may skip over the next branch in the line, and a wicked and ungracious man may interrupt the blessing for a while, but it runneth on again to a thousand generations. Jotham had Ahaz, but Ahaz had Hezekiah; the grandfather wicked, the son wicked, but the grandchild godly again; so that still there is a respect to the family. It is the usual practice of the Lord's grace, and is here put into the form of a promise, and must, as all temporal promises, be referred to God's pleasure, when to exempt the godly from poverty and their seed. Mostly the blessing is conspicuous enough in the course of God's dispensations, and examples to the contrary are very rare. David was a man of good years and narrow observation, a great student in the providence of God; yet saith he, Ps. xxxvii. 25, 'I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor their seed begging bread.' He could find none of their issue in his time reduced to a state of beggary.

Fourthly, To whom the promise will be most eminently fulfilled. There are some qualifications mentioned. All God's servants have their blessings, but these especially; as, namely—

1. The strict, and such as dare not offend him: Ps. ciii. 17, 'The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness to children's children.' They that fear him, that walk exactly in his sight and presence, such are frowned upon, hated, maligned, scorned in the world; therefore God doth take care to provide for them and theirs.

2. The just and upright. They abridge themselves of many advantages of gain which others hunt after. It is not lost: Ps. cxii. 2, 'His seed shall be mighty upon earth; the generation of the upright shall be blessed.' They cannot project, and turn, and wind in the world as

others do, but they deal plainly; it is not without a blessing. So Prov. xx. 7, 'The just man walketh in his integrity, and his children are blessed after him.' They transmit a clear estate, and so it thriveth.

3. The merciful and charitable: Ps. xxxvii. 26, 'He is ever merciful, and lendeth; his seed is blessed.' When we are urged to giving, you may object, What shall wife and children do? I answer—Give the rather; do something the more for every child, that the blessing may be entailed upon them; it is lent to the Lord, and it will be paid to your posterity; your children will not have a whit the less.

4. Those that are tender of God's institutions. The second commandment, that provideth for God's instituted worship, the sanction of it speaketh of blessings and punishments in the posterity, and deservedly. Family arguments prevail with many to yield to the corruptions of their age. But alas! that which they would build they destroy; their children are not preserved, but ruined by it. You may convey an estate, but with a curse. Much of the evil that hath lighted upon ministers and their families had its rise hence. God, that gloriously exalts godly ministers and their children, that would rather suffer the loss of all than yield to the least corruption in worship, doth also reckon with them and their families that are partial in his law.

Use 1. I might apply this to parents by way of advice and consolation.

1. Be godly yourselves. Carnal parents obstruct and stop up the course of mercy from descending upon their children as much as in them lieth; especially in giving up themselves to carnal practices and evil compliances for their children's sake. *Hæreditates transeunt cum onere.* Whatever hands they pass through, the burden continueth. Nay, further, this is not the best way to provide for your children, to drudge and toil like horses, and neglect heaven and happiness, to make them great, or to break God's laws to salve their interest. Besides the mischief you do yourselves, you do not profit them a whit. Fear God, be upright and charitable, careful of God's institutions, and then leave your children with God, and see if he will not provide for them. It argueth a great deal of infidelity when you think you cannot leave them well unless you leave them great. You renounce God, and set up a wedge of gold, if you think that will do them more good than the covenant and the promises of God.

2. Educate your children in God's fear. This will be the means to continue and increase the blessing. Look, as there is a double curse where the father is carnal and the son carnal, so there is a double blessing where the father is godly and the son godly; the blessing is still increased. Abraham laid the foundation, Isaac made an addition, Jacob increased it a little further; Joseph, who was the most eminent of all the patriarchs, he still carried on the blessing; therefore it is said, Gen. xlix. 26, 'The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of thy progenitors.' You may have great hopes when you see children taking kindly to religion, and zealous for their father's God. So in that passage, Gen. xviii. 19, 'I know that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep

the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.'

3. When you die, leave a charge with them : 1 Kings ii. 2, 'Keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself,' &c. ; and 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 'And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind,' &c. It is the last time that you can do anything for God. Speeches of dying men have great weight in them, and are entertained with much reverence. Jacob's sons used that as their best plea: Gen. l. 16, 'Thy father did command before he died, saying,' &c. So the sons of Jonadab, the son of Rechab: Jer. xxxv. 3, 'We will drink no wine, for our father commanded us, saying,' &c. There is most esteem had to a father's dying charge ; it will stick by them far more than pressing discourses at another time. As Mr Bolton charged his children, See that none of you meet in an unregenerate condition at the day of judgment.

Use 2. Is comfort to poor dying saints, when they leave a great charge behind them ; though you leave them no great matter, it is a good portion to lay up some prayers for them, to leave them a God in covenant with them. God doth strangely provide for the children of his people ; a little holdeth out, like the widow's oil and meal. As to visible means, a man cannot tell how they live, yet live they do, and flourish, and by unexpected providences thrive into a great increase. Therefore moderate your fears and cares ; God will provide. I look upon this meeting with joy of heart, as being in a great measure the fruit of the promise, and I hope you will go away refreshed with the sight of it, and increased in confidence, saying, 'Lord, the children of thy servant shall continue, they shall be established.'

Use 3. Advice to the children of godly parents.

I shall first speak to them in the general, and then to this day's meeting more particularly. In the general—

1. Bless God for this privilege. Better be the child of a godly than wealthy parent. I hope none are of so vile a spirit as to hate and condemn your parents because of their piety. Certainly it is a great privilege when you can go to God, and plead your Father's covenant : Ps. cxvi. 14, 'Lord, I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid.' So did Solomon : 1 Kings iii. 25, 26, 'Lord, make good thy word to thy servant David, my father.' That you are not born of infidels, or popish parents, nor fautors and upholders of superstition and formality, but in a strict, serious, godly family, it is a great advantage that you have. It is better to be the sons of faithful ministers than of nobles.

2. Do not interrupt and break off the blessing. It is the greatest unworthiness that can be to be ungodly children of godly parents, and to cast off the God of your fathers : Jer. ii. 12, 'Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this !' He would have the sun to look pale upon such a wickedness, and the spheres to cast out their stars, that a people should cast off their God. Solomon continued alliance with Hiram because he had been a lover of David ; and it is his advice to others, 'Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake thou not.' Surely, then, not the

father's God. Wilt thou be a traitor to thy father's God? 'Be astonished, O ye heavens!' None stain their blood so much as you that forsake the sincerity and strictness of religion which your fathers professed. Treasons in the posterity are counted a stain to noble ancestors; so is apostasy and loss of church privileges in you. It is an excellent thing to see the power of religion preserved from father to son: Heb. xi. 9, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are called 'heirs of the same promise.' Pliny writeth that it was counted a great honour and point of felicity that in one house of the Curios there were three excellent orators one after another, and of the Fabii three presidents of the senate in the same succession. Oh, what an honour is it when there is a constant succession from father to the son, from the son to the grandchild, and all heirs of the same promise! The third descent, they say, maketh a gentleman in a new and opulent family. Here is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all heirs of the same promise; this is the true noble blood, a holy kindred, true gentry; otherwise *omnis sanguis concolor*—all blood is of a colour. It is a high honour to be born of such a race. My father, my grandfather, and great-grandfather were all servants of the Lord, and will you cut off the entail? Christians, I must speak to you not only as sons of private christians, but as the sons of ministers, of whom special holiness is required, and which will engage a special blessing to their posterity, and will you stop the course of it? Oh! let not the ministerial blessing be worn out of your generations. I remember one observeth of the Jews, that as long as the strength and virtue of manna continued in their constitutions, they were a fortunate, valorous, and brave people; but when, after some successions of generations, that it was worn out, they grew pusillanimous and base. The ministerial blessing, while that lasteth, the posterity thrive, and by a wonderful providence arrive to great increase, many times from small beginnings. Oh! therefore keep up the warmth and vigour of godliness in your families, and then you will transmit the blessing to ages to come, and the children that are yet unborn. But alas! many times, through our carelessness and default, in the next generation it is worn out; as Phylostratus said of the son of Rufus, Perrinthius, a great master, 'As for his son, I have nothing else to say but that he was his son.' If that be all your honour, that you are the son of such an eminent man, but have nothing worthy in you, that will be a sorry commendation; much more if you should fall to looseness and riot, you are the stain of your parents, and put them to shame when they are dead and gone. There is a notable place, Lev. xxi. 9, 'The daughter of any priest, if she shall play the whore, she profaneth her father, and shall be burnt with fire.' Let us comment on this text a little. Under the daughter, saith Calvin, the sons were also comprised; but if that were not, the daughter of the priest suiteth with your case; for the sons of priests were priests, which you are not now in the times of the gospel; and her case was more like yours, who are not always public persons. Now it is said, 'She profaneth her father.' How? That is, she was a defilement to his name and house. And so the Septuagint, τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῆς αὐτὴ βεβηλωσί, she is a reproach to the dignity of his office. Ministers must be not only good in their own persons, but in their

relations, ruling their children and their own house well. Eli's sons were a disgrace and shame to their father ; so will you be, if you be nought. Men judge of the parents by the behaviour of their children. Yea, that is not all ; the reflection will not only be personal, but as they will judge of the parents by the children, so of the calling by the persons ; yea, and of God by the calling. It reflects upon God at last ; as the people ' abhorred the offering of the Lord because of the wickedness of Eli's sons,' 1 Sam. ii. 17. The heathens thought it a disgrace to the persons of their gods if their ministers were detected of impurity ; and that is the reason of the great punishment there mentioned, ' She shall be burnt with fire.' The punishment of the priest's daughter was greater than that of any other woman. Others were not to die for simple fornication, neither man nor woman ; but the man to marry her, or to pay a sum of money, Exod. xxii. 16, 17 ; but she is to be burnt. Austin observeth the same of the Romans, Lib. de Civit. Dei, cap. 5, *Nam et ipsi Romani antiqui in stupro detectas vestales sacerdotes, vivas etiam defodiabant : adulteras autem fœminas, quamvis aliquâ damnatione, nulla tamen morte plectebant ; usque adeo gravius quæ putabant adyta divina quam humana cubilia vindicabant.* They were zealous for the honour of their gods, and therefore punished the faults of their ministers the more severely. Well then, if you would preserve the name of your ancestors to posterity, show it in the gravity of your conversations. Your offences will be a disgrace to them, and by them to God.

3. Observe the blessing. Some of you, it may be, came to town poor and ill provided, your parents, out of their short allowance, being not able to supply you better ; but you brought the blessing of the covenant along with you, and that was stock enough to set up withal ; and so mercies have wonderfully increased with you. Jacob taketh notice of this : Gen. xxxii. 10, ' I am not worthy of all the mercy and all the truth which thou hast showed to thy servant ; for with my staff came I over this Jordan, and now am I become two troops.' Mark, he taketh notice not only of mercy, but truth. By truth I understand God's faithfulness engaged in the covenant of his fathers ; for elsewhere I observe that truth is thus understood and applied to Jacob : Micah vii. 20, ' Thou wilt perform thy mercy to Abraham, and thy truth to Jacob, which thou hast sworn to our fathers of old.' The covenant is made in mercy, and made good by truth. Mercy first openeth the door of grace, and truth keepeth it open ; and therefore mercy to Abraham, because the covenant is made with him ; and truth to Jacob, to whom it is made good. Well then, own the blessing of the covenant : Lord, when I came to town, I was a poor lad of mean estate, could hope for little, and would be even glad to live ; and afterwards, when a young beginner, full of doubts and fears ; but Lord, out of thy mercy and truth, thou hast provided liberally for me, and brought me from mean estate to large and plentiful means. Basil saith it is a useful speculation to consider how we grow up into estate, and come to enjoy what we have. It maketh us humble to remember mean beginnings, and thankful to observe the gradual increase of our comforts ; and it decreaseth dependence when we see the mere blessing of the covenant hath carried us through,

and provided such large and rich supplies for us. Oh! surely he is a faithful God in keeping mercy for thousands of them that love him. Now I come more particularly to speak of the meeting of this day. Let it be like a meeting of ministers' sons. If you would have the ministers' blessing upon you, show somewhat of ministerial graces. There are two graces which a minister should chiefly show forth—sobriety and hospitality, or bounty to the poor. You are not ministers all of you, yet you should savour of the stock from whence you sprang; and show your extraction, that you were bred in families where sobriety and hospitality were in great respect. It is said of the earth that was taken from the banks of Nilus, that it sympathiseth with the river and place from whence it was taken; at that time when the river swelleth and overfloweth, the earth will be more heavy and damp than at other times; and when it decreaseth, it groweth dry and light again. I apply it thus: You are not ministers, yet you should not forget the hole of the pit out of which you were digged, but savour of a ministerial education to the last, in being temperate and charitable.

[1.] Let me press you to sobriety and temperance. At a feast men grow more loose, and abate of their severity and awe. Certainly there needs caution. When Job's sons were feasting, the father falleth a-sacrificing. Let it be a sober meeting, as becometh ministers' sons. You have begun well; let not your crown fall to the dust. Do but consider what a dishonour it will be, not to yourselves only, but to this holy calling, yea, to the Lord himself, when from a feast of ministers' sons, some shall go away with staggering feet, inflamed countenances, and a faltering tongue. Oh! let it not be. You do well to begin with a sermon to season your hearts; and you will do as well to end and conclude with a psalm, that it may look like one of the sober and holy love-feasts the old christians used.

[2.] Let me press you to charity. This is the great end of the meeting, and therefore must not be left out or neglected. The occasions and wants of ministers and ministers' widows are many and great. Now let them know that you have received the ministerial blessing. This is the necessary acknowledgment, that you have received all from God. Let him that gave you all that you have receive a part back again for the relief of his poor servants. Give as ministers' sons, in a liberal, plentiful manner, that the world may know from what kind of stock you came.
