

SERMON UPON PROVERBS XIV. 14.

The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.—PROV. XIV. 14.

IN the Proverbs we must not look for method and coherence; for these sentences are not as golden links in a chain, hanging one to another, but as pearls in a string; every sentence is precious, but independent of each other. In this proverb I shall take notice of—

1. The drift of the Holy Ghost.

2. The art and contrivance, so as may best suit that scope.

First, The drift of the Holy Ghost is the same with that of many other scriptures, and divers passages in the Proverbs also, which may serve for a doctrine.

Doct. That whether good or bad, every one shall reap the fruit of his own ways.

Isa. iii. 10, 11, 'Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their own doings. Woe unto the wicked; it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him.' To keep up the hearts of that small company of godly persons that yet remained among them, God giveth them assurance of his goodness; they shall fare well, whatsoever befalleth others. All things that happen shall be good, or work for good, to better their hearts or hasten their glory; for they shall enjoy the fruit of all their labours. But it is sure to go ill with the wicked, for he shall be rewarded according to what he hath wrought. Lest you should think this a particular promise to that time only, Solomon maketh it the common cordial of the saints against the prosperity of the wicked: Eccles. viii. 12, 13, 'Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, that fear before him.' But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.' Wicked men, though they escape long, they shall not escape always; though punishment be delayed, it is at length executed, and generally they do not live long. Lest you think this is spoken *pro more faderis*, according to the tenor of the Mosaical covenant, where long life is promised instead of eternity, and short life threatened as a curse, let us see what the gospel saith, where we have greater encouragements to quicken us to hold fast our integrity, and go on steadily in our obedience and patient waiting on God: Rom.

vi. 21–23, ‘What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ Where the different recompenses are asserted, and the manner how they accrue to us; death to sin as wages, and life to obedience as the mere gift of God; not merited by us, but bountifully bestowed by him: this is the drift of the Holy Ghost, to show that different courses have contrary ends and issues.

Secondly, The art and contrivance of this short saying, whereby this truth may the better be insinuated into our minds; and here, (1.) I shall take notice that here are two different persons spoken of, the backslider in heart, and the good man. (2.) That both desire to be filled or satisfied. (3.) That the one taketh his own ways, and the other God’s direction. (4.) That in the event they are both filled, but in a different sense. (5.) That, rightly understood, every one hath this from himself; the backslider is filled with his own ways, and the godly person hath his own choice, and eats of the fruit of his doings.

I. Let us state the character of these different persons, for that is the clue to guide us to the understanding of all the rest; for according to this the different course and end must be determined. Well, then, the backslider in heart and the good man are opposed.

First, The backslider in heart is he that turneth his heart from God and his ways, and daily groweth worse and worse. The word may be rendered doubly, either *aversus corde*, or *reversus corde*; and so it is meant either of the ordinary wicked person, or of the apostate; the one turneth away from God after counsel, the other after trial.

1. It is meant principally and chiefly of the ordinary wicked person, who turneth his heart back or away from wisdom and her invitations; as see the parallel place: Prov. i. 30, 31, ‘They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof: therefore they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.’ Where the same notions are used; and it is presently added, ver. 32, ‘For the turning away of the simple shall slay them.’ Though men never professed godliness, yet their refusing to hearken to the call of wisdom, or the counsel of God, doth bring them under this character, the perverse or averse in heart. He that turneth away from his chief good, and the way that should lead to the enjoyment of it, and indulgeth his lusts and vain pleasures, he is the man. So the general corruption of mankind is described: Rom. iii. 12, ‘They are all gone out of the way;’ that is, the way that leadeth to true happiness. So Job, professing his innocency, useth these expressions: Job xxiii. 11, 12, ‘My foot hath held his steps; his way have I kept, and not declined; neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips.’ In which words his intent was not to prove that he was no apostate, but that he was no hypocrite or wicked person, which was the matter in debate between him and his friends.

2. You may comprise the apostate, because scripture must not be straitened in the exposition of it; he that falleth away from those ways

of holiness and righteousness, wherein he walked for a time, either through the terrors or through the delights of sense. Against the one the church protesteth : Ps. xlv. 17, 18, ' All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant: our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way.' Where apostasy from God and his commandments is expressed. So Zeph. i. 6, ' Them that are not turned back from the Lord, and those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him.' They know a better way, and have walked in it, but at length are discouraged with troubles and afflictions, or allured by worldly avocations and advantages, and so desert their holy course, and the covenant of their God wherein they were engaged. Now the word ' heart ' is emphatical; take it in either sense, and it showeth—

[1.] That the fountain and beginning of backsliding is in the heart. They distrust God : Heb. iii. 12, ' Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.' Or grow weary of God, and therefore neglect their duty to him : Isa. xliii. 22, ' But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob ; thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.' At least have not *cor tale*, a renewed heart : Deut. v. 29, ' Oh, that they had such an heart in them that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always.'

[2.] It noteth their plenary desertion ; not a slipping back through infirmity and inadvertency in some particular actions, but their hearts were wholly estranged from God, and they deliberately and wilfully gave over themselves to their corrupt affections ; their hearts are turned away from the right way.

Secondly, The opposite is the good man ; and he is one—

1. That seeketh after the chiefest good, and adhereth constantly to God in Jesus Christ, as his only felicity : Ps. iv. 6, 7, ' Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us ; thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time when their corn and their wine increased ;' Ps. lxxiii. 25, ' Whom have I in heaven but thee ; and there is none on earth I desire besides thee.' Goodness is determined by respect to the chiefest good, whether it be applied to persons or things.

2. He doth not only cleave to God, but chooseth that way which God hath prescribed men to walk in, whether the way of faith in Christ ; as John xvii. 3, ' This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent ;' or the way of new obedience ; as Eccles. xii. 13, ' Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter ; fear God, and keep his commandments ; for this is the whole duty of man.' So Solomon concludeth his discourse about true happiness ; so that he is good, and doeth good, and so is conformed to God his pattern.

3. Yet he is in both sincerely, not perfectly good : Ps. cxxv. 4, ' Do good, O Lord, to those that be good, and to them that are upright in heart ;' that is, truly and sincerely good, though not exactly and perfectly, according to the rigour of the law ; for so Eccles. vii. 20, ' There is not a just man upon earth, that doth good, and sinneth not ;' but he ' hath a good and honest heart,' Luke viii. 15. Set to obey and please God in all things, though he cannot do all the good that he would.

And these upright in heart are opposed in the psalmist to such 'as turn aside to their crooked ways,' ver. 5, or the 'backslider in heart' spoken of in the text. Their honest and sincere endeavours shall be accepted and rewarded by God. Well, then, a good man is one whose heart is turned to God, and who keepeth up his affections to him, and walketh according to his counsel, in the way which he hath prescribed. These are the two persons that seek satisfaction and happiness in their different courses. These two contrary competitors have their contrary choices; and though they differ in their disposition, they do not encroach one upon another in the object pursued after. The godly, being taught by God, leaveth the world to the carnal, and taketh God for his portion; the worldly scrapeth on the earth, and leaveth God and his saving grace to the godly.

II. I come now to show you that both desire to be filled or satisfied; the good and the bad, that so seldom agree in anything agree in this, that both would be happy: Ps. iv. 6, 'Many say, Who will show us any good?' You can no more doubt of this, that man would be happy, than that man loveth himself. Man's heart is a chaos of desires; like a sponge, it sucketh something from without, and seeketh to draw it to itself. They must have something which they apprehend to be good; for no man can live without some oblectation and delight. No man hath sufficiency in himself, but seeketh abroad for it. Now according to men's choice, so is their search and so is their obtaining, and in both consists their true happiness or true misery. The backslider in heart must be filled, and the good man must be satisfied. The carnal would fain fill their minds with the vain delights of the world; they go no farther than riches, honours, and pleasures, and despise God and his saving blessings. They would have 'their good things in their lifetime,' Luke. xvi. 25. And therefore they are always sucking upon the breasts of the world's consolation: Luke vi. 24, 'Woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.' They continually seek to fill themselves, and please their fleshly minds; and therefore either glut themselves with carnal delights, and are always 'making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lust thereof,' Rom. xiii. 14. Cater for the body, but neglect the soul; or else they 'seek to join house to house, and field to field,' Isa. v. 8; or to be built a story higher in the world. They are of the earth and incline to the earth, and therefore earthly things are the height of their desires, and they are filling and stuffing their hearts with the comforts of them more and more. This is the comfort they live upon, the happiness they affect. The godly man he must be satisfied too: he is a poor empty creature, and therefore is 'hungering and thirsting after righteousness, that he may be filled,' Mat. v. 6. He must have more of God, and more of Christ, and more of grace; and therefore he is sucking and drawing, and can never be satisfied till he be 'filled up with all the fulness of God,' Eph. iii. 19.

III. That they may be filled, they take their several ways; the one his own ways, the other God's direction. For of the backslider it is said, 'He shall be filled with his own ways.' He despiseth God's counsel, and taketh his own course, to live a pleasant and carnal life here. So by the same proportion, the good man, that hath chosen

God for his portion, taketh God's way, and obeyeth the call and invitation of wisdom.

First, 'The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways ;' that is, such as suit with his own carnal heart.

1. Naturally a man is addicted to carnal things more than spiritual, and to worldly vanity rather than heavenly enjoyments, to the creature rather than to God. Why ?

[1.] Because they are in part necessary for our uses, and so the natural appetite desireth them, as well as the inordinate appetite, which is corrupted by sin. Prosperity, plenty, wealth, honour, ease, pleasure, are good for us, if subordinated to grace and better things : 'Wisdom with an inheritance is good,' Eccles. vii. 11; and again, Eccles. v. 18, 'It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labours that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life; for it is his portion.' But alas! Men are apt to exceed their bounds, and become enchanted with the false happiness, so that they neglect the true and sit down contented with their worldly portion, and God and eternity are little thought of or cared for.

[2.] They are comfortable to our senses. The sweetness of wealth, honour and pleasure, is known by feeling, and therefore known easily, and known by all. Now whilst the soul dwelleth in the flesh, and looketh out by the senses, we soon receive the taint which ariseth from sensible objects : 'All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world,' 1 John ii. 16.

[3.] They are suitable to our fancies and appetites : 'For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit,' Rom. viii. 5. Every one's gust and taste is according to his constitution.

[4.] These things are near us, present with us, and ready to be enjoyed ; whereas spiritual and heavenly things are unseen and afar off : 'But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins,' 2 Peter i. 9.

2. What is the issue of all this? They love a worldly, a sensual, and ungodly life ; and (1.) Religion is slighted and neglected. They live in an oblivion of God : 'The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God : God is not in all his thoughts,' Ps. x. 4. The offers of grace and eternal life are not regarded : 'All things are ready ; come unto the marriage : but they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise,' Mat. xxiii. 45. (2.) Yea religion and godliness is cast off and trampled upon : 'For Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world,' 2. Tim. iv. 10. (3.) Or else opposed and persecuted, and by none more than by those that once had some sense and taste of it : *Apostatae sunt maximi osiores sui ordinis.* 'The revolvers are profound to make slaughters,' Hosea v. 2. By plausible pretences it is palliated, and counsels are laid deep to extirpate the godly. Apostates are most cruelly oppressive. (4.) Or if it be kept up, it is only to hide and feed their lusts, making a market of religion, and denying the power under the form of godliness : 'Having a form of godliness, but

denying the power thereof,' 2 Tim. iii. 5. And the apostle speaketh of some that 'supposed again to be godliness,' 1 Tim. vi. 5; that is, made religion an advantageous trade: 'When thou dost thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men,' Mat. vi. 2. They did it to be seen of men. And Luke xvi. 15, 'And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts; for what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.' (5.) They lead a life of pomp and ease, wallowing in all manner of sin and sensuality; as the carnal rich men are described, James v. 1-5, to be such as lived in all voluptuousness, uncleanness, and oppression. These are the ways from whence do they suck all their pleasure and contentment, and therewith glut and fill themselves more and more, some in a more gross, others in a more cleanly manner.

Secondly, It is implied that the good man seeketh God's direction, for he is opposed to him that despiseth God's counsels. Now God giveth this counsel by his word and Spirit.

1. In the word. In the scripture God hath showed us true happiness, and the way to it, which was a secret and a riddle to the world before. True happiness is but one thing, but the world seeketh it in many things. Two hundred and eighty-eight opinions were reckoned up, and none lighted upon the truth; and therefore we run about and weary ourselves in a maze of uncertainty: 'How long wilt thou go about, O backsliding daughter!' Jer. xxxi. 22. Experience will tell us that nothing in the creature will make us completely blessed. It is but labour in vain to seek it there: 'Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?' Isa. lv. 2. And the many religions in the world prove not the remedy of mankind, but the disease. Only in Christ's religion is the true rest and ease and repose of souls: Jer. vi. 16, 'Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way? and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls;' Mat. xi. 28, 29, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' Now in the scriptures pardon of sin is revealed, which was a great secret to nature, for they were at a great loss about the way to obtain it: 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 thousands 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?' And 'life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel,' 2 Tim i. 10. Now the good man is wholly busied about observing God's direction, how the sore that hath so long run upon him may be cured, and a proper happiness which man gropeth after may be obtained: Acts xvii. 27, 'That they should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after him and find him.' We are fallen from God, and cannot be happy but in returning to him again, nor completely happy till we attain to the full enjoyment of him.

2. By his Spirit. When David speaketh of choosing God for his portion, he presently addeth, Ps. xvi. 7, 'I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel;' we had else been as witless fools as others, rejoicing in the creature apart from God in the midst of soul-dangers. Without this nothing will reclaim us from our wanderings, neither reason, nor experience, nor common grace. Now reason: it is easy to prove the vanity of the creature, that it is not man's happiness to enjoy the pleasures of the world, or to seek to be well here. We may argue against their carnal practices, but what will our arguings avail? Still they are as worldly as ever, and seek satisfaction in their own ways: 'This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve of their sayings,' Ps. xlix. 13. Men may stand over the graves of their ancestors, and say, Where is now their worldly honour, esteem, and favour, for which they neglected God, slighted Christ, and sold their salvation? yet those that succeed them neglect true happiness as much as they that went before, and are as careless of heavenly things. We see great ones die as well as others, but who is bettered by it? The survivors are as greedy of gain, as sensual, as vain, and doting upon worldly greatness as their fore runners were. So for experience, compare Deut. xxix. 2-4, 'Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and all his servants, and to all his land, yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day,' with Ps. xc. 12, 'So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.' God must teach us the plainest lessons. So for common faith, though we have been trained up in the scriptures, though we know that we must enjoy God, or we can never be happy, yet still we are wedded to carnal vanities. Our respects to God are but notions and compliments. The fervency and reality of our affections is intercepted by the world, or else there could not be so many covetous christians, voluptuous christians, ambitious christians. Heart-idolatry is the most dangerous. Men are sooner convinced than converted: 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,' 2 Tim. iii. 5. Nay, though there be some common work of the Spirit, and they do not only talk by rote, but have some sense of the vanity of the world, and of the necessity and excellency of God's favour, 'some taste of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,' Heb. vi. 45. Yet though they would have Christ for their consciences, the world hath their affections. We desire happiness, as children would fain have something, but are pleased with rattles or any toy. We would be happy, but take up with anything that cometh next to hand. Thus we do till God cureth us by enlightening our minds, or giving us counsel in our reins, and inclining our hearts: Ps. cxix. 36, 'Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not unto covetousness.' The good man liveth in obedience to these sanctifying motions of the Spirit.

IV. That as to the event, they are both filled, but in a different sense.

First, I shall show how the wicked are filled with their own ways. A wicked man he hath enough of sin in the punishment; therefore it is said, 'They shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices,' Prov. i. 31; as a man that hath surfeited of pleasant

meat hath enough of it when he feeleth the torments and gripes of his surfeit. Now (1.) When is this ; and (2.) Why ?

1. When ? It may be in this life, but surely in the next.

[1.] It may be here, partly by disappointment when those honours and pleasures and riches which they sought after prove an occasion of much misery to them, and they see they had been safer if they had stood longer. This often falleth out in the world. Many desire greatness to their hurt. Solomon compareth them to 'Fishes taken in an evil net, or birds caught in the snare,' Eccles. ix. 12. They play about the bait so long, till they meet with the hook, or their height ruin them : Job. v. 12, 13, 'He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong.' Partly by death, which bloweth away all vain conceits : Jer. xvii. 11, 'As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not ; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool ;' and Job xxvii. 8, 'What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul ?' and 1 John ii. 17, 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof ; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' Oh, that men were so careful to seek and serve God and save their souls as they are to provide for their bodies and satisfy their lusts ! Usually when men are going out of the world, they complain how the world hath deceived them. It had been better if they had lived in a strict obedience.

[2.] In the world to come. The errors of men's choice are not well seen in this life, but afterwards all will be manifested. What will they think of their foolish and vain course when they are cast into hell ? They have enough then indeed of sin, when their worldly portion is taken from them, and the heavenly blessedness denied to them : for no man shall have more than he sought after whilst he was alive. The conscience of his foolish choice will be a part of his torment, and who can express the other sorrows of the damned, when they are delivered over to the worm that dieth not, and the fire that shall never be quenched ? In the parable of the rich man, Luke xvi. 23, 24, you have some account of it : 'In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom ; and he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.' It is not wine that he calleth for then, but a drop of cold water ; not in a vessel, or in the hollow of his hand, but on the tip of his finger only ; not to quench his thirst, but cool his tongue ; and that he could not get. No ; the gulf was fixed, though that drop would soon have dried up. These passages are parabolical ; but thus our Lord saw fit to represent their endless, caseless estate.

2. Why ? this is not the fulness they sought after, or promised to themselves. They dreamed of nothing but impunity and happiness, and to be feasted with carnal satisfactions. I answer—God doth not consider what they desired, but what they deserved. They brought this upon themselves by their own way : Hosea iv. 9, 'I will punish

them for their ways, and reward their doings ;' and justly ; for (1.) As they regarded not his will in choosing their way, so God will not ask their consent in returning a meet recompense or reward of their doings. (2.) It is equal that he who had so soon his fill of goodness, and was weary of well-doing, should at length have his fill of wickedness. (3.) They thought they could never have enough of sin in the practice, therefore now they shall have enough in the punishment. (4.) For a great while they enjoyed themselves with comfort and success, to the dishonour of God and the scandal of the godly ; now they have their deserved punishment. Though they escaped long, they shall not escape always. This merry world will not always last ; the longer God's patience is abused the greater wrath is then prepared and treasured up for them.

Secondly, For the good man, he shall find at length that which will satisfy him. Now I shall show you—(1.) What is his satisfaction ; (2.) When he shall have it.

1. What is his satisfaction ? He shall be satisfied from himself. It beareth two senses—(1.) That it is his own works which God will abundantly and graciously reward ; of which in the next point. (2.) Or else it is meant of the comforts which he feeleth within himself. It is not by way of exclusion of God, but of the carnal happiness which the backslider fancieth. His happiness is most within himself, independent from the world, but not from God. He valueth his good and evil, not by things external, but, internal. As, for instance, the conscience of his integrity : 2 Cor. i. 12, 'Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, &c., we have had our conversation in the world.' The sense of God's love : Rom. v. 5, 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us.' The hopes of glory : Heb. x. 34, 'Knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and more enduring substance ?' Yea, the glory that he expecteth will be 'revealed in him,' Rom. viii. 18. He hath a spring of comfort within his breast, for God is there and Christ is there by the Spirit, and will be more there hereafter. Now these inward things satisfy him in the destitution and want of outward ; he hath a sufficiency within himself in whatever necessities. *Ἀυτάρχης ἢ ἀρετῆ* was a maxim among the wisest heathens, that virtue is sufficient to itself ; and the apostle tells us, 1 Tim. vi. 6, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.' Certainly a good man, whatever he wants, he wants not contentment in God.

2. When he shall have it—(1.) Here the godly have the beginnings of their satisfaction : 2 Cor. v. 1, 'We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' (2.) Hereafter the completion and full fruition of it. Blessed be God who giveth us our hard things in this short life, and keepeth our portion till eternal life, where there shall be nothing but peace and endless joy. We have much now, the first-fruits of the Spirit. We have not Canaan in the wilderness, but we have the clusters of Canaan ; much in present possession, more in expectation and reversion : Ps. xvi. 11, 'In thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.' In heaven we shall desire no more than we have : Ps. xvii.

15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' Therefore, when God will graciously recompense our goodness, it is enough; we shall have a full sufficiency in the reward.

V. That, rightly understood, every one is filled from himself. The backslider is filled with his own ways, and the godly person hath his own choice, therefore he is satisfied from himself. Not that his choice or course merited it, but God accepteth it. Certainly the wicked hath none to blame but himself, and therefore he is said 'to reward evil to himself,' Isa. iii. 9; that is, by their sins they hurt not God, but wrong themselves, or bring evil unto themselves. As to the godly, he must look to his qualifications. God, that made him without himself, will not save him without himself; therefore he must look to his choice and course. You have your choice, whether you will take your own ways or God's counsel. You do not purchase or merit your reward, but you must qualify yourselves to receive it. It is left upon your choice. It is not always true in carnals, choose and have, but sometimes it is. You may have the trifles of the world in your own ways, but you cannot have God and heaven without accepting God's counsel, without a resolved choice and serious prosecution; there it is choose and have. You must part with your sin and fleshly pleasure, and resolve upon an holy and godly course of life. The world flattereth you to your destruction, but God calleth you to salvation; as you choose, so shall you have. If you refuse Christ, and follow your own ways, you will have enough of it in time; if you obey God, and resolve to seek after him, you shall be satisfied. Therefore your eternal woe or weal lieth much in your own hands. If you forsake your own mercies for lying vanities, whom have you to blame but yourselves? Jonah ii. 8, 'They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.' But though God incline you to choose, and that work must be ascribed to him, yet it is you must choose, and pursue after the true happiness, and God will graciously accept you. God gives you the wit and the will to make a right choice, but you must choose. Something you must do if you would be happy. There is no condition of merit, but order. It is God that reclaimeth you from your sensual inclinations, yet God will not have you without your consent, or against your will, nor give you heaven without a diligent pursuit after it.

Use 1. Consider who is the backslider; one involved in the apostasy of Adam, one that seeketh to be filled with his own ways. The beginning and progress and end of his course is from himself, and in himself, and to himself again; that is, carnal self. He acteth only as his fleshly inclination moveth him. Carnal self is the principle, rule, and end, and God is wholly neglected, neither sought after nor pleased, nor his counsel regarded, nor his grace valued, though he sent Christ to recover us from the world and the flesh to himself. Neither is God minded as the chiefest good or last end; nor regarded as our director and counsellor; nor chosen as our portion, that we may come to him by Christ; nor his grace sought after, that we may be quickened and inclined to seek after him.

2. Consider what a blessed thing it is to be filled with our ways in gracious sense, while we are capable to mend our errors: 1 Peter

iv. 3, 'The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the gentiles.' You have already long, very long, too long, been dishonouring God and destroying your own souls. Oh, it is time we should set about the mortifying of sin, and serious conversion to God.

3. Consider how pleasing to the Lord it is that we, passing by all other things, do choose him for our portion, Christ for our redeemer, his word for our rule, and his Spirit for our guide. When God gave Solomon liberty to ask what he would, and he asked not riches and honour, but wisdom, it is said, 'The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing,' 1 Kings iii. 10. While we are in the world, let us choose something better than the world, something that hath been before it, and will remain when it is gone. Satan casteth worldly things in the way, but let us look higher.
