

SERMON UPON ACTS X. 34, 35.

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.—ACTS x. 34, 35.

THESE words are Peter's reply to Cornelius, who sent for him to hear the gospel from his mouth. For the entertaining of this message, both Peter and Cornelius were aforehand prepared severally by God. Peter by a vision, Cornelius by an oracle. So much ado was needful to gather in the first-fruits of the Gentiles.

In the words take notice of two things—

1. Peter's acknowledgment of his former mistake, ver. 34.
2. His assertion of the positive truth which he learned by this providence, ver. 35.

First, In the acknowledgment of his former error you may observe three things—

1. The preface or introduction: 'Then Peter opened his mouth, and said.' Profane spirits cavil at this expression as needless; for how could he speak, say they, without opening his mouth? But they mind not that it is an Hebraism, frequently used in scripture concerning them that are about to speak anything weighty upon mature deliberation. As of our Lord Christ it is said, Mat. v. 2, 'He opened his mouth and taught them, saying.' So Ps. lxxviii. 2, 'I will open my mouth in a parable;' Prov. viii. 2, 'I will speak of excellent things; the opening of my mouth shall be right things.' To open the mouth is to speak considerately, prudently, confidently. Would to God that those that scoff at these things would never open their mouths to worse purpose.

2. The means of his conviction: 'Of a truth I perceive;' *'Επ' αληθείας καταλαμβάνομαι*. The phrase is used of those that are apparently convinced and persuaded to change their opinion. The Latins would express it, *A vero vinci*, to be overcome by the truth itself. Peter once thought that it was unlawful for a man that is a Jew to keep company with or go to one that is of another nation, as he himself expresseth it, ver. 28. But being prepared by his vision, and now convinced by the words of Cornelius, he perceived the contrary.

3. The error, that God was a respecter of persons, or had so confined his respect to the Jewish nation that he would not reveal himself to any of the gentiles who had not submitted to their rites. But now

he saw that all respect of nations was taken away by the coming of Christ.

Before I go off from explaining this branch—

[1.] Let us see why this was spoken to Cornelius. Was not he a proselyte to the true religion?

I answer—Cornelius was a Roman captain over the Italian band, therefore probably himself of that nation. But though by race and breeding a gentile, yet no idolater, but a worshipper of the God of Israel, or the true God, the creator of heaven and earth; for we are told, Acts x. 2, that ‘he was a devout man, one that feared God with all his house, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.’ Now the *σεβόμενοι*, those that were called devout men, were proselytes. Yet he was not circumcised, nor had he taken upon him the yoke of Moses’ law, and so was not accounted a member of the church of Israel. The Jews distinguished of proselytes, the proselytes of the covenant, and the proselytes of the gate. For the former, the proselytes of the covenant were such as were circumcised, and counted and conversed with as Jews born; but the proselytes of the gate bound themselves only to observe the precepts of Noah, as to worship the true God, to abhor idols, to abstain from murder, fornication, robbery, and in all things to do as they would be done to. With these the Jews might not converse, as being not incorporated into the commonwealth of Israel, though they granted them a part in the life to come. Of this sort was Cornelius.

[2.] Let us observe something from this branch of the text.

(1.) That God’s own people may err in some points of religion. Peter before this had read in the prophecies of the old testament much about the calling of the gentiles; he had heard from the mouth of Christ the command of discipling the nations, Mat. xxviii.; yet he did not comprehend the thing till he was prepared by a vision from heaven, and now found Cornelius endowed with great graces given by God. Thus often we hear the truth propounded, explained, proved, yet we conceive it not. Surely this was a great error in Peter, so difficult to come over to this truth after the ascension of Christ, that still he should think God to be the God of the Jews only, and not also of the gentiles. But good men do not see all things, even those things which are before their eyes, especially when blinded with prejudice, and prepossessed with contrary interests and opinions. Therefore we had need all look about us lest we be ignorant of an obvious truth.

(2.) The godly, when convinced, ingeniously confess their errors; as Peter doth here. Controversies would sooner be at an end if we could but learn this modesty. But men fear the disgrace of a change of mind or opinion and so are the more entangled. It is better to confess and give glory to God, and yield to a conquering truth, than for credit’s sake obstinately to persist in a received error; for it is no disgrace to humble ourselves before God and men, and to submit to such means as he hath appointed for our conviction.

Secondly, His positive assertion of the truth now learned: ‘But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.’ Where—

1. The qualification, ‘He that feareth God, and worketh righteousness.’

You will say, Here is no mention of faith in Christ. I answer—

[1.] Cornelius had not as yet received the knowledge of him, and Peter was now come to preach Christ to him, as he doth in the next verse, where he speaketh of 'preaching peace by Jesus Christ; he is Lord of all.'

[2.] He speaketh not now of our first recovery and reconciliation with God, but of the constant temper of our hearts and tenor of our lives after we are recovered and reconciled to him. Among other things learned from the Jews, Cornelius had heard of the Messiah, by whom sins should be forgiven, and the lost world restored. And that is one chief means to beget fear and reverence of God: Ps. cxxx. 4, 'There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.' But as yet he knew not Christ to be this Messiah.

[3.] This qualification is most to his purpose, which is to show that external prerogatives, abstracted from solid godliness, do not further our acceptance with God, nor the want of them hurt or hinder us. No; where there is a good constitution of heart and an holy life a man is accepted of God. As more expressly to the christian notion, it is said, Gal. v. 6, 'In Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which works by love.' But here it was enough to say, 'He that feareth God and works righteousness.'

2. The privilege, 'Is accepted with him;' that is, accepted to grace and glory.

[1.] To grace. For Cornelius was rewarded with higher revelations from God; who warned him to send for Peter, and prepared Peter that he might not refuse the message. Thus God delighteth to heap up grace upon grace: John vii. 17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' To obey God's will in what we know is the ready way to know more and better.

[2.] And for glory, that cannot be left out; as appears by the conclusion which the believers make when they heard of these things; Acts xi. 18, 'Then hath God granted to the gentiles repentance unto life;' that is, to know and receive Christ unto salvation.

Doct. That God, without respect of persons, accepteth such as fear him and work righteousness.

1. What is respect of persons.
2. In what sense it is denied of God.
3. What is the meaning of this qualification.
4. What is meant by being accepted with God.

I. What is respect of persons? The word *person* doth not signify the substance of a man or his personal subsistence, but that outward estate and condition whereby one differeth from another. Either in the gifts of the body—one is strong, another weak; one fair, another deformed; or of the mind—one is more ingenious, prudent, learned, when another is not so; or else estate, rank, and quality—one is rich, another poor, one more powerful, whilst others are kept low and bare; or in respect of nation or country, Jew or gentile. Lastly, in respect of externals in religion, one may stand upon the vantage-ground who yet is not the taller man. In short, that which is conspicuous in man, and maketh him more or less esteemed among men, that is called his

person. Now, to respect or accept persons in judgment is to prefer and favour one person above another for these outward advantages, not regarding the merits of the cause which is under trial. *Quando non causæ merita, sed personæ dignitas attenditur*—Aug. Now God doth judge *απροσωπολήπτως*, without respect to persons; that is, his judgment is not swayed by anything that is extrinsical and belongeth not to the cause in hand, and will not approve or disapprove any man for his person's sake or external prerogatives, if he be not otherwise worthy of approbation or reproof. As, to instance in the foregoing distinctions—

1. The gifts of the body, strength and beauty. It is not the strong and beautiful that are accepted with God, but the good and the holy. He is strong in a spiritual sense, not that overcometh another man, but tameth his own flesh: Prov. xvi. 32, 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.' The true strength is seen also in vanquishing the temptations of the devil: 1 John ii. 14, 'Ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.' So not outward beauty, but grace, doth make us amiable in the sight of God. Alas! that is a fading thing; in its prime it is but skin-deep. The adorning of the hidden man of the heart is that which is of great price in the sight of God, 1 Peter iii. 3, 4. This beauty is never shrivelled, nor doth it wax old, and is in high esteem with God.

2. For the gifts of the mind; learning, secular prudence, these things may make us more serviceable in the world, but surely in themselves they do not commend us to God. It is pity men should prostitute their great abilities to so vile an use, as only to cater for the body, or to turn and wind in the world, or else to put a varnish on the devil's cause. As Satan chose the form of the serpent to deceive our first parents, because he was the subtlest of all the beasts of the field, Gen. iii. 1, so he delighteth to employ the sharpest subtlest wits; but at last, with all their wit and learning, they are thrust down into hell, unless they lay aside their worldly wisdom, and cleave to Christ, and walk in his ways whatever it costs them: 1 Cor. iii. 18, 'If any among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise.' In the eye of the world it seemeth foolish to stand on terms of conscience, but that will be found the best wisdom at last.

3. Of estate, rank, and quality. Some are noble, some ignoble. But the blood that runneth in the veins of the poor is of the same colour with yours that are nobly descended. By nature you are equal; for 'he has made all nations of one blood,' Acts xvii. 26. And this distinction will not outlive time, but ceaseth at the grave's mouth. Certainly it beareth no weight before God's tribunal: 1 Cor. i. 26, 'Not many mighty, not many noble are called.' So some are rich and mighty, others are poor and in a low condition, but none are accepted the more for their greatness, dignity, or worldly pre-eminence: Job xxxiv. 19, 'He accepteth not the person of princes, and regardeth not the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of his hands.' Alas! it is a vain plea with God to say, I am rich, I am noble, I am a prince; I hope he will not deal severely with me. The rich or poor, prince or beggar, do all stand upon the same level before God. The dignity, power, and wealth of princes doth not move him to spare

them ; neither lordship, nor ladyship, nor principality, nor kingdom can stand you if you be a transgressor. Your sensuality is as odious to God as the drunkenness of the rascality. When we stand before the Lord, we are stripped of all our personal qualities, and regarded only according to our works : Rev. xx. 12, 'I saw small and great stand before God.' So for bond and free. Though christian religion abolish not those civil distinctions which are between masters and servants, governors and governed, yet it layeth no weight upon any of these as to our acceptance with God. The bond may be Christ's freeman, 1 Cor. vii. 22, and the free are but Christ's servants. Therefore the apostle biddeth masters to carry themselves well to their servants, because God is no respecter of persons, Eph. vi. 9, Col. iii. 25.

4. In respect of nation or country. Some lie nearer, others more remote from the sun, but they are all alike near to the Sun of righteousness: Gal. iii. 28, 'Jew and Greek are all one in Christ Jesus,' or else miserable without him. Especially since the coming of Christ in the flesh ; the door of grace is much more enlarged and the enclosure broken down.

5. For externals in religion, for profession and outward privileges. Cornelius was an holy and good man, but wanted circumcision, yet was accepted of God when many a carnal Jew that had it was rejected by him. This is attested by the apostle : Rom. ii. 9-11, 'Tribulation and anguish upon every soul that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the gentiles ; but glory, honour, peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the gentile ; for there is no respect of persons with God.' God is not partial to Jews above gentiles, nor to carnal, literal christians above pagans. If by outward profession there be a people nearer to God than others, they have the privilege to be first rewarded if they do good ; but then they must expect to have punishment and destruction first if they do evil ; for the greater their privileges, the greater also their provocation and guilt will be. For God's rewards and punishments are not conferred by an uncertain rule of arbitrary favour and displeasure, neither do they depend on outward privileges of being or not being circumcised, but are exactly proportioned to men's qualifications and actions.

Well, then, baptism, or the external profession of the faith, is the *πρόσωπον* of the christian ; as circumcision, or the profession of the law, is the *πρόσωπον* of the Jew. Now if either be without holiness of heart and life, it is nothing to their acceptance with God, either for the submission to the rituals of Moses, or the external observances of the gospel ; if there be not that constitution of heart, or that course of life which this profession calleth for ; for God looketh not to shows and appearances, but the reality of men's godliness and obedience. It is no plea to say, I am of the true religion.

6. I shall add, where men are under one common profession, but differ in lesser things. As there were different parties at Corinth, but one common Christ: 1 Cor. i. 2, 'All that call on the Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours ;' with 12th and 13th verses. 'Is Christ divided ?' It is the nature of man to confine all religion to their own party, and enclose the common salvation. As here in England, our divisions have tempted us to unchurch, unminister, unchristianise one

another; we make no scruple to cast one another out of God's favour; but God's approbation doth not go by our vote and suffrage. *Lingua petiliani non est ventilabrum Christi.* It is well that every angry christian's tongue is not the fan wherewith Christ will purge his flour. God considereth men in his judgment, not of this or that party, but as righteous or wicked.

II. In what sense is this denied of God? for it seemeth God doth respect persons, giving more grace to one than another, though both be equal in themselves. I answer—

1. The text speaketh of what is done by God in his government. Respect of persons is not faulty, except it be in judgment; for so it is forbidden to man, that neither the poor nor the rich should be favoured in the judgment of their cause: Lev. xix. 15, 'Thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.' And so it is applied to God: 1 Peter i. 17, 'Who without respect of persons judgeth every one according to his works.' Therefore God may be considered two ways—either as a righteous governor of the world, or as a free lord. And the decision in short is this, that God, that is arbitrary in his gifts, is not arbitrary in his judgments. Therefore we must not exclude the free distribution of his graces; for God, as a free lord, may give his benefits as he seeth meet; for that is not a matter of right and wrong, but of mere favour. Thus God of his free mercy called the gentiles, who were further off from him than the Jews; and may give the gospel and the grace of the gospel to one, and not to another, when both are equally unworthy of it. As to his gifts, he may do with his own as it pleaseth him, Mat. xx. 15. We can plead no right, either by merit or promise. On the other side, if you consider God as a governor, who governeth mankind by a law which hath punishments and rewards, punishments threatened and rewards promised, he judgeth according to that law, and as obliged by promise. Compare Rom. ix. 16, and 1 Cor. ix. 24. In the one place, 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.' But in the other, 'So run that ye may obtain.' How shall we reconcile these places? The first place belongeth to God's dispensation as a free lord, the second as a righteous governor. All acts of government are dispensed according to law and rule, but his gifts according to his own pleasure. If you ask why he doth not give effectual grace to all, and hinder sin in all; he is not a debtor, but a free lord; though we are all children of wrath, though God seeth no more in one than another, yet it pleases him to show more mercy to one than to another. He speaketh not here of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God, who taketh into favour one that is of himself as unworthy as another, but his love towards the work of grace, in whomsoever it is found. He speaks of his consequent rewarding grace, in dispensing of which he looketh not to outward prerogatives or observances.

2. In his gifts of grace, he doth not respect persons or nations, or outward prerogatives, but the council of his own will. He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, passing by others which are nobler, richer, wiser. He is not moved by any by-respects to anything in the creatures so to do: 'Even so, Father, for so it pleaseth thee,' Mat. xi. 27.

III. What is the meaning of this qualification, 'That feareth God

and worketh righteousness,' and the respect which each hath to the other?

The answer must be given according to the several acceptations of the words *fear* and *righteousness*, which may be taken strictly or largely.

1. Strictly. So the fear of God implieth his worship: Deut. vi. 24, 'The Lord commanded us to fear the Lord our God for our good always;' or all that duty of man which is immediately given to God. And righteousness is also taken for the whole duty of the second table, as often in scripture. Now thus it maketh a good sense; for all religion consists in these two—the faithful discharging our duty to God and man. There are two tables, and we are to take care of both, that we do not give offence to God or men, by neglecting our duty to either: Acts xxiv. 16, 'Herein do I exercise myself, to keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man.' So Rom. xii. 17, 'Providing things honest in the sight of all men;' neither offending against the rules of justice or mercy, but abounding in the exercise of both.

2. Both are taken largely; fear for the principle of our obedience to God, and righteousness for the fruits of it, whether they belong to the first or second table. As 1 John iii. 7, 'He that doeth righteousness is righteous.' So that here Peter observeth the right order; he beginneth with fear as the root of all duty and worship, and then proceedeth to the fruit, which is an uniform, constant, impartial obedience to the whole law; which method is also observed in other scriptures. As Ps. cxii. 1, 'Blessed is the man that feareth God, and delighteth greatly in his commandments;' and Deut. v. 29, 'Oh, that there were such an heart in them to fear me and keep my precepts.' This sense I choose and prefer, and therefore shall examine—(1.) Why fear is made the principle; (2.) Why working righteousness is required as the fruit.

[1.] Why fear is made the principle of obedience. Certainly not to exclude faith in Christ; for without him we can do nothing, John xv. 5; at least nothing acceptably: Heb. xi. 6, 'Without faith it is impossible to please God.' And God is especially to be revered and adored for his goodness in Christ: Hosea iii. 5, 'They shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter day.' Let us a little then consider—(1.) What is this fear of God; (2.) why is it required as the principle of all our actions.

(1.) What is it? Holy fear is of two kinds—the fear of reverence, and the fear of caution. The fear of reverence respects God, and not ourselves. Fear of reverence is grounded on the nature of God, his majesty, holiness, goodness, and justice. The fear of caution upon the weightiness of the work we have to do, and our own weakness. The fear of reverence maketh us walk strictly; the fear of caution, watchfully.

(1st.) The fear of reverence is necessary, or an awful regard of God, that we may not offend him, or displease him, or give him just cause of being angry with us, who is of such glorious majesty: Jer. x. 7, 'Who would not fear thee, O thou King of nations?' Of such unspotted holiness: Rev. xv. 4, 'Who would not fear thee, O Lord? for thou only art holy.'

(2*d.*) The fear of caution is necessary to make us watchful against temptations. The work is weighty; if we miscarry, we are undone for ever.' Heb. iv. 1, 'Let us fear lest, a promise being left us, any of you should come short of it.' We are weak and inconstant, 2 Cor. x. 12. The devil is busy: 1 Peter v. 8, 'The devil like a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour.'

(2.) Why is this frame of heart pitched upon?

For two reasons—

(1*st.*) That we may most carefully abstain from what displeaseth God. Nothing breedeth tenderness of conscience so much as holy fear: Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How shall I do this wickedness and sin against God?' So Phil. ii. 12, 'As you have obeyed not as in my presence only, but much more in my absence, so work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' God is alike everywhere, and therefore he that feareth God is alike everywhere. He needeth no other theatre than his own conscience, no other spectator than God and his holy angels. No secrecy can tempt such an one to sin: Lev. xix. 14, 'Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor lay a stumbling-block before the blind; but thou shalt fear the Lord thy God.' The blind see not, the deaf hear not; but God seeth, God heareth; and that is enough to restrain a gracious heart. No terror can tempt them to break the laws of God: Exod. i. 17, 'The midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them.' No worldly dangers are so much feared as God's displeasure. They look upon God offended with the greatest terror, upon God reconciled with the greatest comfort and delight; therefore they strictly abstain from what may offend God, even in the least: Neh. v. 15, 'So did not I, because I feared God.'

(2*d.*) Because it produces a care and diligent endeavour to approve ourselves to him, and to be accepted of him. Nothing engageth us to diligence and cheerfulness in his service so much as an holy fear of God: 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,' Phil. ii. 12. Let this be the governing principle, and you cannot be slight and careless; you will work, and work out: 2 Cor. vii. 1, 'Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' A little grace and a little holiness will not serve the turn. So Heb. xii. 28, 'Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.' God is not a God to be put off with everything, or a little religiousness by the bye. If we have a due sense of the excellency of God, it inspireth us with care, zeal, and diligence in his service.

[2.] Working righteousness is made the fruit of this sense of God upon our hearts. To work righteousness is to set our whole heart and soul a-work to live conformably to the law of God, or to approve ourselves to him by a constant uniform obedience. The sense is, he that undertaketh the service of the true God, as Cornelius did; and exerciseth himself in works of mercy, justice, and devotion; that hath fear, which giveth uprightness of heart; and worketh righteousness, which implieth holiness of life; this is the man accepted with God. Now this is required over and above the former.

(1.) In respect of God, that we may honour him in the world; for our obedience maketh our reverence and esteem of him visible and sensible. Principles are hidden, but actions discover them. Things

that lie hid in their causes are not seen, but when the effect breaketh out, they do sensibly appear. All principles are discovered in their actions; as atheism and want of the fear of God: Ps. xxxvi. 1, 'The transgression of the wicked saith, There is no fear of God before their eyes.' And so good principles are seen to God's honour and glory, be it faith or fear. All graces are more sensible in their fruits than in their internal elicit acts. Faith: 2 Thes. i. 11, 12, 'The work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you.' So fear is seen in the effects: Acts x. 2, 'Cornelius feared God, and gave much alms, and prayed to God alway.' A fantastical airy religion bringeth little honour to God.

(2.) It is for our own comfort. When we set ourselves diligently and solicitously to obey God, and are careful not to displease him, it leaveth an evidence in our consciences. Partly because actions are more evident than habits: 1 John iii. 19, 'Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.' And partly because uniform actions are greater and surer evidence of our sincerity than single actions: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.' Partly because there is a sensible pleasure that accompanieth the holy and heavenly life, and delighteth the person so employed: Prov. iii. 17, 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness.' Constant obedience breedeth a durable delight and pleasure. All other pleasures are nothing worth to this continual feast. Partly because God is more ready to witness to our sincerity. Comforts are the rewards of obedient children: Ps. xi. 6, 'The righteous God loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.' God is just and upright himself, and he hath a special eye of grace and favour over them. There is a likeness between them and God; he delighteth himself in the reflection of his own image imprinted on them.

IV. The meaning of the privilege, 'Is accepted with him.' The person is pleasing to him, so far as to maintain, increase, and perfect the grace begun in them; for the first grace is supposed.

1. He that feareth God, and goeth on in a constant, steady course of righteousness, is sure of God's favour and protection: Phil. i. 6, 'Being confident of this very thing, that he that hath begun a good work in you will perform it to the day of Christ;' that is, will maintain what he hath begun; you may be confident of his fatherly love and protection.

2. He will increase it; for God delighteth to crown his own gifts. See Prov. iv. 18, 'The path of the just is as the shining light that shines more and more to the perfect day;' Prov. x. 29, 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright.'

3. He will perfect it, and reward you with an everlasting glory. See Ps. xv. 2, 'He that works righteousness;' Ps. cvi. 3, 'Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.'

Use 1. Of information.

1. It informeth us—

[1.] How much they are mistaken who think sanctification hath no influence upon our comfort and peace. Some good people are over-

tender in this point ; they pretend they would fetch all their comfort immediately from Christ. And is Christ the less author of it because sanctification is the matter of it ? As if sanctification were not from Christ as well as justification. He is both to us : 1 Cor. i. 30, ' He is made unto us of God wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.' But they think this is to fetch comfort from something more in ourselves than justification is ; for the one is an adherent privilege, as the other an internal qualification.

Ans. True ; but though it be in us, it is not of us. It floweth from the same grace of God, and the same power and merit of the Lord Jesus. And something there must be in us, or how shall we make out our title and claim, or know that the grace of God belongeth to us ? If we look only to justification, and suspect all comfort that is elsewhere derived, we are in danger of falling into the gross part of the error of Poquinus and Quintinus, who in Calvin's time asserted it to be the only mortification to extinguish the sense of sin in the heart. But this is not to mortify sin, but to mortify repentance and holiness, to crucify the new man rather than the old, not to quiet conscience, but outface it. Surely where there is sin there will be trouble. Sanctification is one means of applying the grace of God, as well as justification ; and we must look to both benefits, and the mutual respect they have to one another.

But because this prejudice is drunk in by many not ill-meaning people, let us a little dispossess them of this vain conceit.

(1.) As to Christ. It is certain that a sinner can have no hope of acceptance with God but by Christ : 1 Tim. i. 15, ' Christ came to save sinners ;' and Mat. i. 21, ' He shall save his people from their sins.'

(2.) It is as true that ' whosoever is in Christ, he is a new creature,' 2 Cor. v. 17. So that the dispute will lie here ; to clear up our interest in Christ, whether we are new creatures ; for till that be determined, we can have no solid peace and comfort within ourselves.

(3.) None is a new creature but he who feareth God and worketh righteousness ; for that is the description of a new creature, that all old things are passed away, and all things are become new ; a new heart, a new mind, and a new conversation ; for a new heart is only sensibly discovered by newness of life, Rom. vi. 4. Well, then, our proposition is fully reconcilable with the grace of Jesus Christ.

[2.] With respect to the new covenant, which, suspending our right and title to privileges upon the conditions of faith and new obedience, do plainly show what influence fearing God and working righteousness have on our comfort and peace. Now in the new as in all covenants there is *ratio dati et accepti*, something promised and something required. That which is promised is acceptance unto pardon and life ; that which is required is taking hold of this covenant, and choosing the things that please God, Isa. lvi. 4 ; that is, an unfeigned consent to God's covenant, as it is modelled and stated, or such a sense of God's transactions with men by Christ as maketh them willing of the mercies offered and duties required in order to these mercies. This sense of God's mercy is sometimes called faith, sometimes love, sometimes fear. It is called faith, because we treat with an invisible God

about an happiness that lieth in an unseen world. It is called love, because such great and necessary benefits are offered to us as draw our hearts to God again. It is called fear, because we are so culpable, and God is so holy and glorious, and the concernment of the work is so weighty, that we come to serve him with reverence and godly fear, Heb. xii. 28. But then this sense makes us willing of the mercies offered, because none but the serious part of mankind doth regard and care for them. And it maketh us also willing of the duties required, both for their own sakes, they tending to the glory of God and the perfecting of man's nature, as also because of the annexed benefits. But now every will doth not give you a title to the blessings of the covenant, but a sincere will. There is a cold and ineffectual will, which is in no prevailing degree; a lazy wish, which will never change our hearts; and there is a fixed bent, which maketh it our work to please and glorify God: Heb. xiii. 18, 'We trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.' This is that sincerity which is our gospel duty.

[3.] With respect to the Spirit, who is our sanctifier and comforter. First a sanctifier, and then a comforter, and therefore a comforter because a sanctifier. Otherwise the Spirit would cause us to rejoice we know not why, and the comforts of a christian would be fantastical and groundless; at best we should rejoice in a mere possible salvation. But holiness is God's seal and impress upon us: Eph. i. 13, 'In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.' When his sanctifying work is interrupted, so is his comforting work disturbed also, Eph. iv. 31. David's bones were broken, and he lost his joy, when he fell into great sins, Ps. li., and Ps. xxxii. And it is true in others, who, when they have been lifted up to heaven in comfort, have fallen almost as low as hell in sorrow, trouble, and perplexity of spirit, when they grew remiss, negligent, and disobedient to the motions of the Holy Ghost. If we intermit a course of holiness, the frowns of God will soon turn our day into night; and the poor forsaken soul, that was feasted with the love of God, knows not whence to fetch the least support. Such is the fruit of our careless and loose walking.

[4.] With respect to conscience. He that casts off a godly life, and giveth up himself to a carnal course, can never have comfort; for guilt will breed terror, and by frequent sinning you keep the wounds of conscience still bleeding. Till it be better used, how can it speak peace to us? 1 John iii. 20-22, 'Beloved, if our own hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things; but if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do what is pleasing in his sight.'

Mark, therefore, how much is ascribed to the testimony of conscience, because of its nearness to us. It is our own hearts, a domestical tribunal, which we carry about with us in our bosoms. It is more worthy of credit than any human testimony whatsoever; for what shall we believe if we do not believe our own hearts, which are most likely to deal impartially with us.

Partly in relation to God. It acts in God's name, as his deputy,

according to his law; and what conscience speaketh, it is as if God himself had spoken it. So that these workings of conscience are, as it were, a beginning either of hell or heaven within us.

Mark, secondly, the testimony it goeth upon, 'Because we keep his commandments, and do what is pleasing in his sight.' Just the same with that in the text, to 'fear God and work righteousness.'

Mark, thirdly, the success and effect: 'We have confidence towards him, and whatever we ask we receive of him;' that is, we have such favour with God that we shall obtain whatever in reason and righteousness we can ask of him.

2. It informeth us of the true nature of that sanctification which giveth us hopes of acceptance with God. If both principle and performance are right and justifiable, 'fearing God and working righteousness.' He that is truly sanctified must first be one that truly feareth God; that is, maketh God his witness, approver, and judge. His aim is to please and glorify God, and his work is to serve God. Grace must be acted in the whole life, and this not by starts and fits, but for a constancy, Ps. cvi.

3. We can make no judgment upon ourselves by what is unusual and extraordinary, but by the tenor and drift of our conversation. Not by what happeneth rarely, but by our ordinary course: Acts x. 2, 'Cornelius gave much alms to the people, and prayed unto God alway.' Daily converse manifesteth the temper of our hearts. A christian is not to be judged by single acts, but by his life. These two, then, we must still look after—the principle and the performance. The principle is fear; that owneth God's authority; our hearts and lives must be ordered and directed according to his will, and moved and acted by his rewards. And the performance must be regarded. Wherefore did God change our hearts, and infuse grace into them, but that we might have the use of it? but that we might act it and live by it? Saving grace is a talent, and the chiefest talent that we are intrusted with for the master's use: Mat iii. 8, 'Bring forth fruits met for repentance;' and Acts xx. 21, 'Testifying to the Jews and Greeks repentance towards God.' There must be practices becoming such a change of heart.

Use 2. To press you to fear God and work righteousness. I have many arguments in the text.

1. From the privilege, 'to be accepted with God.' That should be our great scope: 2 Cor. v. 9, 'We labour that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.'

[1.] With respect to God. See that all is right between you and God. It is his law you have broken, his wrath you fear, his judgment you must undergo, his presence you come into, his favour which is your life and happiness. So that it is a great privilege to be accepted of God. Then for your comfort: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience.' Carnal joys do but tickle the senses, this doth affect the heart; yea, the conscience, which is the quickest, tenderest, and most sensible part of the heart. Many things please our affections which yet cannot appease our consciences; that frowneth upon and soureth our other delights, if it be not pacified. Till God accepteth our persons this still occurreth, God may condemn thee to eternal torments for all this.

[2.] With respect to men. He that is accepted with God needeth not care for any man's hatred; he may be confident of God's favour and the privilege of his servants: Job xvi. 20, 'My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears to God.' Besides, you have a testimony in their consciences, not by being zealous for the interests of a faction, but careful of God's laws: Rom. xiv. 17, 18, 'He that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men.'

2. From the condition, what is required of you.

[1.] Fear. To fear God is not contrary to your comfort or blessedness; to be always in God's company, living as under his eye, is a branch of blessedness: Prov. xxviii. 14, 'Happy is the man that feareth always.'

[2.] Righteousness. These are things which bespeak their own respect. If the Lord had bidden us do some other things, we might have stuck at it; but righteousness is so amiable and lovely, that if a man be well in his wits he will not stick at it, but would work righteousness if it were not required of him. We should be so inured to it that we cannot go out of its track. We should never consent to break a law so fit for God to give and us to receive, so conducive to the glorifying of God, governing ourselves, and commerce with others.

3. The force of the enunciation. In general it is *predicatio adjuncti de subjecto*. But what kind of adjunct is it? It is either *signi de signato*, or *effectus de medio requisito et necessario*.

[1.] It is a sign or evidence whereby you may really know that you are accepted with God. It is a comfortable thing to know how we shall fare in the judgment hereafter, or whether we shall be accepted to life or no. This cannot be known but by somewhat equivalent to what is asserted in the text. That is a sure note which gives you comfortable access to God for the present, and hopes of fruition of him hereafter: 2 Kings xx. 3, 'Remember, Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart.' But—

[2.] There is not only *necessitas signi*, but *necessitas medii*. A sign is with respect to our own judgment of ourselves, but a means is our qualification before God, and God considereth these things in his judgment: Luke i. 6, 'They were righteous before God, and walked in all the ways and ordinances of God blameless;' Rev. xxii. 14, 'Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life.' A sign giveth us comfort, but a necessary means appointed by God giveth us right. The new covenant is certainly the strongest ground of solid comfort to the fallen creature. We can have no other hope of acceptance with God than that alloweth. Now in the new covenant there are three things considerable, all which have a great influence on our comfort and peace—

(1.) The first is the merit and satisfaction of the Lord Jesus. This is necessary to allay the conscience of sin, which is the root of all our trouble: Heb. ix. 14, 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?' 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 ;' Heb. xii. 24, ' And to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of Abel.'

(2.) The matter of it, or the large privileges we enjoy by it ; for these are the ' hope set before us,' Heb. vi. 18 ; Ps. lxxxiv. 11, ' He will give grace and glory,' &c. ; Ps. cxix. 111, ' Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever ; they are the rejoicing of my heart.'

(3.) The third is a sure claim. Now this is not perfection, but sincerity : Gen. xvii. 1, ' Walk before me, and be thou perfect,' or upright ; Ps. lxxxiv. 11, ' No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Here then are the three grounds of comfort—everlasting merit, blessed promises, sure title. This last is to walk before God in all holy conversation and godliness ; this keepeth conscience from being offended, Acts xxiv. 16. This accepted with God is next to faith in Christ. So that attain this, and conscience is well settled, and hath a full right to these privileges, and will be matter of everlasting comfort to you.

4. It is represented here as a thing evident in God's government : ' Now I perceive of a truth that God is no respecter of persons.' Now God's way of government is either external or internal, and it is seen in both ; as, for instance, there are two acts of judicature—reward and punishment.

[1.] God's government is seen in rewarding ; God's external government is seen in dispensing outward blessings to his people as the fruit of their obedience : Micah ii. 1, ' Do not my words do good to them that walk uprightly ?' His promises as declared speak good ; as fulfilled, do good ; that is, yield protection, countenance, and such a degree of outward prosperity as supporteth and encourageth them in their service. David owned God's dealing with him in this sort : Ps. cxix. 56, ' This I had because I kept thy precepts.' Now, as to his internal government, he giveth his people increase of grace, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, Rom. xiv. 17. So God often rewardeth grace with grace : Isa. lviii. 13, 14, ' If thou call the sabbath a delight, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord.' So Ps. xxxi. 14, ' Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart.' Proficiency in the same grace is a reward of the several acts and exercise of it. So also God delights to reward his children's obedience with internal comfort.

[2.] God's government is seen in punishing. Sometimes he useth the way of external punishment by visible judgments exercised on his own for the breach of his holy law : Rom. i. 18, ' The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ;' Heb. ii. 2, ' Every transgression and disobedience receiveth a just recompense of reward.' Sometimes the way of internal punishment, by terrors of conscience and punishing sin with sin. Both godly and wicked. For the godly, as to external government : 1 Cor. xi. 32, ' When we are judged we are chastened of the Lord.' Internal ; lesser, penal withdrawals of the Spirit, which God's people find in themselves after some heinous sins and neglects of grace, Ps. li. 10-12 ; but the judgments of the souls of the ungodly are most dreadful. As when the sinner is terrified : 1 Cor. xv. 56, ' The sting of death is sin.' Stupefied : Ps. lxxxii. 12, ' So I gave them up to their own hearts' lusts ;'

so that the sinner is left dull, senseless, past feeling: Eph. iv. 7, 8, 'Having the understanding darkened.' By horror of conscience they are made to feel God's displeasure at the courses they walk in. But when that is long despised, and men sin on still, the other and more terrible judgment cometh, the giving up a sinner to his own heart's lusts; and losing remorse and tenderness is the sorest judgment on this side hell.

5. In all acts of judicature, either in punishing or rewarding, God is no respecter of persons. His own people are not excepted when they fall into wilful or scandalous sins: Amos iii. 2, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities;' Prov. xi. 31, 'The righteous shall be recompensed on the earth, much more the wicked and the sinner.' God judgeth not with partiality. In his external government he punishes sometimes with—(1.) A blot on their name: 1 Kings xv. 5, 'David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside in anything that he commanded, save only in the matter of Uriah.' His plotting Uriah's death is more laid to his charge than the other sins which he committed. Many failings of his are left on record; distrust, dissimulation, rash vow to destroy Nabal, injustice in the matter of Ziba and Mephibosheth, indulgence to Absalom, his carnal confidence in numbering the people; yet all these are passed over in silence as infirmities; only the matter of Uriah sticks close to him. (2.) With many troubles, for the vindication of his justice and providence, though they be the dearly beloved of his soul. What troubles in his house ensued upon David's presumptuous sin! his daughter ravished, Amnon slain in his drunkenness, Absalom driveth him to shift for his life, his subjects desert him, 2 Sam. xii. 10–12. So Eli's sons slain, Israel discomfited, the ark taken; his daughter died in child-bearing; the old man broke his neck. Do not think your estate will bear you out; sin is odious to God by whomsoever committed.

6. We shall shortly appear before the tribunal of God, where every man's qualification must be judged, whether he fear God and work righteousness. How soon it may come about we cannot tell; most will be taken ere they think of it. Therefore the word *found* is often used: 2 Cor. v. 3, 'We shall not be found naked;' 2 Peter iii. 14, 'That we may be found of him in peace;' Phil. iv. 9. Well, then—(1.) Let us make our peace with God, 2 Cor. v. 19. (2.) Fear God; get a single heart: Col. iii. 23, 'Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.' (3.) Work righteousness: 1 John iii. 7, 'He that doeth righteousness is righteous.' You must do wrong to none, good to all. Charge yourselves to practise this great duty.
