

SERMON UPON ECCLESIASTES VII. 29.

But they sought out many inventions.—ECCLES. vii. 29.

THERE are two things in this scripture—

1. The righteousness of God in his work about men, ‘God made man upright.’

2. Man’s perverse subtlety in inventing ways of backsliding and apostasy from God, ‘But they sought out many inventions.’

From this latter part observe—

Doct. That man fell from the integrity of his first estate, and is ever since full of evil and fruitless inventions.

I. I shall speak to this point as it is represented in the text.

II. Give some considerations as to the general case.

1. The persons, ‘they.’ The expression was singular before, ‘God made Adam upright;’ but now plural, not only to include both our first parents, but all their posterity. Adam had his invention, and all his posterity theirs. The devil inspired Adam with a sad and doleful invention, to go about to find out another happiness than God had appointed. Adam could not content himself with this kind of happiness, but fancied to himself an higher perfection, and yielded to follow these new devised ways of blessedness which Satan and his own deceived heart did suggest to him; and this invention bath invented and found out all the sin and misery under which the world groaneth. As Adam had his invention, so all his posterity theirs; we are inventing still to make ourselves more miserable. The least ebullitions of sin are expressed in the old testament by ‘imagination;’ in the new by ‘lusts.’ In the old testament by ‘imagination;’ Jer. xviii. 12, ‘And they said, There is no hope; but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart;’ Gen. vi. 5, ‘And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.’ In the new by ‘lusts;’ James i. 14, ‘But every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed;’ Titus iii. 3, ‘For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts.’ Not only the desiring, but the understanding faculty is corrupt; therefore it is said, Prov. i. 31, ‘They shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices;’ Jer. vi. 19, ‘Behold, I will bring upon this people even the fruit of their thoughts;’ meaning the evil which their own devices and practices had procured to themselves. Every one of us has our devices, ways,

and haunts of sin, whereby we make ourselves more wretched and sinful.

2. Their act, 'They sought out;' that showeth the voluntariness and studiousness of man's defection; it is their own act and deed, and their hearts are set upon it. It is said, Jonah ii. 8, 'They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies.' They set their minds a-work, prostitute their reason to their senses. All men's projects, what do they tend to but the satisfaction of their own lusts, to cater for the body, and gratify the animal life? 'Making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof,' Rom. xiii. 14; 'Taking thought what they shall eat or what they shall drink,' Mat. vi. 25. Their care is about the base and brutish part more than about the soul, how to adorn the body and gratify the body; and for this the soul must be made a slave. There is a perverse diligence in men to corrupt themselves.

3. The object, with its number, 'Many inventions.' There is some difference in the translations. Ludovicus de Dieu, because the word for 'many' signifieth also 'great' and 'mighty,' rendereth it, *Ipsi autem quesiverunt cogitationes magnatum*; meaning by the 'mighty' the angels who were not contented with their own station, but forsook it, Jude 6. Certain it is the devil's first temptation was, Gen. iii. 5, 'Ye shall be as gods;' that is, advance into a more honourable and noble condition than now you are in. These thoughts being suggested by Satan, they ambitiously entertained them. The vulgar readeth it, *Se infinitis miscuit questionibus*. Adam at first out of curiosity would know good and evil, and ever since we have been sick of questions, questioning this and questioning that, and have no clear light to guide us. The Septuagint render it, *ἐξήτησαν λογισμούς πολλούς*, they sought out many ratiocinations. We grope in a maze of uncertainties, and so entangle ourselves the more. Our heavenly wisdom is lost by our sin and rebellion, and instead thereof we have gotten a false carnal wisdom, which is 'enmity to God,' Rom. viii. 7, and only inclineth us to a false happiness, James iii. 15, to the pleasures, honours, and profits of the present world; and so are given up to an injudicious mind, and are left in the hands of our own counsel, which is the heaviest plague that can light upon a reasonable creature: Ps. lxxxii. 11, 12, 'But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me; so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.' For our own wisdom is an ill guide and counsellor, and will never guide us aright in the way to true happiness, but lead us into bogs and pits, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts.

But keeping more closely to our own translation, let me a little open this expression, 'They sought out many inventions.'

First, Observe that man is left to invent, and (since he left the straight line of God's directions) to shift for an happiness for himself. Surely it was better for us when we needed only to accept or submit; we never sped well since we would be our own carvers, and would follow those new ways to blessedness which Satan and our own hearts suggest to us; as a runagate child or servant, that is not content with the father's or master's finding, is driven to a thousand shifts. All our inventions may be disproved by a double reason—

1. They are insufficient to make us happy. We were made for God,

and cannot be happy again till we return to God. Being fallen from God, in whose favour alone true happiness is to be found, we invent false ways wherein we seek to attain happiness; but after all our vain pursuits, we can nowhere find rest for our souls. We have but a little vainglory for that eternal glory which we have lost, a little brutish pleasure for that fulness of joy which we might have in God's presence, perishing vanities for the true riches; so that we do but go about: Jer. xxxi. 22, 'How long wilt thou go about, O backsliding daughter?' We do but weary ourselves as long as we keep off from God; you meet with a broken cistern instead of the fountain: Jer. ii. 13, 'My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.' You may drink many a puddle dry, and yet never quench your thirst; labour your hearts out, and yet not meet with that which satisfieth: Isa. lv. 2, 'Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.' True rest and peace will only be found in God reconciled to us in Christ.

2. They plunge us in farther misery. It is true both as to opinions in religion and as to practice.

[1.] As to opinions in religion. If men apprehend some misery, how vain are their inventions about the remedy! All their devices show how desperate the disease is. The philosophers, when they had found out a god, yet were 'vain in their imaginations,' Rom. i. 21; when they sat abroad on a religion, they hatched nothing but what was ridiculous: 'And professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.' The Egyptians, who vaunted themselves to be the fathers of all sciences, worshipped onions and leeks, and their gods grew in their gardens; they were planted and cultivated by their labourers before they were worshipped by their princes. The Romans, who excelled all nations for their morality and civility, made gods of all things, for war and peace, fears and passions, agues and fevers. And still the religion of heathens, Turks, and pagans are so far from being the remedy, that they are a part of the disease, and remove man further off from God. All men's inventions to pacify God's wrath do further provoke him: 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?' Go to, false christians! it was never well with the world since men were guided by inventions rather than institutions; while they hope by their own penances and exterior mortifications to appease God, he is the more alienated from them.

[2.] So as to practice. Whilst instead of dependance and downright simplicity they fly to their own shifts, and will help themselves rather than trust God, they involve themselves the more. There is one principle of sincerity, to depend upon God's all-sufficiency: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' But they that do not trust God cannot be true to him. When men will be in-

venting, and shift for their own happiness, they never carve to themselves a good portion, but have enough of their devices at last. Besides, our false happiness which we pursue after, and our inventions about it, are not only vain, but pernicious and destructive: John iii. 19, 'And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.' If we love our own dark counsels rather than God's provision for us and the remedy offered to us, our case is the more doleful.

Secondly, Observe, these inventions are many. Here I shall inquire—(1.) What are these inventions? (2.) Why many?

First, What are these inventions? We must distinguish—

1. There are profitable inventions for the good of society and benefit of mankind, such as are civil arts and disciplines, manufacture and occupations, which conduce much to the good of the present world, and do repair those natural defects which were introduced by the fall. Now, though these are not intended in this place, yet two things I shall say upon this occasion—

[1.] The one is, that if man would have been contented to be at God's finding, many of these would not have been needed; such a deal of do would not have been needful to man in innocency. It is sin hath made so many necessities, and lust still multiplieth them.

[2.] The other is, that though since the fall we can find some remedy for our natural defects, yet for the spiritual distempers of the heart we can find no cure. By art man can melt the hardest metals, and make them capable of any form, but to soften the heart, and make it capable of God's image, that is past the skill of men or angels. There is no creature so fierce but 'it is tamed and hath been tamed of mankind,' James iii. 7; but yet man cannot tame his own heart; it is God must turn us, or we are never turned. How many inventions hath man found out to repair the ruins of the fall! Grammar and rhetoric to polish our speech, logic to refine our reason, ethics to reform our manners in civil converse, economics to govern families, politics to model kingdoms and commonwealths; but nothing to tame and subdue the heart to God? It is God that 'createth in us a clean heart, and reneweth a right spirit,' Ps. li. 10; even he that made it at first.

2. There are sinful inventions, taken in a more limited sense, for those exquisite studied ways of sin wherewith many please themselves; as we read of some that were 'inventors of evil things,' Rom. i. 30, who find out such wickedness as the world was never acquainted with before; as new-fashioned oaths, lusts, torments. This argueth the height of wickedness; and such are the more corrupt of the corrupt sort of men. These are not principally intended in this place, yet may be comprised here.

3. The inventions here intended are such as by which we start away from God and corrupt ourselves. This more general sense of the words compriseth two sorts of inventions—

[1.] Those many crooked counsels and devices whereunto men are carried by their own corrupt hearts, when once they had forsaken God and the straight rule of his law. We read, Jer. xvii. 9, 'That the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?' There is a bottomless, unsearchable depth of wickedness

in the heart of man, which none can discover but God ; it is wily, fraudulent, prone to deceive, full of windings and turnings, wiles and sleights ; no creature in wicked subtlety and dissembling can go beyond him. The scripture delighteth in this term, 'inventions' and 'imaginations ;' Gen. vi. 5, 'All the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually ;' and Jer. xviii. 12, 'We will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imaginations of his evil heart.' The heart of man is in continual action, framing and moulding things within itself ; and because there are many cunning fetches and secret devices within the heart, by which they seek to put out their own eyes, that they may not apprehend themselves to be so vile and filthy as indeed they are, and a deceitful heart smooths evil, and presents it under another notion, therefore they may be called, and are in scripture called, 'devices' and 'inventions.' There is so much remainder of light and conscience since the fall, that there needeth a great deal of craft to varnish sin, to insinuate it with any satisfaction to the conscience ; a great deal of diligence to compass it, and a great deal of art to hide it from the world, that it may not make us hateful or obnoxious, that we may live in it with greater leave and allowance from those remainders of reason which are yet left within us. True wisdom is plain and simple ; it needeth no disguises to palliate it from the judgment of conscience or the notice of the world : 'Wisdom is justified of her children ;' Mat. xi. 19, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world,' 2 Cor. i. 12. But with sin it is not so ; there are many inventions for the hiding, palliating, excusing, and defending of sin ; it is the great power of the word to discover them : Heb. iv. 12, 'For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' These are the most secret acts of the soul. Intentions respect the end, thoughts respect consultations about the means. There is an artificial dexterous managery of sin : Eph. ii. 3, 'Fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind,' *θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν*, that is, imaginations and lusts. Now of these inventions I shall say two things—

(1.) The more studiously and dexterously any sin is carried on, it argueth the worse temper of spirit, and the sin is the more aggravated : 'To be wise to do evil,' Jer. iv. 22 ; 'To devise iniquity, and work evil upon our beds,' Micah ii. 1 ; 'The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth,' Ps. xxxvii. 12. The subtle designer of sin is worse than he that occasionally lapseth into it. The good may be overtaken or overborne, but to dig deep to hide our wickedness, and sit abroad upon it, is the greatest evil.

(2.) That sinful inventions for the hiding and palliating of sin never succeed well, but involve us the more. I shall not instance in the worst of men, how they are forced to add sin to sin, and help out one wickedness with another, which at last bringeth upon them the feared evil with the greater violence ; but even in the best of men, that you may the more loath these sinful inventions. David had many inventions to

cloak his sin with Bathsheba, but how ill did they succeed at last ! When sin hath got a tie upon a man, and a man hath done some evil from which he cannot well acquit himself but with some loss and shame or other inconvenience, then it is a mighty snare, unless he cover it or maintain it, or some other way help himself by adding some other sin to it. Thus usually in this case men have their inventions, shift off a fault with a lie, and imagine it in a sort necessary for their safety to be evil ; and out of this seeming necessity heap and pile up sin upon sin, and transgression upon transgression. This, I say, was David's case in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah. Surely he had never proceeded to such black thoughts, to plot the murder of a person so worthy and innocent, but to salve his credit and cover his dishonest act, when other arts and shifts failed and took no effect. Admit one sin, and the devil taketh this advantage, that he will force us for the defence of that to yield to more. Thus Sarah's unbelieving laughter brought forth a lie : Gen. xviii. 12-15, ' Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not ; for she was afraid.' Peter, when he had denied his master with a plain single denial, ' I know not the man,' Mat. xxvi. 70, he proceedeth after to a denial with oaths and execrations : ' Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man,' ver. 74. If he had prevented the first sin with ordinary courage and boldness, he had not thus entangled himself ; but one sin must help out another, though still to our loss and trouble. Eudoxia, wife to Theodosius junior, having received of the emperor her husband an apple of incredible beauty and bigness, gave it to one Paulinus, a learned man, whom she prized ; he, not knowing whence the empress had received it, presents it as a rare gift to the emperor, who thereupon sending for his wife, asked her for the apple ; she, fearing her husband's displeasure if she should say she had given it away, answered she had eaten it ; upon this afterwards the emperor produceth it, and in his jealousy killeth innocent Paulinus, and hateth his wife. If she had not told an untruth at first, she had not fallen into the sin of lying ; but giving way a little, she is drawn into a greater sin, her innocent friend lost his life, and she her husband's favour ever afterwards. All this is spoken that we may beware of evil inventions, which never succeed well, nor to the content of the party that useth them.

[2.] These inventions are put for our pursuits after a false happiness. True happiness is only to be found in the favour of God, and in the way appointed by God ; but man would be at his own dispose, and would invent and find out an happiness for himself, and be sufficient to himself for his own blessedness, without any dependence upon God. Now, when man was thus fallen off from God, God was disobliged from providing for him, and so man is left to his own shifts. But alas ! how ill doth he provide for himself ! This being the very thing intended in the text, I shall a little more amply dilate upon it in several propositions.

(1.) When man fell from God, he fell from him *tanquam a principio et fine*, from dependence upon him as the first cause, and respect to him as his chief good and last end. His dependence was loosened, because he distrusted God's provision for him, and would be a god to himself, his own principle, rule, and end ; live from himself to himself,

according to his own will. So that self-love came in the place of love to God; he that before sought nothing but God, began now to seek himself, and thought he should find in himself what he lost in God.

(2.) Man being once off from God, never of himself cometh on again, but rangeth infinitely, being guided by his own will and wit: Jonah ii. 8, 'They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies.' Man being fastened to such objects as he liketh, keepeth aloof from God, whom he liketh not, and will not come at him as long as he can make a shift without him: Jer. ii. 31, 'We are lords; we will come no more unto thee.' And though he wandereth hither and thither, he finds no rest for his soul, for he seeketh happiness where it is not to be found, in the riches, honours, and pleasures of the present life.

(3.) Though he meet with often disappointments, yet he is unwilling to return even after God hath showed a remedy, and brought life and immortality to light in the gospel, in which way he may have peace and happiness, and so rest for his soul. God hath showed us the way to rest: Jer. vi. 16, 'Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls;' Mat. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' But yet man is for his shifts still, till God changeth his heart and giveth him counsel in his reins, and disappoints him in his worldly inventions and pursuits, by blasting the creature, or occasioning some wound in his conscience. God speaketh often in his word, but it is disregarded till he speak by real arguments, and speak to the quick, so as to force an hearing; till he take away their comforts, or take away their use of them, by some languishing sickness or anguish in their own conscience, or both; by smiting them with a rod dipped in guilt: 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth,' Ps. xxxix. 11; so that then they see the fruitlessness of all their inventions, their vain pleasures, costly buildings, great honour and riches, how little these can stand them against the wrath of an angry God. So loath is man to submit to God's remedy; he laboureth all that he can to patch up his sorry happiness, and is very unwilling to confess his misery; he turneth and windeth every way, and seeketh help from the creature before he will be brought to implore aid from grace; he will use all means within his grasp and reach, till his despair teach him to return from whence he fell, and that it is better to seek God's favour than continue his vain pursuits: Hosea ii. 7, 'I will return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now.'

Secondly, Why many inventions?

1. In opposition to that one straight line which leadeth to true happiness. Christ telleth us, 'One thing is necessary,' Luke x. 42, namely, to serve and please God, and enjoy him for ever. To enjoy God and please him is that one thing which is enough. But error is manifold; though there be but one path to heaven, yet there are many ways of sinning and going to hell. Every man hath his several course and way of sinning: Isa. liii. 6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;' according to the several constitutions and business and affairs of men. *Velle suum cuique est, nec voto vivitur uno.* As the channel is cut, so corrupt nature in every

man findeth an issue and passage. No sin cometh amiss to a carnal heart, yet some are more kindly and suitable; one is worldly, another sensual, another proud and ambitious. It is our wisdom to observe our own haunt, and the tender parts of our souls: Ps. xviii. 23, 'I was upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity.' All sin is but carnal self-love disguised; or many, with respect to the successive entertainment of divers sins: Titus iii. 3, 'Serving divers lusts and pleasures.' Sins take the throne by turns. By age and experience men grow weary of former vanities, but others are adopted into their room, and so their lusts are but exchanged, not abrogated. Now we are fallen from our primitive happiness, we multiply means and cares; yea, at the same time the pleasures of the flesh draw the sinner several ways: James iv. 1, 'Whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts, which war in your members?' Desire of riches contradicts idleness, and the toilsome cares and labours of this world that ease which the flesh affecteth; disgraceful lusts are contradicted by ambition and pride.

2. Many inventions, in opposition to that simplicity and singleness of heart which original rectitude did include. The heart of man was originally of one constant, uniform frame; but now, instead of simplicity, there is a multiplicity. The heart now is never right till it be one with God. Therefore David prays, Ps. lxxxvi. 11, 'Unite my heart to fear thy name.' He begs a heart entirely fixed upon God, who, as our great end, uniteth all our affections in this one scope, that we might please him, and enjoy him as our chief good and last end; that fixeth man's mind; which otherwise will be tossed up and down in perpetual uncertainties, and distracted by a multiplicity of ends and objects, that it cannot continue in any composed and settled frame. No one part of our lives will agree with another. A divided heart breedeth an uncertain life: James i. 8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways;' the whole not firmly knit together by the power of the last end running through all; so that our lives are a mere lottery, the fancies and appetites we are governed by being jumbled together by chance. The heart by natural corruption is loosed from God, and distracted with variety of vain objects, which offer themselves to our senses. The interest of the world and flesh is taken into competition with God; and whilst the heart rangeth abroad, it is such a variable and double heart as will never be true to God; and while men are tossed from one dependence to another, and do not firmly adhere to God, being weaned from the vanities of the world, they are carried hither and thither by their perverse affections, sometimes to one thing, sometimes to another.

3. With respect to that one object who alone was sufficient for us. They that have left God, and would find happiness in the creatures, need many creatures before they can patch up any sorry tolerable happiness to themselves. One broken cistern can yield but little refreshing, Jer. ii. 13; so many disappointments make them look more about. God made man for himself, capable to enjoy him; now he is an infinite eternal good. We desire an infinite eternal good, still such as may quiet and satisfy us; therefore man being made capable of enjoying God, who is infinite, and finding himself not satisfied with a few or many things, always seeketh after new things. Here is his

error, that he seeketh after that which is infinite, among those things which are finite, and so wandereth up and down groping for an eternal good: Acts xvii. 26, 27, 'And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth; and determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitations; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.' As we depart from God, we are gone from unity, and are left distracted and confounded in the multitude of the creatures. *Querunt in varietate creaturarum, quod amiserunt in unitate creatoris*—They seek in the variety of the creatures what they have lost in the one God.

Use 1. Is to represent the misery of fallen man, that we may take up a lamentation for him, and bewail our departure from life and blessedness, and forsaking it for sin and misery. They have cast off God, and set at nought his counsel, and given themselves over to many fruitless and hurtful inventions. For alas! man being left to the counsel of his own desperately wicked and deceitful heart, what doth he look after? What may be expected from him but that all his thoughts and projects should be for the satisfaction of his lusts, to serve his pride, avarice, revenge, pomp, pleasure, and vanity? God is not in all his thoughts; he cares not whether he be pleased or displeased, honoured or dishonoured.

Here consider the disorder and danger of this state.

1. The disorder introduced hereby.

[1.] The creature is preferred before God; for all their projects are how to live at ease in the world, not how to please and enjoy God; and so they 'forsake their own mercies for observing lying vanities,' Jonah ii. 8. They seek an happiness apart from God, who is 'their own mercy;' that is, they might have had from him all that which the mercy of an all-sufficient God can afford. And for what do they forsake him? For 'lying vanities.' In regard of their emptiness they are vanities; and in regard of their disappointing our expectations, 'lying vanities.' They do deceive us with a vain show, and in the issue miserable disappointments. And mark, these must be observed, followed after with a great solicitude and care, whereas the other is freely offered to us; it is our own in the offer, and it is our own fault if it be not our own in the choice. So Jer. ii. 13, 'My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that will hold no water.' God is the well-spring of all manner of good, a fountain that runneth constantly, and never faileth; and such would he have been to us if we had continued loyal and dutiful to him. Besides the leaving of the ever-living, all-sufficient, and ever-flowing fountain of all good, they have betaken themselves to poor paltry vanities, that will yield them no real and solid refreshment.

[2.] The body is preferred before the soul; for all our inventions run upon the body and the pleasing the flesh: Rom. xiii. 14, 'And make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' But the precious and immortal soul is little thought of and cared for. They sit down well appaid with carnal contentments: Luke xii. 19, 'Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry; thou hast much goods laid up for many years.' They do not rise to any thoughts of an higher life, never think

of that immortal soul they carry about with them, but only use it to cater for the body, that the body may be well fed, and clothed, and adorned. Our business is to seek rest for our souls; if we would invent and consider, we should look after that: Jer. vi. 16, 'Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' We are never in our wits again till this be the project and design we travel with. But alas! this is not thought of. The neglected soul may easily complain of hard usage. What are our thoughts but what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and how shall we make a fair show in the flesh? If we look after the soul, it is to adorn it with secular learning and wisdom, which is but to serve the flesh in a more cleanly manner, and to gratify our worldly ends, our pride, or our interests. We look after flowers rather than fruit; those adornments of the soul which are for pomp rather than life, and for present use rather than eternal benefit.

[3.] They prefer earth before heaven and time before eternity. All their business is rather to make sure of the prosperity of the body than the salvation of the soul. And though it is plain, and they do or may know and see that this will not cure their diseases, nor ease their pain, nor save them from the grave nor hell, yet because riches will help them to live in pleasure and reputation with the world, and in plenty of all things, and to have their will as long as they live, that is enough for them, for they care not for the pleasures and happiness which are to be enjoyed in the other world. Though death and the grave may put an end to all they have here much sooner than they imagined, yet their minds and hearts are set upon these things as their happiness, and will not be diverted from them; they have their portion in this world: Ps. xvii. 14, 'From men which are thy hand, O Lord; from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.'

2. The danger. As it is a base thing to act so disproportionably to the light of reason, so within a little while it will be a bitter thing: Jer. ii. 19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee.' Sure it will be bitterness in the end to forsake the Lord, and walk in the inventions and imaginations of thine own heart. You are posting to your eternal misery, where a reflection upon your evil choice will be the greatest part of your misery: Isa. 1. 11, 'Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and the sparks which ye have kindled: this shall ye have of my hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.' The allusion is not to such a fire as burneth and consumeth, but such as doth warm and cherish. Those stakes which wicked worldlings rely upon for succour will in time prove their greatest calamities, and those tufts and fuzes which they promised the greatest comfort to themselves from will occasion the greatest sorrow; the brands which they heaped together will afford them little heat and light, but smoke to vex and choke them. He that will warm himself by his own sparks can expect no other issue from his own rash folly and God's righteous vengeance.

Use 2. To exhort us not only to lament it, but to come out of this condition. And here to this end—

1. Renounce that crooked carnal wisdom which is man's undoing. Man at first seeking to be wise, became a fool. Now 'he must be a fool, that he may be wise,' 1 Cor. iii. 18; a fool to the flesh and the world, that he may be wise to God.

2. Give up yourselves to God in covenant, as your Lord and felicity. A man is never in his wits till he cometh to this: Ps. xxii. 27, 'All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord.' Our misery is in departing from him, so our happiness is in putting ourselves into his hands again. Now you must give up yourselves to him as your supreme Lord and chief felicity or happiness, depending upon him as your happiness, obeying him as your Lord; obey his counsel though against your own reason, and stick to his ways though they seem to be against your present happiness. Remember that duty is safety, that cleaving to God with loss is better than departing from him with seeming gain; and God, that outwits the subtle designer, doth take care of and preserve the plain and simple person, that avowedly adhereth to him, when all the contrivances of foolish and worldly-minded men prove vain and unprosperous. Your obedience will be your safety. Dependence and obedience do mutually cherish one another; the more we depend, the more we obey; and the more we obey, the more we depend; and so they discover one another. Let us show our dependence on God, that in all the changes of this life, by a firm, fast adherence and resolution, we stick fast to God, whatever comes of it, using no means but what he allows, and counting his favour our happiness. They that depend not on him are left to their own inventions.

3. Your great design must be to approve yourselves to God: 2 Cor. v. 9, 'Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of the Lord.'

Use 3. It showeth what need we have to give up ourselves to the conduct of God's word and Spirit. Man is so full of his own inventions that none can be safe but they that depend upon God for direction: James i. 5, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God.' Such a fallible creature as man is in point of truth, such an impotent creature is he in point of power, such an indigent creature in point of happiness and self-sufficiencies, such a sinful corrupt creature, so full of imaginations and lusts, so many crooked dispositions in his heart, so many wiles to justify his irregular choice, so many temptations, and they represented with such sophistry, that he should be willing to accept of direction. Yea, the people of God themselves have need of the direction of the word, in regard of the weakness of their understandings and the perverseness of their affections.

1. Our understandings are so weak, that we are ignorant of many things necessary to be known; for we know but in part. If we know something in general, we fail in particular application; both in general and in particular. If we know things habitually, we do not actually consider them, being hindered by multitude of business, or the violence of temptations, or lulled asleep by the pleasures of the flesh: Eccles. v. 1, 'They consider not that they do evil.'

2. Our affections are perverse, and so addicted rather to be led by

sense than right reason, that there is great danger lest, seeing and approving that which is better, we follow what is worse, contrary to our knowledge and conscience : Rom. ii. 18, ' And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law.' And therefore the best had need to pray with David : Ps. cxliiii. 10, ' Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God : thy Spirit is good ; lead me into the land of uprightness.'
