

SERMON UPON PROVERBS III. 31, 32.

Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward are an abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous.—PROV. iii. 31, 32.

IN these words we have—(1.) An admonition; (2.) A reason to enforce it.

The admonition consists of two parts—(1.) Not to envy the oppressor; (2.) To choose none of his ways. The reason is propounded by way of thesis and antithesis, the usual method of the proverbs; wherein is set forth the different condition of the prosperous oppressor, and the suffering godly.

To prosecute every breach apart would take up more time than can well be spared. The sum of the whole may be drawn into this observation.

Doct. All things considered, the suffering godly have little or no reason to envy the prosperous condition of wicked men in this world, or be tempted thereby to take the same course.

Here I shall show you—(1.) What this envy is; (2.) That it is incident to the godly; (3.) Why it so ill becometh the suffering godly.

I. What this envy at the prosperity of the wicked is. Two words must be explained; one, which concerneth the act of the soul, 'envy;' the other the object, 'oppressor;' and in the 32d verse, 'froward.'

1. Envy. In the general, *invidentia est vitium, quo alterius bono contristamur*. A sin by which we grieve at another's good, whether hurtful to us or no. So carnal men are said to live in malice or envy, Titus iii. 3. Fallen man is not only perverse to God, but grown unsociable to men. They would shine alone, and think all is taken from themselves that is given to another. This the apostle telleth us: James iv. 5, 'The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.' Such an impropriating spirit is natural to us. Children suck it in with their milk, *vidi zelantem parvulum*. Distinct from this, but like it, is another sin, called 'emulation.' So among the works of the flesh reckoned up, Gal. v. 19–21, in the 20th verse, 'emulation, wrath, strife,' are mentioned as distinct sins from envyings and murders; where by 'emulation' is not meant that good 'emulation' whereby we strive to excel others in that which is good, virtuous, and praiseworthy, but carnal emulation, whereby we are grieved at the welfare of others, not so

much from hatred to their good, as because it over-shadoweth us; wherein it differeth from envy, because an envious man doth not so much grieve because he wants that good himself, as that another hath it. But emulation is an undue commotion of mind, not because another hath good, but because we want it; for envy is a base malicious passion, whereby we grieve at the good and prosperity of others, without any endeavour to attain that good ourselves. There is yet a third sin, and that is by the philosopher termed *indignation*, when we are troubled, not so much because another man receiveth good, as at the unworthiness of the person that enjoyeth it, because it falls to his share to whom it least belongeth in our conceit and imagination; wherein we deal with God as Joseph with his father Jacob, when a prophetic instinct guided his hands. He thought his father had erred out of blindness or want of sight when he laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim the youngest, and his left hand upon Manasseh the eldest: Gen. xlviii. 18, 'Not so, my father: this is the first-born; put thy right hand upon his head. I know it, my son, I know it,' saith Jacob. So there is in us an indignation, as if God did preposterously dispense his blessings and misplace his hands, when it falleth out unto the righteous according to the work of the wicked, and to the wicked according to the work of the righteous; and thence the expostulation of the saints, whereby they express this indignation against God's proceedings: Jer. xii. 1, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?' Hab. i. 12, 13, 'Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine holy one? we shall not die, O Lord; thou hast ordained them for judgment, and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?' There is a fourth word, *ζηλοτυπία*, jealousy or obtrication, which is a trouble of mind arising from this, that another, in our conceit unworthy, enjoyeth that which we desire, or jealousy lest they take away our Father's blessing from us. Such was the hatred and envy of Esau against Jacob, when he had gotten the birthright from him; and in after times the envy of Ephraim against Judah, which the prophet speaketh of. Now there is all this in the sin spoken of in the text. There is envy in the general, or a grief and trouble at those good things which others enjoy; only herein it differeth, because we are troubled at the exaltation of the wicked, as they have more power to hurt; and so this envy is not a bare grief, but a sort of fear: there is emulation in it, because there is a desire to excel ourselves, as well as a grief at their respect, honour, and happiness. There is besides indignation in it, because we apprehend them unworthy, and so are troubled; which trouble may be good, so far as it doth not exceed bounds, and doth only quicken us to prayer; for it is an evil that we may lay to heart and mourn for. There is an holy mourning for it, as under a judgment: Prov. xxix. 2, 'When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked bear rule, the people mourn;' Prov. xi. 10, 'When it goeth well with

the righteous, the city rejoiceth; but when the wicked perish, there is shouting.' It is a disorder that may be regretted, but yet we must take heed of fretting against the Lord. We may complain of it to God: Ps. xii. 1, 'Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men;' and ver. 8, 'The wicked walk on every side when the vilest men are exalted.' But there is a difference between complaining to God and complaining of God. This indignation groweth sinful when it exceedeth measure, and tempts either to atheism against God, manifested by a dislike and suspicion of God's providence, or to seditious attempts against men. And lastly, there is in it jealousy, because we desire that happiness which they have, or are offended at it, because it seemeth to tend to our prejudice, and the reproach and burden of our cause; and so degenerateth into that *ζήλον πικρὸν*, James iii. 14, 'bitter zeal.' We translate it, 'bitter envyings,' or that secret discontent and grudge that we take at their advancement or esteem. Well, then, in this envying there is a grudge, and an indignation, and an evil inordinate emulation of their happiness.

2. The object is expressed in the word *oppressor*, or man of violence; in the 32d verse, the 'froward.' The one noteth the disposition of his heart; he is froward: the other the evil of his practice; he oppresses, or seeketh to bear down others by violence. The froward, *præfractus*; the hard, inflexible man, that is, confirmed and settled in his evil purpose; refractory opposers of the ways of God. Mark, it is not the wicked or undeserving in the general; a man may be tempted to envy them; but the froward and oppressors, such as are maliciously and obstinately bent to do mischief to us. Though the advancement of such may be apprehended as a burden and judgment, and so complained of to God, especially as it is likely not only to prejudice our interest and comfort of life, but as contrary to God's honour and interest, or as it tendeth to the increasing or confirming of wickedness, yet we should not fret at it; first, as if they were happier than the godly, lest we be tempted to let go our innocency; secondly, as if we did tax the providence of God of injustice; thirdly, to be stirred up thereby to any undue practice; fourthly, that our quarrel should not be the main reason of that sense we have of this disorder, our ease, our credit, our revenge, lest it be like Jonah's anger, Jonah iv.; not so much for God's honour, as his own, lest he should be accounted a false prophet.

II. That the people of God are subject to fall into this distemper of envy at the prosperity of the wicked the scripture everywhere witnesseth. David is an instance: Ps. lxxiii. 3, 'I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.' So Jeremiah, so Job, so Habakkuk, so all the saints. Here in this lower world, where our hopes are unseen and to come, and our trials are so many, and the flesh is so importunate to be pleased, and the wicked, being of the earth, have so much of earthly happiness, as nettles, that grow of their own accord, will thrive better than choicer plants; especially when we ourselves are burdened and straitened. Now this troubleth the children of God, that bastards should be better fed than sons, that they whom God hateth should seem to have more of the Father's love, care, and blessing.

III. That there is little reason yet why the people of God should be so affected, if you consider—(1.) The condition of the wicked; (2.) The state of the suffering godly; (3.) The mischievous nature and effects of this envy.

I. The condition of the wicked, though never so much exalted. That is represented in the text: 'Envy not; for the froward are an abomination to the Lord.' Mark, it is not only said, God hateth them, but abominateth them. There is not only *odium inimicitiae aut offensionis*, a hatred of enmity, but abomination and abhorrence; when a thing is done contrary to our will, or when a thing or person is contrary to our nature. So God is not only angry with them, but hateth them, and that is enough to make them miserable.

[1.] Observe here, that the suffering godly, the spiritual blessings which they have, they have with God's love, and cannot but have them so, for these are not given in anger; but we cannot say so of the wicked's prosperity and success, that they have this with the love of God; they have it from the hand of his providence, but his heart is not with them, for the froward are an abomination to the Lord; which showeth that their felicity is no true felicity, for it is such as may consist with God's hatred. This consideration, that the Lord abhorreth wicked men, as it showeth that they themselves can have no solid satisfaction in their estate, be it never so high, plentiful, and prosperous, for they cannot for all this say that God loveth them: Eccles. ix. 1, 'No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them.' Yea, they may determine by the word, if wicked, that God hateth them; they are but fattened to destruction, as swine for the slaughter. The curse of God sticketh to them when they eat their plentiful morsels of meat, put on their gorgeous apparel; they have this thought to sour all, God hateth them. I say, as this consideration lessens the comfort and satisfaction of wicked men, so should it abate, yea, take away, the envy of the children of God. God is displeased with them, what plenty and pomp of living soever he affordeth them by the bounty and indulgence of his providence. Surely those whom God hateth are objects of pity rather than envy, if their condition were well considered; still they are under the wrath of God. Certainly the people of God, when appointed by man as sheep to the slaughter, being under the love of God, are in a happier condition than wicked men, that are fattened for destruction, and under the wrath of God; for it is not the wrath of man, or the favour of man, that maketh us miserable or happy, but the love and hatred of God. Who was in the better condition, Daniel among the lions, or Nebuchadnezzar among the beasts? In a sober mood, which would you choose? The love of God can sweeten the bitterest cup that ever a believer drank off; but, if it were rightly apprehended, to be liable to his hatred is the saddest thing in the world; it is the sting of miseries and the curse of blessings.

[2.] Observe, to be hated and rejected of God should be esteemed by us as one of the greatest calamities that can befall a poor creature, as to be accepted with him one of the greatest blessings: Ps. iv. 6, 7, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? 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 wine increased.'

(1.) On one side we have the matter compared, their good things, their corn and wine; not sinful, but lawful comforts. (2.) It is proposed with a supposition of increase, not in the wane. (3.) For the time, take it at best, when this joy is most lively, at the time of vintage and harvest. (4.) The persons, their corn and wine; not different godly men, in whom these things are refracted and broken, not the same godly man, in whom these different desires are found. On the other side, there is—(1.) The matter and ground of gladness, the light of God's countenance: Jer. ii. 13, 'My people have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns,' &c. They drink of the cistern, you of the fountain; they rejoice not in God, but his gifts, and those not saving, but the common sort, such as riches, pleasures, honours; and in these, not as the effects of God's bounty, but as happening to them in the ordinary course of second causes; as they rejoice in an uncertain good, so in an uncertain author. You rejoice in God, in his best gifts, his love and grace. (2.) The author, 'Thou hast put;' allowed by God, wrought by him: Rom. xiv. 17, 'Joy in the Holy Ghost,' stirred up by his Spirit. Their joy is neither God's allowance nor God's work. (3.) The subject and seat, 'Into my heart;' not to tickle the senses, but delight the heart; not as the morning dew, but as a soaking shower. (4.) The measure, more pure, more sublime, or more cheering, that is, of a stronger efficacy, which not only overcometh the sense of present infelicity, but the fear of death, hell, and judgment to come: Heb. vi. 18, *ισχυράν παράκλησιν*, 'Strong consolation.' They dance about the brink of hell, have their secret gripes; and will you envy them, as if your condition were not much better? When God hath given you the feast, will you be troubled that others should have the scraps and fragments of his bounty?

[3.] Observe, from the supposition of God's abomination of their persons and courses, that he can when he pleaseth easily ruin and destroy them, which must needs infer at least an uncomfortable uncertainty in their condition. The wicked being objects of God's hatred, the easiness of their destruction is often asserted in scripture: Job v. 3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation;' Ps. xxxvii. 20, 'But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs; they shall consume, into smoke they shall consume away.' The fire licketh up the fat of lambs, which is not a very solid substance, but easily melted; so shall their glory vanish and be consumed in God's wrath, when he is pleased to let it out upon them: Ps. xxxvii. 2, 'They shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.' Though they seem to be in a prosperous condition for the present, as grass while it is growing is very green, yet they are soon cut down by the scythe of Providence, and then presently fade, and are carried away as grass from the place where it grew: Ps. cxviii. 12, 'They are quenched as the fire of thorns.' Though for the time it burneth and flameth extremely, yet they are soon consumed, and are turned into dust and ashes: Ps. lxxiii. 18, 'Surely thou didst set them in slippery places.' And it is notable that all these places do intimate that God can easily destroy them, and usually doth, when they are at their prime; and that they are never nearer their ruin, than when they come to the height of their exaltation.

As the sun declineth presently when it cometh to the highest point of the zenith; as grass, when it cometh to its full growth, it beginneth to wither; as the sacrifice is first fatted, and then killed before the Lord; so enemies are permitted to prosper, and grow great and proud, and then are cut off. Or as thorns die, and are extinguished by their own blaze, so in slippery places, the higher they go, the nearer to their downfall and ruin; as men on the top of an hill, and there have no firm footing, they slip and fall, and by the highness of the ground are more sorely bruised. And as by the expressions of scripture, so by God's providence it appeareth how easily he can subdue wicked men. God did not bring down Egypt by bears, and lions, and crocodiles, but flies, frogs, and lice. The walls of Jericho fell, not with force of arms and engines of battery, but rams' horns, Josh. vi. 6; the tents of Midian with trumpets and earthen pitchers, Judges vii. 7. The city of Nesibis was freed from a long siege only by gnats, at the prayers of his people, when Saporet king of Persia thought to have his will upon them, as Theodoret witnesseth. God sent such clouds and swarms of them, which flying into the mouths of their elephants and horses, disturbed their whole camp. And should we envy them to whom God oweth an evil turn, and can so easily ruin, though nothing appeareth of it? Once more, observe how the scripture representeth the uncertain condition of the wicked with the stable condition of the godly: Prov. xi. 28, 'He that trusteth in his riches shall fall, but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.' The one is compared to a leaf, the other to a branch. So Prov. xii. 12, 'The wicked desireth the net of evil men, but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit.' Men who have no grounds in them of piety and godliness are for the present only; and when they see the prosperity of the wicked, and how they thrive in their evil designs, taking up men as fishes in the waters, they are willing to get into the net too, even run with company; but the root of the righteous, which hath its growth underground, not seen by fleshly eyes, this root will grow up again, and yield abundance.

[4.] God will not always bear with them that are an abomination to him, but hath his times of showing his hatred of them and their evil courses; for if they are an abomination to him, and he never show it, they need not care, and so it inferreth not only a possibility, but a certainty of their destruction: Ps. xcii. 7, 'When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.' The end of all their flourishing and temporal prosperity is perdition; yea, their very prosperity, as it ferments their lusts, and hardens their hearts, and encourageth them to acts of violence, becometh one means to draw on their ruin the sooner: Ps. lxxiii. 17, 'I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end.' God's vengeance are due to them, and one time or other shall be inflicted: Ps. xxxvii. 13, 'His day is coming;' Ps. xxxvii. 38, 'But the transgressor shall be destroyed together; the end of the wicked shall be cut off.' Though long deferred, vengeance cometh at last, to the full, and cuts them off. You think providence doth not deal righteously because the unworthy are exalted and the worthy depressed; tarry but a while, and you will have no cause to complain, or grow weary of godliness, or to cry up a confederacy with evil men.

Who would envy those that climb up the ladder for execution, or are carried to the top of a rock to be thrown down thence and broken in pieces, or think Haman preferred because advanced above others on a high gallows? Would you envy a man on the gallows because he standeth above the rest of the company?

2. The state of the suffering godly. Wicked men, you see, are under God's displeasure, which will one day break out upon them, and consume all their temporal happiness; but in what state are the godly? consider their future hopes and their present enjoyments, they need not envy them.

[1.] Their future hopes. Their possessions are not to be compared with your hopes: Ps. xvii. 14, 15, 'From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly is filled with the hid treasure; they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. But as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' Men are dazzled with the splendour of worldly happiness, and think it a fine thing to be well fed, and well clad, and well attended, but this is all for them and theirs; and shall we envy them for this, that they have more for back and belly than we have, a little pomp of living, especially when such great things be provided for us in Christ? Alas! what is a more plentiful table to the everlasting fruition of God; the pomp of the world to the honour Christ will put on us at the day of judgment, when he shall be admired in his saints; the favour of princes to seeing God face to face; vainglory to everlasting glory; their momentary pleasures, which pass away suddenly as a dream, to that everlasting pleasure at God's right hand; a little decking and adorning of the body, to be satisfied with his likeness, and to walk with God in white?

[2.] Present enjoyments. Here I take in the notion of the text, 'His secret is with the righteous.' There is some difference what should be meant by 'the secret of the Lord.' Sometimes it noteth—

(1.) Spiritual illumination, or the knowledge of God's will: Ps. xxv. 14, 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; he will teach them his covenant.' They know more of God's mind than others do, and they know it not only literally, but spiritually; that is, by the lively light of the Spirit, not disciplinarily. Now this is a great favour, that God doth so love them, that he doth admit them to his arcana: John xv. 15, 'I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known to you.' It is a greater evidence of God's friendship to understand his counsel in the word, and to be acquainted with the mysteries of godliness, than all the success, power, and greatness of the world. Christ gave his Spirit to the rest of the apostles, but his purse to the son of perdition. Some have knowledge and eminent gifts, others wealth and honour; yea, though they which increase knowledge increase sorrow, yet the knowledge of a despised, hated truth, though it expose us to sufferings, is better than to flourish in opposition against the ways of God, through our ignorance, obstinacy, and blind prejudice. And will you, that are directed in the way of salvation, advanced to know God, and the tenor of his will, far more than the blind, carnal, careless world, envy them that are only acquainted with

christianity as a report, or tradition calculated and formed to a worldly interest?

(2.) The secret of the Lord may intend not only direction in our duty, but satisfaction about God's dispensations, for our consolation in all afflictions. God helpeth them to interpret his providence better than others, called 'the secrets of wisdom,' Job xi. 6. And should the saints, whose graces make them so sharp and eagle-eyed, that know more of God's mind than others in these very dealings which are so troublesome and offensive to them, should they envy the oppressor, and be so discontented to suffer a little, that have more skill than others to look into God's ways, and consider the course of his proceedings?

(3.) 'Secret' may imply the visible blessings of God's providence; so it is said, Job xxix. 34, 'The secret of the Lord was upon my tabernacle.' The singular love God bore to him did preserve him, and did guide him and his family, and made all his affairs prosper: Ps. xxxi. 20, 'God shall hide them in the secret of his presence.' When they seem to be left open as a prey to the oppressions and injuries of their potent adversaries, yet there is a secret guard upon them, and they are kept the world knoweth not how. Now, should such as are hedged round about with the guard of a secret blessing leave their refuge for the defence of a little interest in the world, which God hateth, and can soon blow upon? Ps. xci. 1, 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.'

(4.) 'Secret' may note the intimate familiarity that is between God and them, and that inward consolation which they have with God in a course of holiness which is hidden from the world: 1 John i. 7, 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another;' John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him.' Many secret refreshings, visits of love, expressions of grace, are bestowed upon them. Now, have such any cause to envy others? They that walk with God, meet him at every turn, are so often comforted and quickened by the manifestations of God, and the influences of his grace: Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.' The psalmist preferreth his present condition before the greatest happiness of carnal men, because he had opportunities of beholding the face of God, or enjoying the comforts of his presence. This is as if a child fed with manchet should envy a slave for being fed with the bread of sorrows.

3. The nature and mischievous effects of this envy; for it is not so tame an evil as the world doth imagine.

[1.] It disposeth to fretting or murmuring against God's holy providence: Ps. xxxvii. 1, 'Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity;' Prov. xxiv. 19, 'Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked.' It notes a certain taxing of God's providence, as if he did not rightly govern the world.

[2.] It tempteth to apostasy from God's ways to the ways of the wicked; that is in the text clearly: 'Envy not the oppressor, and

choose none of his ways ; ' implying that this emulation of their happiness will draw you to cry up a confederacy with them, and to enter into their lot and net : Prov. xxiv. 1, ' Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them.' When we admire their happiness, it secretly enticeth our hearts to take share and lot with them. A man is perverted by this envy ; it weakeneth our fear of God, our value of spiritual blessings, expectation of things to come, and diligence in God's service.

[3.] It implieth and includeth many evil principles which tend directly to the weakening of faith, hope and piety. (1.) It implieth or includeth this principle or opinion, that the felicity of a man consisteth in these external good things which the wicked enjoy, which is an error destructive to godliness ; for change a man's chief good and last end, and all goeth to wreck and disorder, for the whole life is seasoned by it. They call the proud happy, and therefore envy them. (2.) It includeth this principle, that it is in vain to depend upon God in a course of duty and holiness ; that we may shift better and carve better for ourselves : Mal. iii. 14, ' Ye have said, It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances ? ' Ps. lxxiii. 11-13, ' And they say, How doth God know, and is there knowledge in the Most High ? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world ; they increase in riches ; verily I have cleansed my heart in vain.' (3.) It includeth an opinion of our own worth and merit, as if we deserved more at God's hands, as if all happiness were but our due debt ; which destroyeth all humility : Luke xvii. 10, ' When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do.'

Use 1. To reprove us, and humble us for this envying the wicked. It appeareth partly by our troubling and vexing ourselves so much at the sight of their prosperity. We are so dejected at it, as if God had done nothing for our souls, as if all our happiness were gone, and lay in outward things. We should chide ourselves for this : Ps. xlii. 5, ' Why art thou cast down, O my soul, why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God ; I shall yet praise him, for the help of his countenance.' Partly by our questioning providence and murmuring against providence, as if all things were not under the government of God : Exod. xvii. 7, ' They tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us or not ? ' Judges vi. 13, ' If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us ? ' Or as if we had deserved more than he giveth us : Isa. lviii. 3, ' Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not ? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge ? ' Partly by our proneness to choose their ways, and weariness of the good course wherein we are engaged. Alas ! how have we lost our way, and been hurried to and fro in this time of trial, like light chaff. As Cyprian observeth, *De Lapsis : Ad primum statim verbum minantis inimici, fidem suam perdit nec prostratus est, persecutionis metu, sed voluntario lapsu seipsum prostravit, &c.* We give out at the first assault ; yea, before assaulted ; at the very blast and rumour of a temptation.

2. Envy them not. Let it enforce the admonition of the text. Now, for remedies, let me—

[1.] Recommend those three radical graces, faith, fear, and love.

(1.) Faith, that we may see afar off, and look beyond the present condition: 2 Peter i. 9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.' Faith showeth us there are other good things after this life, with which these present unstable good things are not to be compared, nor so much as called good things. The use of faith is to be, Heb. xi. 1, 'The evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for.' Some are of so weak a sight, that without their spectacles they can scarce see anything except those that are so bulky and great that they are not only seen but felt; but if they use their spectacles, they can see afar off. In a perspective-glass men can discern ships at sea at a great distance. All carnal men see nothing but those corporeal things which dogs and horses see; they know it is good to eat well and drink well and sleep well, increase by trade, or follow after vain pleasures; but faith giveth an eagle's eye, that can see, beyond all the clouds of the lower world, an invisible God, and heaven at a distance. Yea, faith is necessary to see the vanity of present things: Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36, 'I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree: yet he passed away, and lo! he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found;' that we may not look too much to sense and appearance, that we may not judge rashly of matters as they show for the present; but remember all flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass.

(2.) The fear of God is necessary: Prov. xxiii. 27, 'Let not thine heart envy sinners, but be thou in the fear of God all the day long.' Fear is always necessary, that we may be sensible of his providence, to suppress all murmurings, and to moderate our desires of earthly things; to keep us as with a bridle from putting forth our hands to iniquity.

(3.) Love is also necessary. Love to God and his ways: Ps. cxix. 165, 'Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them;' they do not easily stumble. So to men: 1 Cor. xiii. 5, 'Charity envieth not.' We are apt to be grieved at the good of others, and their preference before ourselves. We should rejoice in others' good as our own: 1 Cor. xii. 26, 'The members should have the same care one for another; and whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.'

[2.] A due estimation and value of our privileges, though spiritual and future. They are not worthy of the favour of God that do not prefer it above all worldly things whatsoever, even one drachm of his love: Heb. xi. 26, 'Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.' In the darkest times of trouble you are in a better state than they. A christian sees nothing under the sun truly great and worthy his envy; nothing worthy to be compared with what he enjoyeth in Christ.

[3.] A sound judgment about providence, and a right interpretation of God's dealing with us. If the just should be always prosperous, and the wicked always miserable, religion would be a matter of sense; so, on the contrary, if the just should have always evil, and the wicked always good, it would tempt to despair; therefore providences are mixed.

The present state is a state of faith ; we are justified by faith, we live by faith, we walk by faith. Now the state of faith requireth this, that the manner of God's government of worldly affairs should neither be too perspicuous nor too obscure, but be carried on in a middle way ; as the morning is a middle thing between the darkness of the night and the light of high noon ; for, if it were too clear, sense would do all, there would be no need of faith ; if it were too obscure, faith would be too much discouraged ; therefore the righteous are not always happy, and the wicked always miserable. It would not be a dispensation suitable to God's end, which is to try our respects to him. Yea, the fear and hope of temporal reward would be the greatest motives to keep the law of God, and men compelled to own, rather than choose, that which is good. Therefore, that men may understand that the good and evil of the world is not our last reward or punishment, our greatest happiness or greatest misery, God doth not always comfort the just with these good things, nor punish the wicked with the contrary evils. On the one side, if good men were always miserable, what a grievous temptation would this be to the weak ! We should then think, ' I have cleansed my hands in vain.' Therefore God mixeth the dispensation of these outward things. Though piety be the only way to obtain them, and to have them by promise, and with satisfaction and a blessing, yet sometimes he giveth to his enemies that which he denieth to his children, that he may exercise our faith and patience ; and sometimes he punisheth the wicked, and delivereth the godly that he may show his providence. Well, then, a right judgment about providence would much stay our hearts. Two things you may be confident of—

(1.) That no evil can befall you without God's hand and counsel. It must first pass through the hands of God before it can reach you ; for as nothing can be done against his will, so nothing without his will : ' The hairs of your head are numbered,' Mat. x. 30. The devil asked leave to go into the herd of swine. Now this is a great comfort, that you do not fear the sword if you do not fear him that weareth the sword. God can stop all evil, and will, when it is for our profit and his glory ; for he loveth us more than a mother her only child. If thou hadst an enemy that hath a purpose to take thee away by poison, and he could not any ways do it but by telling thy parents of his purpose, and asking their leave, yea, and must have the poison given thee by them, wouldst thou be troubled and perplexed ? for how could it be that thy parents would conspire with thine enemy to thy death ? This is the case ; God loveth his people, gave his only-begotten Son for them ; neither men nor devils can do anything against them without God's leave.

(2.) God being just, wise, and good, doth dispense all human affairs with great wisdom, sweetness, and equity. The judges of this world, when they have the guilty in their hands, do not presently pass sentence, but proceed gravely and with mature advice, examine witnesses, consider the cause, seek to draw out the truth by confession, and then afterwards at a certain day pass sentence ; so God now heareth accusations, divers complaints, examineth witnesses, prepareth all for judgment, and in time all things that seem to be in trouble and confusion are put into an orderly frame.