

SERMONS UPON ACTS XXIV. 14-16.

SERMON I.

Believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets : and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man.—ACTS xxiv. 14-16.

THESE words are part of Paul's apology against the accusation of Tertullus. Among other things, he chargeth him to be an heretic, or an apostate from the Jewish religion. When the Romans had conquered the Jews, they submitted upon this condition, that they should innovate and change nothing in their religion, but defend it against the disturbers of it. Now the christians being accused of innovation and disturbance of such a religion as was under the caution of the Roman laws before a Roman tribunal, it concerned them to show the harmony and agreement of both religions as to the substance. This is Paul's business, and therefore he giveth an account of his faith, worship, and conversation. He did indeed observe the way of the christian worship, which they called sectarism or heresy, and Paul was accused 'to be a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes,' ver. 5; but yet this was agreeable enough to the religion of the Jews for the substance, which he proveth by his faith, hope, carriage, and conversation.

Here is in effect all christianity delivered to us in one prospect and view.

1. An account of his faith at the bottom of all, 'Believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets.'

2. His hope, as the immediate fruit of it, 'And have hope towards God;' and the principal object is, 'The resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust,' when we shall enjoy the full of what we wait for.

3. An account of his manners, where you have a brief description of a christian conversation, 'Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards men.' My business is not to discuss all these branches of christianity apart, and in their full latitude, but to give you the sum and delineation of all religion in one view. Therefore observe—

Doct. That true christianity is such a believing the truths contained in the scriptures as produceth an hope of eternal life, and is expressed in an impartial, uniform, and constant obedience.

Here is Paul's apology; faith at the bottom, hope as the immediate effect and product of it, and an holy conversation as the fruit and consequent. The same method is observed in other scriptures; as 1 Tim. i. 5, 'The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.' The commandment is the gospel institution, and this received with a pure heart and faith unfeigned produceth a good conscience, which shows itself in love to God and men, by a true and lively faith in Christ. The Holy Ghost purifieth the heart and conscience, and so produceth love: 2 Peter i. 5, 6, 'Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness.' In the chain of graces faith is the root of all. I shall—
(1.) Examine the expressions here used; (2.) Give some reasons why this is true christianity.

I. Examine the expressions here used.

First, Concerning faith, 'Believing all things that are written in the law and the prophets.'

1. Here is the object, or things believed, 'Things written in the law and the prophets.'

2. The extent, 'All.'

3. The act, 'Believing.'

1. The object, 'Things written in the law and the prophets.' Law and prophets is an expression commonly used for all the scriptures then extant: Mat. xi. 13, 'For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John;' and Luke xvi. 29, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' The books of the Old Testament are thus called. We christians, who have received the canon and rule of faith more enlarged, are said 'To be built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles,' Eph. ii. 20; so that now the object of our faith is prophets and apostles. The object of faith may be considered formally or materially. Materially, such things as God hath revealed; formally, because God hath revealed them. If God hath revealed what is in the writings of the apostles, then we are to believe them. God's veracity is the ground and support of our faith, into which it is ultimately resolved. His instruments in revealing are the prophets and apostles. We know God hath revealed the things written by them, partly because these writings are delivered to us by the universal tradition of the church, and the testimony of christians through all successions of ages, in whose experience God hath blessed these writings for conviction, conversion, and consolation; and partly because of the consent between the prophets and the apostles, the one foretelling whatever the other declared as accomplished: Acts xxvi. 22, 'Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.' Partly because the doctrines have an impress of God upon them, as everything that hath passed his hand hath. How do I know a fly, gnat, or any other creature to be made by God? God hath set his signature upon them: Ps. xix. 1, 'The heavens

declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork.' So the scriptures agree with the nature and properties of God. As God is wise, powerful, and good, these doctrines become his wisdom; they have the stamp of his moral goodness, which is his holiness; and as for his power, they that feel it not fear it: John iii. 20, 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.' There is something that alarmeth the conscience. And partly because it agreeth with the nature of man, so far as a man hath any good left in him. It agreeth with the necessities of man, his guilty fears and his desires of happiness. For his guilty fears, men, that by reason of sin are afraid of God's justice, cannot be quieted by any other means, but are by this: Jer. vi. 16, 'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls;' Mat. xi. 28. 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' In life and death the conscience is quieted. So for desires of happiness. Men rove and grope about for some satisfying good: Acts xvii. 27, 'That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him;' And Ps. iv. 6, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good?' Life and immortality are brought to light in the scriptures, and the way to obtain it clearly revealed: Ps. xvi. 11, 'Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.' Partly because God hath witnessed and attested it by his Spirit: Acts v. 32. 'We are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost.' Without, by miracles and other wonderful effects; within, by enlightening the heart and mind, inclining and exciting us to believe it upon these motives and arguments: 2 Cor. iv. 6, 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;' so as to discern God's impress. Upon these accounts we receive what is written in the prophets and apostles as revealed by God.

2. The extent, 'All things.' A believer receiveth all truths which are of divine revelation, whether precepts, promises, threatenings, doctrines, or histories. But then we must distinguish of an implicit or explicit faith. With the latter we can only believe those things which we know; what we know not we cannot believe with an explicit faith. Some christians know not all things which are contained in the prophets and apostles, and yet in a sense they do believe by an implicit faith; as Agrippa believed the prophets: Acts xxvi. 27, 'King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.' Yet he was ignorant of some things revealed by them. So all christians own the writings of the apostles and prophets as the rule and warrant of faith, yet they do not discern every truth therein contained; they do believe that whatever the prophets and apostles say and have written is true, and so are ready to believe all things which shall be demonstrated to them to be written or said by them. But by an explicit faith they believe all fundamental truths, such as are absolutely necessary to salvation, and usually most other truths which are next to fundamentals. The fundamentals are set down, John xvii. 3, 'This is life eternal, to

know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.' That God is to be known, loved, obeyed, worshipped, and enjoyed, and that the Lord Jesus is our Redeemer and Saviour, to bring us home to God, with his gifts of pardon and life, to be begun by the Spirit here, and perfected in heaven.

3. The act, 'Believing.' It is not enough not to deny or not to contradict, but we must actually and positively believe. The reason why the generality of people living in the christian world feel so little force of their faith is from their inadvertency; they leap into the christian faith by the advantage of their birth, but do not consider what they believe, nor why they should believe it, and how they are concerned in it; and so may be rather said not to contradict than to believe. But true faith is a positive, firm assent, excited in us by the Spirit of God. As the apostle saith of some that were zealous for the law, 'Understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm,' 1 Tim. i. 7, so the rabble of common christians may be zealous for the gospel, yet are not instructed in the nature and grounds of it, what and why they should believe. A sound belief requireth a thorough understanding of what we believe, and a deep consideration of the grounds and reasons why we are to believe it. And then it is such a fixed assent as is not perplexed and haunted with doubts about the truth of it, and such a close adherence as is not discouraged with difficulties and oppositions. It would be much better with the christian world if every one that carrieth the name of a christian could say, 'I believe all that is written in the prophets and the apostles.' In short—

To a sound belief there is necessary—

[1.] A knowledge or full instruction in the things which we believe; for it is said, 1 John iv. 16, 'We have known and believed the love that God hath to us;' first known and then believed.

[2.] A due conviction of the certainty of them: Luke i. 4, 'That thou mayest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed;' and John vi. 69, 'We believe and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God;' and John xvii. 8, 'They have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.'

[3.] This faith doth not only imply a bare intellectual assent, but a practical trust and affiance; for the nature of the object requireth so much. Christianity doth not only propound bare truths to be assented unto, but joyful, comfortable truths suitable to our necessity and desires; and therefore we must depend upon them, seek our happiness in them in the way appointed by God, which is nothing but practical trust and affiance. Therefore it is not a bare opinion, but a reliance upon God, that he will make good his word to us, whilst we continue with patience in well-doing. Therefore we are said to belong to Christ, 'If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end,' Heb. iii. 6.

[4.] Those truths which are contained in the word are to be considered with application, that we may know them for our good: Job v. 27, 'Hear it, and know thou it for thy good.' Every doctrine, which upon search we find to be sound and good, we must make application of it to ourselves, that it may affect our own hearts; if threatenings, that we

may escape the curse: if comforts or promises, Rom. viii. 32, 'What shall we say to these things?' The promise of pardon to all believers is so universal, that it includeth you as well as others. Christ is offered to every creature, that he may be yours as well as another's; and the offer of heaven and eternal life is so propounded that you should engage your hearts to seek after it, and closely to adhere to it till you obtain it. But to apply it so as to be persuaded that your own sins are already pardoned, that you are an heir of glory, that you are Christ's as to actual interest, you must have good evidence for that from a spiritual sense of your own qualifications: but it belongeth not to faith simply taken. Thus we have set forth a christian in his first part, as a believer.

Secondly, The apostle asserts his hope, 'And have hope towards God, which they themselves allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.'

1. Mark that he propoundeth his hope as the immediate effect and product of faith; for when I believe, then I must look and long, and prepare for the blessedness offered, otherwise my faith is but a cold opinion, not such a faith as will subdue the inclinations and interests of the flesh, nor make the labours and sufferings of the spiritual life tolerable: and that is true faith which breatheth and longeth after the end of all religion, and looketh for it. What good will it do me to believe the doctrines of the prophets and apostles, if I expect no good from thence? Faith would be vain, and religion vain. Only note here that hope is twofold—

[1.] One the fruit of regeneration, or the immediate effect of conversion to God: 1 Peter i. 3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.' And this is nothing else but a seeking and looking for a happiness in another and an unseen world, with a longing desire and diligent care to obtain it. It is faith to place my happiness so high and so far from sense; now when my desires and delights are there, and my daily care is to get thither, and to live in a continual preparation for it, and desirous expectation of it, and to deny myself, and suffer any loss and pain to get thither, this is the work of hope.

[2.] There is an hope built upon experience: Rom. v. 4, 5, 'And experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.' This dependeth upon the sense of my qualification and interest, and is confirmed by experience of God's love to my soul, for grace hath the force of an evidence and pledge.

2. Observe that he pitcheth upon the resurrection as the great thing hoped for, because then is our full and final happiness. We do not believe in Christ unless we believe in him for eternal life: 1 Tim. i. 16, 'That in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting;' John xx. 31, 'But these things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through his name.' This is the great thing which we hope, wait, and labour for. Nobody would trouble themselves about religion, which abridgeth us of present delights, and exposeth us to

great troubles and sufferings, but for these things. Who would deny himself, and devote himself entirely to God, but for these things? 1 Cor. xv. 19, 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable;' but at the resurrection all shall be recompensed to us, all the effects of sin cease.

3. Observe that he proposeth the double resurrection, of good and bad; all that ever lived shall be judged and rewarded, whether good or evil; though with a hope to be found among the good and among the sheep, not the goats. This is the true way of christian reflection upon the great day; however we are assured of our own interest, that whilst we strengthen faith and hope, we weaken the security of the flesh. Some may miscarry, though I have hopes to be accepted: 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27, 'I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.' We have a covenant wherein to trust, as long as we continue faithful with God, and deny the flesh its satisfactions.

Thirdly, See what account he giveth of his manners and conversation: ver. 16, 'And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards men.'

Observe here three things—(1.) The encouragement; (2.) The integrity of his obedience; (3.) The laborious diligence wherewith he carried it on.

First, His encouragement, *ἐν τούτῳ*. Interpreters diversely expound this *ἐν τούτῳ* (*χρόνῳ*), *interea temporis*, in the meantime, till faith be turned into vision, hope into fruition. There is a time between believing and possessing, hoping and having; and during that time there is much exercise for our faith and patience: Heb. vi. 12, 'That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' Again, *ἐν τούτῳ*, by virtue of this faith and hope, upon this hope and encouragement. Faith and a good conscience are often coupled: 1 Tim. i. 5, 'Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.' We cannot keep the one without the other; not a good conscience without faith, nor faith without a good conscience. Not the first, for no man will make conscience of his duty unless he believeth in God and hopeth for salvation; for unless we believe in God and hope for his promises, we shall not be so careful to keep a good conscience, by eschewing evil and doing good. Sometimes faith is said to work by love, and sometimes by hope. By love: Gal. v. 6, 'For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith that worketh by love.' The soul is never fit for duty till it be possessed with the love of God and man. Sometimes by hope: 1 John iii. 3, 'He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself as God is pure.' And the second is evident, for it is said, 1 Tim. i. 19, 'Holding faith and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck.' Any great lust cherished will destroy our faith and hopes, as a man cannot long subsist in a leaky vessel. So 1 Tim. iii. 9, 'Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience.' Precious liquors are best kept in a clean vessel.

Secondly, The integrity of his obedience, set forth in all the necessary requisites.

1. There is sincerity asserted. For his conscience was in it, and a good conscience. Now conscience is that faculty which is apt to take God's part, and is the judgment a man maketh upon his actions, morally considered, in order to praise and dispraise, reward and punishment; and the goodness of conscience consisteth in its ability to do its office, in its clearness, purity, tenderness, quietness, or peaceableness. For its clearness: a blind conscience is an evil conscience; for 'without knowledge the heart is not good,' Prov. ix. 2. As a judge that understandeth not the laws of the country is unfit to give judgment in any matter that cometh before him, or as a dim eye cannot do the office of an eye, so a blind conscience is no competent judge of our duty to God. So for the purity of conscience: 1 Peter iii. 21, 'Not the putting away of the filthiness of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God;' and Heb. xiii. 18, 'We trust we have a good conscience, willing in all things to live honestly.' A good conscience is an heart set to please God in all things, an heart hating sin and loving holiness. Again, tenderness is another property of a good conscience when it is wakeful, and smiteth for sin upon all occasions offered. This property may be understood by what the apostle saith of heathens for gross sins: Rom. ii. 15, 'Which show the work of the law written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts in the meantime accusing or else excusing one another.' In David: 1 Sam. xxiv. 5, 'David's heart smote him because he had cut off Saul's skirt;' and by what Job saith, chap. xxvii. 6, 'My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live.' The opposite is a seared conscience that hath no feeling: 1 Tim. iv. 2, 'Having their consciences seared with a hot iron.' This we contract by frequent heinous sinning, or by a customary practice of that which is evil, by which the heart groweth as hard as the highway which is trod upon. Quietness of conscience is another property, whereby the goodness of it is discerned; only this quietness must arise from the former properties, else it is a dead, sleepy, seared conscience. For in this we must consider not who hath most quiet, but who hath most cause; as in buildings, not the fairness of the structure, but the foundation of it is to be regarded. There is a quiet evil conscience: Luke xi. 21, 'When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace.' When wind and tide go together there is a calm, but the quiet good conscience is from faith in Christ: Rom. v. 1, 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God;' from a sense of our sincere dealing with God: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.' A serenity resulting from our peace with God and close walking with him.

2. The strictness and exactness of the apostle's course. He would keep this good conscience 'void of offence.' It may be understood passively or actively. Passively, that conscience be not offended and suffer wrong; actively, that we offend not, or offer wrong to others.

[1.] That conscience be not offended, or receive wrong by any miscarriage of ours, for it is a tender thing. The least dust in the eye

hindereth its use, so doth sin offend and trouble the conscience. Take those four notions before mentioned. Clearness: Mat. v. 8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' A dusty glass hindereth the sight of the image, so lust cloudeth the mind. In regard of purity; so far as we give way to sin, conscience is defiled. The apostle speaketh of some 'whose minds and consciences were defiled,' Titus i. 15. It is defiled by sin. In regard of tenderness, nothing bringeth a brawn upon conscience so much as frequent and allowed sinning in small things. First it is wounded, and then hardened, and so groweth dead and sleepy; though it may write, it refuseth to speak; it is a register when it is not a witness. So it is offended in regard of quietness. An offended conscience will offend us, and 'a wounded spirit who can bear?' Prov. xviii. 14. You may as well expect to touch the flesh with a burning coal without pain as to sin without trouble of conscience. Sin will bring shame and horror ever since Adam's experience, who was afraid and ashamed, Gen. iii. 7.

[2.] The second sense, that we offend not, nor offer wrong to others, will fall in with the next head.

3. The impartiality of his obedience, 'Both towards God and towards men.' There are two tables, and we are to take care we do not give offence to God or men, by neglecting our duty to either.

[1.] Our chief care should be that we do not make a breach upon our love to God. Conscience standeth always in dread of God's eye and presence, to whom it is most accountable: Acts xxiii. 1, 'I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day;' O 'grieve not the Spirit!' Eph. iv. 30. Offend not the pure eyes of his glory.

[2.] That we do not offend men: Rom. xii. 17, *προνοούμενοι τὰ καλὰ*, 'Provide things honest in the sight of all men.' We must be careful of our conscience before God and frame with men, that we neither seduce them by our example nor grieve them by any unjust or uncharitable carriage of ours, but be blameless to men.

4. The constancy, *διαπαντὸς*, 'always,' in all cases, by all means, at all times. A conscience brought forth at times, and for certain turns, is not a good conscience: Job xiii. 18, 'Behold now I have ordered my cause; I know that I shall be justified.' A man is tried by his course, not by a step or two: 1 Peter i. 15, 'As he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation,' *ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ*; in every creek and corner of your lives, not in an humour and in good moods. A christian is everywhere like himself, and never dareth to do anything knowingly against conscience.

Thirdly, The laborious diligence wherewith he carried it on: 'I exercise myself.' We must make it our constant labour and endeavour, by a diligent search into the mind of God: Rom. xii. 2, 'That we may prove what is the good and acceptable will of God;' Eph. v. 17, 'Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is;' Eph. v. 10, 'Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord,' that we may not offend him in worship or daily conversation. By a serious inquiry into the state of our own hearts and ways: Ps. iv. 4, 'Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your hearts upon your bed, and be still.' If we would have conscience speak to us, we must often speak to conscience: Jer. viii. 6, 'I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no

man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Ask questions of your hearts. And also by a constant watchfulness and taking heed to our feet: Ps. xxxix. 1, 'I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue.' Many live as if they had no conscience, and by a broken-hearted making use of Christ's death: Rom. v. 1, 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ;' and 1 John ii. 1, 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;' and Heb. ix. 14, 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself to God without spot, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.' By a serious resistance and mortification of sin, cutting off the right hand, and pulling out the right eye, Mat. v. 29, 30; and Gal. v. 24, 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts;' and by the use of all holy means which God hath appointed.

II. The reasons why this is true christianity.

1. The necessity of it. It is a great question how far obedience belongeth to faith, whether as a part, or as an end, fruit, and consequent? I answer—Both ways. Consent of subjection is a part of faith, actual obedience a fruit of it. In the covenant there is a consent first before practice. Faith believeth the precepts as well as the promises: Ps. cxix. 66, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I have believed thy commandments;' Heb. x. 22, 'Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.' It believeth the promises to sweeten obedience to us; it hath a persuasive oratory, as it worketh by love or hope. It worketh us to an observance of the precepts by the hopes of the resurrection, lest we be enticed from them either by things grateful or troublesome to present sense: 1 Cor. xv. 58, 'Be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your work is not in vain in the Lord.' If you believe things written in the law and the prophets, you will see your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

2. The comfort of obedience to us. We cannot make out our evidence and plea but by a uniform, constant, and impartial obedience. Principles are latent till they discover themselves by their fruit. Our faith and hope is but a fancy unless it prevail over sensitive inclinations to present things, that we may live in the patient and delightful service of God, and an entire obedience to his holy will. The sap is not seen, but the apples and fruit appear: Acts xxvi. 20, 'That they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance;' Mat. iii. 8, 'Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance;' we can else have no comfortable evidence of it.

3. It is for the honour of Christ, as well as our own comfort and safety. Obedience maketh faith visible and sensible: 2 Thes. i. 11, 12, 'And fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him.' An holy conversation bringeth doctrines near to our senses, and thereby it is more clear and powerful to gain upon others: Christ hath the honour, we the reward: John xv. 8, 'Herein is my father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit, so

shall ye be my disciples ;' and Phil. i. 11, ' Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.' Uniform practice is such a fruit of grace as representeth the doctrine of life with advantage to the consciences of others ; otherwise we shall never do any great things for Christ in the world.

SERMON II.

Believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets : and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.— ACTS XXIV. 14-16.

USE 1. Is disproof of the nullifidians, and solifidians ; those that cry up good life without faith, and, on the other side, that cry up empty faith without obedience and holiness.

1. Nullifidians, who are very rife among us, who do as wisely as those that would plant a tree by the top, and not by the root ; so they cry up a morality without the faith and hope of the gospel, and that love to God which is engendered by it ; and so, out of a fondness of pagan strictness and philosophic institution, defy the religion they were bred up in. There can be no true love to God or man without the faith of the gospel. The apostle telleth us, Rom. vii. 4, ' That we are married to him who was raised from the dead, that we may bring forth fruit to God.' As the children who are born before marriage are illegitimate, so all that justice, and temperance, and charity which is not cherished in us by the love of God, and faith in Christ, and the hopes of the other world, is but mock grace and bastard holiness, and is not acceptable to God.

I shall prove two things—

[1.] That morality is not kindly unless it be founded on the gospel, and never so thoroughly promoted as by the principles laid down there : Titus ii. 11, 12, ' The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.' The more we believe all things contained in the writings of the prophets and apostles, the more we are taught how to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world. There we have the true principle of obedience, viz., love to God fed and bred in us by his love to us in Christ ; the true encouragement and motive of obedience, the hopes of the other world ; the true rule of obedience, God's mind revealed in his word, and perfecting the light of nature so far as it discovereth anything of our duty to God, neighbour, and self. Here is better furniture than we can have elsewhere, a forcible principle and a glorious hope, and an exact rule. Now they that would cry up right

reason in defiance of these are not Christ's disciples, but would make him theirs, and teach him and his apostles how to speak and teach the way to true happiness; and so are guilty of great unthankfulness for this blessed revelation which we have in the gospel.

[2.] That true morality and good conscience cannot be had without the faith of the gospel; so that we are not only better provided, but indeed cannot perform such obedience as is acceptable to God without faith in Christ. And therefore I shall show you the defects that are in men's obedience till they believe in Christ.

(1.) There is a defect in their state. They are not reconciled to God till they be in Christ; and therefore he will not accept an offering at their hands who neglect his grace, and will not sue out their atonement with him in that penitent and broken-hearted way which he hath appointed in the new covenant. Let them first sue out their pardon in the name of Christ, and then begin with a new course of obedience. God is first *placandus*, then *placendus*. First his wrath is to be appeased, and then he will accept of our duties and actions; first our persons are accepted, and then our duties and offerings: Gen. iv. 4, 'The Lord had respect to Abel and to his offering;' Abel being a believer, and under grace, as the apostle explaineth it, Heb. xi. 4, 'By faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he, being dead, yet speaketh;' that is, he was justified and accepted with God. This is such a principle of reason, that Lilius Gyraldus saith it was the custom of the heathens, *Ut prius iratos deos placarent, et postea invocarent propitios*—First to appease their gods, and then to pray unto them. Man cometh as a sinner to God, and therefore first he must deprecate his wrath, and use all means how God may be pacified and appeased.

(2.) There is a defect in the actions themselves.

(1st.) In the root; there is not a clear fountain or principle of grace in their hearts; and then, 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?' Job xiv. 4; a clear stream out of a dirty puddle? How can he perform a good action which is naturally corrupt? Without the Spirit of Christ all our good actions have a blemish: 'The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth,' Eph. v. 9. It is but wild fruit unless it be the fruit of the Spirit, and floweth from the grace of regeneration, and that new state of heart into which we are put by Jesus Christ: John xv. 5, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.' One that is in Christ will be fruitful to God, but without him, *χάρις ἔμou, seorsim a me*, or apart from him, there is no bringing forth fruit to God. It is not *nihil magnum*, some great thing, ye cannot work miracles without me, but *nihil*, nothing, nothing saving and acceptable to God.

(2d.) In the manner. They do not obey God with that purity, that life and affection, that he hath required. Their actions are superficial, shadows of good things; they draw nigh to him with their lips when their hearts are far from him: Mat. xv. 8, 'This people draweth nigh to me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.' Their duties to men are but shadows of good

actions, not flowing from a hearty love and a good conscience, but from interest or natural temper.

(3d.) There is a defect in the end ; they do not regard God's glory : Col. iii. 17, ' Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him ; ' 1 Cor. x. 31, ' Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' The most commendable actions of carnal men have either a natural aim, as self-preservation ; so in their worship : Hosea vii. 14, ' They have not cried unto me with their heart when they howled upon their beds ; ' they howl upon their bed for corn and wine. Or self-quiet and ease ; so in their duties to men, more ' for wrath than conscience ' sake, Rom. xii. 5. Or for vain-glory, ' To be seen of men, ' Mat. vi. 1. Or a legal aim ; when most devout, to quiet conscience, or to satisfy God for their sins by their duties : Micah vi. 6, 7, ' Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God ? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old ? will the Lord be pleased with thousand of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil ? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ? ' Usually the sacrifice of the wicked is ' brought with an evil mind, ' Prov. xxi. 27 ; to buy our indulgence in some sins by avoiding others, or by performing some duties to pay for their neglect of others which are more weighty. Duties are performed as a sin-offering, not as a thank-offering ; to pacify God, not to glorify him. There is no delight in God or obedience. In short, all is as flowers strewed upon a dunghill.

2. The solifidians, that cry up an empty faith without obedience and holiness, these are to be dealt with as well as the other.

[1.] The end of all religion is practice. Christianity was not brought into the world that we might talk of great things, but do great things for God. All the mysteries of our most holy faith are mysteries of godliness ; and if it be not so, the word of God is come to us in word only, and not in power, and we are christians of the letter, not of the spirit. The law of grace was never intended to try the acuteness of men's wits, who could reason most profoundly of these glorious things, nor the firmness of their memories, who could best carry in mind these holy truths, nor the readiness of their invention, who could most plausibly discourse about them, but the willingness of their obedience, who would most entirely practise them : John xiv. 21, ' He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.' The practical christian hath the truest sense of his religion.

[2.] The end of our redemption is obedience. Christ hath ends of his own, as well as those which more immediately concern our benefit : Rev. v. 9, ' Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.' Sin had made us unserviceable to God, and the end of Christ's death was to put us in joint again, and to bring us into a course of service and obedience unto our Creator : Rom. xiv. 9, ' For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of dead and living.' He came to redeem us not only from wrath, but from sin ; not only to abolish guilt, but to establish holiness : Titus ii. 14, ' Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.'

[3.] It is the end of his renewing grace. He hath altered the constitution of our hearts, that we may live unto God: 2 Cor. v. 17, 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.' We are renewed in heart, that we might walk in all newness of conversation.

[4.] It is the end of our faith and hope. Faith and hope are but means subservient to love, which is the grace by which we are inclined to perform our duty to God and man; and therefore the strength of our faith is to be judged by the readiness of our obedience: Gal. v. 6, 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.' That carrieth away the prize of justification. It is the love of God, stirred up in us by faith which maketh us watchful against sin, and careful to please him in all things.

Use 2. To press us all, if we would be complete christians, to take all the three parts. (1.) Let us be sound in the faith; (2.) Let us keep up hope; (3.) Let us be thorough and exact in obedience.

1. Let us be sound in the faith, believing all things that are contained in the word of God, not contenting ourselves with a light credulity or common tradition, but have a faith of the Spirit's working. Your love to God dependeth upon the principles laid down in the gospel, which discover to you his love in the Redeemer, and the provision made for your souls; therefore you are 'to build up yourselves in your most holy faith, that you may keep yourselves in the love of God,' Jude 20, 21.

2. Let not hope be left out as an unnecessary grace. This is not a cursory and slight, but a desirous expectation, so as not to be weakened by the lusts of the flesh: 1 Peter i. 13, 'Wherefore gird up the loins of your minds; be ye sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' When Christ cometh all your labours and self-denial shall be recompensed: Rom. viii. 24, 25, 'For we are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? but if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.'

3. Be sound and thorough, and exact in obedience. Many hold sound doctrine, and have some lazy expectation of eternal life, but they are defective in the third branch; they are not careful to keep a good conscience, and do their duty in all things to God and man. Here I shall press you to two things—

[1.] Let conscience be your guide.

[2.] Exercise yourselves in this, that conscience may be a good guide to you.

First, Let conscience be your guide. I shall press you hereunto by two considerations—

1. From the nature of conscience. It is not only a monitor, but a judge. As a monitor it warns us of our duty; as a judge it censures our neglects of it. Science is one thing, conscience is another. Science is a man's knowledge of other things; conscience is a man's knowledge of himself, his state, and ways, to know what he is to do, and to know what he hath done; that is conscience. It is the judgment of a man concerning himself and his actions with respect to reward and punish-

ment. God, that is our Lord, is also our proper judge; but it pleaseth God to put a faculty into man, this spirit within him, that he should have something in his own bosom to be a rule and judge, but yet a subordinate rule, and a deputy-judge, accountable to God; but a judge it is. However it much conduceth to the glory of God and to the safety of man.

[1.] To the glory of God.

(1.) As it is an evidence of his being, whose law is the ground of conscience, and before whom conscience doth accuse, and whose sentence it doth dread and stand in fear of. Why doth conscience scruple this or that, if there be not a God by whose will good and evil are distinguished? To whom doth it accuse us but to God? Why is conscience sometimes afraid, sometimes comforted, if there were no God to mind things here below? We find conscience appalleth the stoutest sinners after the commitment of some offence, though it be secret, and beyond the cognisance and vengeance of man: Ps. liii. 5, 'There were they in great fear where no fear was;' that is, no outward cause of fear, where none sought to hurt them; accusing themselves when none else could accuse them, as Joseph's brethren: Gen. xlii. 21, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother's blood;' or where none had power to reach them, as princes and worldly potentates feel the stings of conscience as well as others. Felix trembled, who was the judge, at Paul's words, who was the prisoner: Acts xxiv. 25, 'And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.' What is the reason of this, but that they know there is a supreme judge and avenger?

(2.) It is for the glory of his judicial proceedings. Self-accusers and self-condemners have no reason to quarrel with God and impeach his justice. Man hath principles and sentiments graven upon his heart, which justify all God's dealings with him: Luke xix. 22, 'Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant!' and Ps. li. 4, 'That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.' Hereby he is left without excuse: Rom. i. 20, 'So that they are without excuse,' *ἀναπολογήτους*; Titus iii. 11, 'Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself,' *αὐτοκατάκριτος*. Hence the frequent appeals to conscience: Isa. v. 3, 4, 'Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard: what could I have done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?' I have produced these scriptures to show that by conscience man is better induced to give a testimony to God concerning all his dealings with him.

[2.] To the safety and benefit of man, that he may have an oracle in his own bosom to direct him to his duty, and to warn him of his danger if he doth amiss. Conscience is spoken of in scripture both ways; as instructing us in our duty: Ps. xvi. 7, 'My reins also instruct me in the night season;' that is, conscience showed him his duty, and how he was concerned in the law of God, or the rule which God had given to his creatures. And as it showeth us what to do, so it reflecteth upon what we have done. If evil, it smiteth us for it: 2 Sam. xxiv. 10, 'And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people.' If good, it cheereth us with it: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this,

the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.' It smiteth as it exciteth fear of punishment; it cheereth as it stirreth up hope of reward, and we do very much understand hereby how God standeth affected towards us: 1 John iii. 19-21, 'And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him; for if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.'

2. Conscience is God's vicegerent and deputy. You may know much of his mind by the voice and report of conscience; therefore, next to the judgment and sentence of God, a man should regard the judgment and sentence of conscience: 1 John iii. 20, 21, 'If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.' Observe what conscience speaketh; doth it condemn thee or acquit thee? and upon what terms doth it either? The voice of conscience is often the voice of God, and men would sooner come to know themselves, and might make a right judgment upon their estates, if they would look inward, and regard the voice of conscience, doth it condemn or acquit? Indeed there lieth an appeal from court to court, and from judge to judge.

[1.] From court to court. In what court doth conscience condemn you? In the law court? You ought to own the desert of sin, clearing God, if he should inflict it upon you: 1 Cor. xi. 31, 'For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.' But yet you may take sanctuary at his grace, and humbly claim the benefit of the new covenant: Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, 'If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' If it condemn you in the gospel court for no sound believer, the case must not be lightly passed over, but examined, whether there be a sincere bent of heart towards God: Heb. xiii. 18, 'We trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.'

[2.] There is an appeal to an higher judge. Doth conscience write bitter things against thee? Yet if God justifieth, Rom. viii. 33, 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth.' God's act is authoritative and powerful: Isa. lvii. 19, 'I create the fruit of the lips, peace, peace to him that is afar off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord, and I will heal him;' Ps. lxxxv. 8, 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace unto his people and to his saints.' But sometimes he speaketh in the sentence of his word when not in the conscience; his authority may comfort when we feel not his power. So for acquitting; conscience is not the highest judge: 1 Cor. iv. 4, 'For if I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord;' Prov. xvi. 2, 'All the ways of a man are clear in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits.' We must consult his word, and thereby clear our case, so as to assure our hearts before him.

3. Conscience is easily offended, but not easily appeased; as the eye is easily offended with the least dust or mote, which soon gets in, but

is not easily gotten out. But then to appease it costs a great deal of trouble. Therefore, if we would, as Paul, keep a conscience void of offence, there needeth much tenderness and watchfulness, for by the commission of deliberate and wilful sins you may raise a tempest that is not easily laid again; as David felt broken bones after his foul fall: Ps. li. 8, 'Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.' Before the action conscience showeth what is to be done; in the action it guideth us in doing; after the action it censureth it as well or ill done; and so either comforteth us with hopes of a reward, or terrifieth us with fear of punishment. As a man acteth, so conscience is a party; as the action is censured, so conscience is a judge. After the action the force of conscience is usually seen more than before the fact or in the fact, because before and in the action the judgment of reason is not so clear and strong, the affections raising mists and clouds to darken the mind and trouble it, and draw it on their side by their pleasing violence. By the treachery of the senses and revolt of the passions the mind is betrayed; but as the violence of the affections ceaseth, and is by little and little allayed, guilt flasheth in the face of conscience, and reason hath the greatest force to affect the mind with grief or fear. The act being over, and the affection satisfied, the soul giveth place to reason, which was before contemned; and when it recovereth the throne, it striketh through the heart with a sharp sentence and reproof for obeying appetite before itself, and brings in terror and trouble, which causeth the soul to sit uneasy: Mat. xxvii. 4, 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood;' Rom. i. 32, 'Knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death.' Therefore do not go like an ox to the slaughter, nor a fool to the correction of the stocks.

4. Conscience is the best friend and the worst enemy. It is the best friend, partly for its comfort: Prov. xv. 15, 'He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast;' 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience;' no bird sings so sweetly as the bird in the bosom. Partly for its nearness; it is always with us, in health and sickness, in life and in death. Husbands and wives, who are most together, yet because they live a distinct life, they are often apart; death looseth the bond and knot, but this remaineth with us. So it is the worst enemy. Partly for its universal nearness. It is sad for a man to be at odds with himself, and fall out with his own heart. It is a domestical tribunal, which always remaineth with us; and therefore Job could bear the reproaches of others, but his own heart should not reproach him as long as he lived, Job xxvii. 6. Partly because of the grievousness of the wound and stroke: Prov. xviii. 14, 'A wounded spirit who can bear?' It is no less than the fear of the wrath of the eternal God. A man cannot run away from his conscience, no more than he can run away from himself; and therefore for a man to please others and offend his conscience, what folly is that! or to please a lust to wound his conscience. A lust or vain appetite is an unjustifiable thing, and will soon appear so, but the fears of conscience are justified by the highest reason, the law of God. The satisfaction of a lust is a poor vanishing pleasure, but the observing and keeping a good con-

science breedeth a solid joy, which will stick by thee to the very last, and when thou comest to die, will be a support to thee : Isa. xxxviii. 3, ' Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.' When thou must leave riches, honours, and pleasures, which are the baits of thy lust, this will stick by thee : 1 John ii. 17, ' The world passeth away, and the lust thereof ; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' Therefore now thou shouldst mortify thy lust and gratify thy conscience.

5. Thy conscience is the beginning of heaven and hell. A good conscience is the beginning of heaven, and peace and joy in believing is a foretaste of that fulness of joy and pleasure which we shall have when we come into God's immediate presence. The glorified spirits carry a good conscience with them to heaven ; ' their works follow them,' Rev. xiv. 13 ; and the damned carry their stings and convictions with them to hell : Mark ix. 44, ' Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.' Oh, think of this ! The joys of the Spirit are an antepast of glory, called often an earnest in scripture : 2 Cor. i. 22, ' Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.' And the horrors of conscience are the suburbs of hell. Oh ! therefore be sure to keep all quiet within, and whatever be your temptations, do not offend conscience, but unfeignedly discharge your duties to God and men.

6. If there be a crack and a flaw in your conscience, all your trading with heaven is at a stand ; there cannot be any serious dealing with God, nor holy boldness in prayer : 1 John iii. 31, ' If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.' When you have sinned away your peace, a strangeness and distance groweth between God and you : Ps. xxxii. 3, ' When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long ;' Gen. iii. 8, ' And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.' Adam ran to the bushes. Your hearts will grow shy of God, and you cannot so comfortably look him in the face, and so the sweetness of holy privacy and communion with God will be lost. Time was when you could go boldly, and open your hearts to God, but now you are afraid of him, and every act of commerce is a reviving of your bondage ; the remembrance of God is a trouble to you.

7. If conscience speaketh not, it writeth, for it is not only a witness, but a register and book of record : Jer. xvii. 1, ' The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond.' We know not what conscience writeth, being occupied and taken up with carnal vanities, and carried away with foolish and hurtful lusts, but we shall know afterwards, when the book of conscience shall be opened : Rev. xx. 12, ' And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God : and the books were opened ; and another book was opened, which is the book of life ; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.' These books are the book of conscience and the book of God's remembrance. The remembrance of our actions shall be forced upon us. Conscience is God's register, and keepeth a diary, and sets down everything. This book, though it be in the sinner's keeping, cannot be razed : what con-

science writeth is written to eternity, unless it be blotted out by repentance and a serious application of the blood of Christ. Well, then, consider a sleepy conscience will not always sleep: if we suffer it not to awaken here, it will awaken in hell, where there is no remedy; for the present it sleepeth in many, in regard of motion, check, or smiting, but not in regard of notice and observation. This secret spy is privy to more than it speaketh of; it is laid up as matter for the worm that never dieth to feed upon.

8. If the stings of an evil conscience be not always felt, yet they are soon awakened by serious thoughts of death and judgment to come, and then forced upon us. There is a fire smothering in our bosoms, and it is soon blown up into a flame. Sometimes by the word: Acts xxiv. 25, 'And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.' Belshazzar's edge was taken off in the midst of his carousing: Dan. v. 6, 'Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.' Sometimes by some great troubles: Isa. lix. 12, 'For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them.' Therefore 'we roar like beasts, and mourn like doves,' ver. 11. In a tempest, that which is at the bottom cometh a-top. Or by death; whatever silence there be in conscience before, yet death usually reviveth these fears: 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin.' Men are wise and more serious as they are entering on the confines of eternity; near things affect us; the baits of the flesh have then lost their allurements. The devil, that was before a tempter, will then be a tormentor. Things overlooked before are then seriously considered; then the stings of sin work more sensibly, and in a lively manner, and the deluded sinner begins to see what he would not take notice of before.

9. If conscience do not speak to you, you must speak to it, and call upon it to do its office. Call yourselves to an account for the expense of your time and employment: Ps. iv. 4, 'Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still;' Ps. lxxvii. 6, 'I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search.' Take a time to parley with yourselves, and consider how matters stand between you and God. When the clock striketh not, it is a sign the plummetts are down, and we must wind them up again. Every day we must do something, as Job sacrificed for his sons day by day: Job i. 5, 'It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.' And God himself reviewed every day's work, and 'saw that it was good,' Gen. i. 4, 10, 12, &c. So should we review every day's work, and cast up the account at the foot of every page. Short reckonings prevent mistakes. Pythagoras taught his scholars that they should never give way to sleep till they had posed themselves with these questions, *Quid feci*, &c. — What have I done? what good have I omitted? wherein have I transgressed? Conscience, what hast thou to say to me? And Seneca telleth of his friend Sextius, that before he would betake himself to rest he would ask his soul, *Quid hodie malum tuum sanasti? cui vitio obstitisti? qua parte melior es?* — What evil hast thou got rid of to-day? what sin hast thou resisted? wherein art thou

better than thou wert before? And he saith of himself, *Quotidie apud me causam dico, totum diem mecum scrutor, dicta et facta mea rementior*; that he scanned all his actions and speeches in the day. Shall heathens be more serious, and shall christians, who are acquainted with eternity, never take time to set conscience a-work? Oh! let us be ashamed of our slightness and negligence!

10. We can never have a sound conscience till we be sincere with God in a constant uniform course of self-denying obedience: 1 John iii. 19, 'Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him;' and this is described in the text by 'keeping a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards men.' So 2 Kings xx. 3, 'I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight,' and this not in an act or two, but in a man's whole course: Ps. cvi. 3, 'Blessed are they that keep judgment and he that doeth righteousness at all times.' Not by starts and good-moods only, but constantly and at all times. And our obedience must be self-denying as well as constant and uniform. That religion is worth nothing that costs nothing: 2 Sam. xxiv. 24, 'I will not offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.' When we value God's interest above our own, and we can deny ourselves upon the hopes of glory, then is our sincerity most evidenced. But if we embrace only the safe, cheap, and easy part of religion, and cannot deny our ease, profit, and honour, we do not set up Christ's religion, but a christianity of our own making: Mat. xvi. 24, 'Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any one will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.'

11. If we would have conscience to do its office, there must be great heed and watchfulness, for it is corrupt as well as other faculties, and from a judge it may become an advocate, excusing the partialities of our obedience. To evidence this more fully with respect to conscience, men may be considered three ways—as acting without conscience, or according to conscience, or against conscience.

[1.] A man may act without all conscience, so a man may do either good or evil.

(1.) Good, as those that act rashly, inconsiderately, or customarily. As when men pray, give alms, go to church; conscience did not send them thither, but custom, inducement of friends, persuasions of parents, or the like. These do that which is good, but they do it not well: Luke viii. 18, 'Take heed how you hear.' Conscience doth not put them upon it. To this first sort may be reckoned those that intended to do evil, but by accident do that which is good; as Joseph's brethren: Gen. i. 20, 'But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good.' And those that perform the duties of christianity so far as the interest of the flesh will give them leave, for the flesh itself will command you to do well, and sin itself forbid sin, that it may not disgrace them in the world, and bring some hurt and inconvenience on them. Conscience doth not guide them herein, but hypocrisy or sin sets them a-work.

(2.) Evil, as Lot's incest with his daughters: Gen. xix. 33, 34, 'He perceived not when they lay down, or when they arose.' Conscience

was laid asleep; it did not stir and chasten or rebuke him. So when the people of Ephesus came together, Acts xix. 32, 'The most part knew not wherefore they were come together;' they were in a hurry, tumult, and sudden passion. These consult not with conscience in their actions, and the evil they do is not against conscience; yet evil it is, and doth not exempt from punishment, for a man is bound not to act rashly, but according to the dictate of conscience.

[2.] A man may act out of conscience, or according to conscience, and so he may act either good or evil.

(1.) Good, either lawful, because it is permitted, or necessary, because it is commanded; in the one conscience is sensible that he may, in the other that he ought to do so. This he doth not out of terror, but the sweet force of love and willing obedience unto God; for fear and conscience are opposed: Rom. xiii. 5, 'Wherefore ye must be faithful, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake;' but he doth it in obedience to God: Ps. xxvii. 8, 'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' I acknowledge thy power over me.

(2.) Evil. So Paul out of conscience persecuted Christ, for his erring conscience told him that the precepts and ceremonies of the law of Moses were all of eternal obligation, and necessary to a man's justification towards God, and therefore that Christ, abolishing the ceremonies, was an enemy to Moses: Acts xxvi. 9, 'I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.' Error of conscience dictated it to him. But did Paul do well or ill herein? As to the manner of the action, it was well, for he did it with a good mind, and according to his conscience; thus far Paul sinned not. But as to the matter of the action, he did wickedly, that he followed the dictates of a misguided conscience, and did not subject his conscience to that higher revelation of God which is in scripture, but to the tradition of the elders. So many persecutors do evil, and do not think they do evil, but do God good service: John xvi. 2, 'They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service;' and this through ignorance and blind zeal. This erring conscience is their bane; it may urge them to do evil, but it cannot oblige them to do evil, for they are bound to know better; and according to the means of their conviction, so is the greatness of their sin.

[3.] A man may act against conscience.

(1.) So he may do good. As a papist communicating with the reformed churches in the word, and prayer, and sacraments, he doth that which is good, but he doth it against his conscience, because he thinks it is not lawful to have communion with heretics. To this head belongeth those things that we do with scruple of conscience, fearing the things which we do are not right. So many times we do things which are lawful, yet fearing they are unlawful; we do them not without some scruple, and terror of conscience; as, for instance, a self-condemning sinner coming to the Lord's supper, yet because he hath not a clear sense of the love of God, his conscience troubleth him, and he is afraid he eateth and drinketh unworthily. The apostle saith, Rom. xiv. 22, 23, 'Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that

thing which he alloweth ; and he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith ; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin ;' that is, to the party that doeth it, though it be good in itself. Therefore we must endeavour that, whatever we do, we may be assured out of the word of God that it is lawful : Rom. xiv. 5, ' Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind.'

(2.) So he may do evil. When a man doeth good against his conscience, it is evil ; but when he doeth evil against his conscience, it is a double evil, because he doth not only transgress the rule that should guide him, but affronts the judge which God hath set over him in his own bosom, and kicketh against the pricks, the urgings of his own conscience : James iv. 17, ' Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' But especially it is a greater sin, when not only by light natural, but by the checks and motions of the Spirit, he understandeth the evil which he doth, or the necessary good which he omitteth, for this is to resist the Holy Ghost : Acts vii. 51, ' Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.' Especially when he wilfully and blasphemously rejects that sufficient evidence that is given him of the ways of God, ' and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace,' Heb. x. 29 ; for that is ' the sin unto death,' 1 John v. 19. In short, we should be careful we sin not against conscience, for it is our best friend or our worst enemy. It is God's deputy, and to resist the officer is to resist the prince or magistrate. Therefore do nothing without conscience, do nothing against conscience, but do all things with conscience, rightly informed by the word of God.

Secondly, Exercise yourselves in this, that conscience may perform its office, and be a good guide unto you. There are two offices of conscience—to direct and to censure ; to judge rightly *de jure*, what you ought to do ; and to judge rightly *de facto*, what you have done or what you are, that you may neither have a blind and erring nor a sleepy conscience.

1. That you may not have an erring conscience, or a blind one, you must consult with your rule : Rom. xii. 2, ' That ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God ;' Eph. v. 17, ' Wherefore be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is ;' with a mind fully resolved to do his will : John vii. 17, ' If any man do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' This rule is the word of God : Ps. cxix. 105, ' Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.' Beg the light of the Spirit : ver. 133, ' Order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' And be not rebellious against this light, for our sins and lusts blind the mind, and a naughty heart defileth the conscience, so that it groweth loose and indulgent, and from a judge it becometh an advocate, excusing the partialities of our obedience to God and our injuries to men. Therefore there must be a resolute endeavour to overcome every sin you are convinced of : Heb. xiii. 18, ' Pray for us, for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.'

2. That you may not have a dead, sleepy, stupid conscience, you

must often excite it. For your actions, bring them to the rule: Hag. i. 5, 'Now therefore thus saith the Lord God, Consider your ways;' Ps. iv. 4, 'Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.' For your state, try it often: 1 Cor. xi. 28, 'But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup;' 2 Cor. xiii. 5, 'Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' The acts of conscience are three—to be an accuser, witness, and judge.

[1.] As an accuser, hearken to its voice; what doth it say to you, good or evil? Job xxvii. 6, 'My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.' If it speak not to you, you must speak to it. God complaineth, Jer. viii. 6, 'I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?'

[2.] As a witness, consider the evidence it bringeth, that it may be matter of joy or sorrow to you, of confession or thanksgiving. If it reproach you, do not smother the check: Acts xxiv. 25, 'And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a more convenient season I will call for thee.' If it cheer you, see upon what grounds: Rom. ix. 1, 'I speak the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.' It is no matter what others think, but what conscience thinketh. Nothing is nearer to us than ourselves; it is a domestical tribunal, that we always carry about with us.

[3.] As a judge it passeth sentence; if it be wrong, there is an appeal from court to court: Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, 'If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who can stand? but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' Conscience is a judge, but it is an inferior judge; there lieth an appeal to a higher: 1 Cor. iv. 4, 'He that judgeth me is the Lord;' Heb. xii. 23, 'And to God the judge of all.' But it should be done with great admiration of grace. But if the judgment be right, it is ratified; its judgment we must yield to: 1 Cor. xi. 32, 'But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord.' Thus should we keep up the force of conscience.
