

SERMON XVIII.

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.

EPH. v. 15.

IN the context the apostle inferreth a change of life from the change of their condition ; they sometimes lived in heathenish darkness, but were now light in the Lord ; and therefore it is an easy deduction he inferreth, that they should walk as children of the light. And then he showeth them what kind of walk that is—(1.) Negatively, that they should ‘ have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.’ (2.) Positively, he directeth them here to ‘ walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.’

In this direction the duty is—(1.) Propounded ; (2.) Expounded.

1. It is propounded, ‘ See that ye walk circumspectly ; ’ where—

[1.] The manner ; he would have them regard it as a matter of importance, *βλέπετε οὖν*, look to it.

[2.] The matter, *πῶς ἀκριβῶς περιπατεῖτε*, how circumspectly ye walk. Mark, it is our *walk* that the apostle speaketh of, or the whole course of our conversations. There may be a zealous fit or pang for a step or two, but the whole course, manner, and tenor of our lives must be thus ordered. And the other word, *ἀκριβῶς*, signifieth exactly, accurately : Mat. ii. 8, Herod chargeth that they should search diligently for the child. The word is *ἀκριβῶς*, narrowly. Some may think the apostle intendeth wary carriage, to avoid danger, and save themselves. No ; it is not a politic cautiousness to save a temporal stake, but a holy wisdom to save our souls ; it relateth to our duty to God rather than to danger from men.

2. As it is expounded by a new proposal, which hath also the advantage in it of a motive and argument : ‘ Not as fools, but as wise.’ In the judgment of the world you will be accounted fools, but really and indeed this is your wisdom : Deut. iv. 5, 6, ‘ Behold I have taught you judgments and statutes, even as the Lord my God commanded me. Keep them therefore, and do them ; for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, when they shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ But mark the emphasis ; the apostle speaketh both negatively, ‘ Not as fools,’ and positively, ‘ But as wise.’

[1.] ‘ Not as fools,’ negatively. Fools are a sort of easy people, apt to be seduced and drawn aside to carnal compliances.

[2.] ‘ But as wise,’ that is, as men of prudence, who weigh all things, or as those that are endowed with the wisdom of God revealed in his word : Prov. xiv. 8, ‘ The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way ; ’ Prov. xxiii. 19, ‘ Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.’

Doct. It is the duty of God’s children to walk exactly or circumspectly.

This is commanded : Heb. xii. 13, ‘ Make straight paths for your feet.’ God doth not allow men the liberty to take what way they list, or to enlarge themselves as their fleshly inclinations move them. No ;

their conversations must be bounded and confined within such limits as God hath prescribed : 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'That as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more.' The christian faith and the care of our own salvation layeth great obligations upon us to walk exactly, according to the rule that is set unto us, and to improve and increase the holiness that is already in us, that we may please God better than yet we have done. And as it is commanded us, so it is commanded to us as the most comfortable course that we can take: Gal. vi. 16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the whole Israel of God.' The word there signifieth to walk orderly and attentively, as soldiers when they keep rank, who do observe their rule or the laws of military discipline. These have peace in their own consciences, and mercy from God in pardoning their many failings. So Acts ix. 31, 'They walked in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.' We think to be so exact is tedious and troublesome. No ; it is the ready way to peace and comfort. Whereas others make a hard shift to go to heaven through many doubts and fears, they have a comfortable sense of their interest in Christ, and live in the delightful foresight of glory to come. The saints are commended for it : Luke i. 6, 'It is said of Zachary and Elizabeth, 'they were both righteous before God, and walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless ;' that is, were approved and accepted of God as sincere and upright persons, who live in obedience to all God's will, without indulgence to any known sin ; therefore their human frailties are not mentioned and imputed to them. So Paul : Acts xxiv. 16, 'Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence, towards God and towards men.' That was his daily exercise ; so should we be exactly careful to perform our duties to God and man.

Reasons to evince the necessity of this circumspect walking.

First, We have a strict rule, that doth not yield the least allowance and indulgence to sin. When David had admired the perfections of the law, for the purity of it, and its dominion over the conscience, what was the fruit of that meditation ? Ps. xix. 12, 'Who can understand his errors ? cleanse thou me from secret faults.' The best man living, when he compareth himself with the law of God, will be forced to blush and acknowledge more sins than ever he took notice of before. The law of God is said to be a 'broad law,' and sometimes a 'narrow law.' A broad law : Ps. cxix. 96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection, but thy commandments are exceeding broad.' A narrow law, as our way to heaven is called a 'narrow way,' Mat. vii. 14. It is a broad commandment, because it compriseth the whole duty of man. Everything is under a law, not only our actions, but our aims ; there is a law to our thoughts and our desires, and the very sudden and indeliberate motions of our souls. We make too short an exposition of the law, and therefore have too large an opinion of our own righteousness. Again, it is a narrow law, because it alloweth no liberty to corrupt nature to discover and bewray itself. There are extremities on either side to be avoided : Deut. v. 32, 'Ye shall not turn aside to the right hand nor to the left.' It is a proverbial form of speech, used to signify our exact care to walk in God's laws ; it is taken from passengers, that keep

exactly to the road and highway, from which they could not turn aside on either hand, without trespassing on some one or other. The same speech is used, Isa. xxx. 21, 'This is the way, walk in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left;' Prov. iv. 27, 'Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.' Now, then, in a narrow way it is easy to err, for it is hardly found and hardly kept, but the danger of erring is great. Therefore to escape the danger, and that we may walk evenly in the ways that lead to heaven and happiness, we need much circumspection. Let me give you an instance. Solomon saith, Eccles. vii. 16, 17, 'Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself overwise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself? Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time?' The meaning is, avoid the faulty extremes on both sides. But then he saith, ver. 18, 'He that feareth God shall come forth of them all;' that is, he that ordereth his ways in the fear of God, turneth not after either to the right hand or to the left; he is neither too stiff and proud in his own conceit, nor too flexible and bending, where his duty forbiddeth compliance.

Secondly, What a holy God we have for our witness, approver, and judge, who will one day call us to an account! This is often pressed: Deut. iv. 23, 24, 'Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he hath made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of anything, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, which he hath forbidden thee: for the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.' Therefore we must not make bold with his name, law, worship, or interest. So to press them to seriousness: Josh. xxiv. 19, 'And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God, he is a jealous God.' And when he smote the Bethshemites, 1 Sam. vi. 20, 'Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?' It may be you will think this is the character of God as he represented himself to the Jews; but doth not the christian representation of God call for the same respect and reverence? See Heb. xii. 28, 29, 'Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire.' He is a God of all grace, but he will not be slighted; his mercy doth not lessen his majesty, nor expose it to contempt. There are two things in this reason—(1.) That God is our witness; and (2.) He must be our approver and judge.

(1.) He looketh on, and seeth all that we do for the present: Ps. cxix. 168, 'I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies; for all my ways are before thee.' It is impudence, and great contempt of God, to break his laws before his face. What can we do that is hidden from him and done behind his back? And his inspection is accurate: Prov. xvi. 2, 'The Lord weigheth the spirits.' He not only seeth, but weigheth them.

2. He must be our approver and judge. If we be sincere, we make him so: 2 Cor. v. 9, 'Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him;' 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have

had our conversation in the world.' But whether we will or no, he will call us to an account, and then everything will come into the judgment: Eccles. xii. 14, 'For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.' When you reckon with your servants, a general bill doth not serve the turn. Now we cannot be too strict who are to account for all our thoughts, words, and actions. Christ will not take our accounts by heap and in the lump, there will be a narrow search into our hearts and lives.

Thirdly, A great obligation to our strict obedience, as we are children of the light.

1. Surely there should be a great and broad difference between them and the children of darkness. Now it is both a saddening and quickening consideration to consider how far a natural man may go; and if you go lower in the rule of holiness, how can you think yourselves sincere with God? Christ hath told us, Mat. v. 20, 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.' As he convinceth the pharisees of unsoundness: Mat. v. 46, 47, 'For if you love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not the publicans so?' What singular thing do ye more than others? So to convince false christians, what do ye more than others? The pharisees were a strict sect; they did profess *περισσέειν*, to exceed, to supererogate; and add to the duty of the law in externals. It were wondrous to tell you what a painful and costly profession they made, insomuch that the Jews had a proverb, that if two men only should be saved, one of them would be a scribe, the other a pharisee, such were their long devotions, large alms, and frequent penances. Now our righteousness must exceed as to principle, manner, and end. The love of God, a more thorough heart-subjection to him, and his glory, must be our scope.

2. Because the more light and knowledge a man hath, the more he is bound to take heed to his ways, that his practice may be according to his light. The children of light can better choose their way and foresee their danger; and if they do not, their sin is double, and so will their punishment be: Luke xii. 47, 'That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.' You have more light than others, and therefore you should walk more exactly; to stumble in the dark is not so culpable. None can sin as you do, because none sin against such clear light as you do. You are 'light in the Lord.' The gospel hath not only shined upon you, as the sun may upon an opaque and dark body, but hath also shined into your hearts. You have the light seated in you, and so are made luminous yourselves; therefore you have need to look to the principles, ends, motives, and circumstances of all your actions, that you may do nothing that may afterwards be a shame, disgrace, or grief of heart to you. Whatever vanity, disorder, or confusion is seen in the lives of others, that are carried to no certain scope, but are hurried hither and thither by the uncertain motion of their lusts, you should refer all things to their great end and scope, and not be deceived with a false appearance.

3. They are the light of the world: Mat. v. 14, 'Ye are the light of the world;' Phil. iii. 15, 'Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.' They should be a copy and pattern to others to invite them to the heavenly life by the strictness and seriousness of their conversations. The same honour is put upon you that was put upon the star at Bethlehem, to be guides to Christ. Therefore you are to be more exemplary, which cannot be without circumspection.

4. Because there are many snares and dangers; as in a chessboard, we can hardly move back or forth but we are ready to be attacked. In all the businesses, affairs, and comforts of this life, we are apt to miscarry. To some their table becometh a snare: Ps. lxxix. 22, 'Let their table become a snare before them; and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap.' To others their estates: 'They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare,' 1 Tim. vi. 9. Yea, sometimes there may be a snare in our duties: 1 Tim. iii. 6, 'Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil;' that is, grow proud by his ministerial service and employments, and so become a sect-master, and make divisions. Now they that are not circumspect are sure to miscarry. He that hath his eyes in his head, and looketh about him, may escape: Prov. i. 17, 'In vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.' In short, so many and so subtle are the temptations which Satan sets for us to entrap us and draw us from our duty, that we cannot be circumspect and cautious enough. Therefore we that are placed in the midst of so many dangers and temptations ought to walk circumspectly, that we may not be ensnared: Eph. vi. 11, 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.' He assaults us not only by force, but cunning; his wiles are more dangerous than his darts, because they do not approach us with such frightening and awakening assaults as his darts do. He conveyeth such ensnaring temptations as he knoweth will best take with the person tempted; and to deal with the children of light, 'He transformeth himself into an angel of light,' 2 Cor. xi. 14. Some are for grace, others for works; some indulge the flesh, others use the body with more rigour, and will not suffer themselves to be at the whistle of every temptation.

5. Most christians have but a weak heart, that is apt to lead them aside into some unbecoming practice. Our heart is most in danger, and therefore we have need to look to ourselves: 1 Cor. x. 12, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' Those that seem to be most firm and settled have little cause to trust themselves. Though it is true that ordinarily, if the first radical inclination to God and heaven be strengthened, all the other graces grow strong with it, yet many times, yea, most times, it falleth out that christians are weak in some things and strong in others; for all graces do not grow in an equal proportion in true believers, because of some accidental obstruction in the receiver, either through bodily temper, or frequent temptations, or want of serious diligence. So Adam, Solomon, Noah, and others, whose upper soul was considerably furnished and fortified, fell by sensual appetite. Some may have a good proportion of zeal yet

fail in humility ; therefore all graces are not in an equal degree in christians. Some are impotent in bridling a passion, others in bridling the tongue, or checking pride and envy and self-esteem. There is often great zeal with little knowledge ; and again, some have great knowledge with little charity. Therefore how much doth it concern christians to be cautious. Some have more to do to govern their passions, some to keep down their ruder lusts : Titus iii. 3, ' Serving divers lusts and pleasures.' Sometimes the eyes, that they may not let in temptations to the soul : Job xxxi. 1, ' I made a covenant with mine eyes ; why then should I think upon a maid ?' Sometimes the tongue : Ps. xxxix. 1, ' I said, I would take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue.' Sometimes the appetite : Prov. xxiii. 2, ' Put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.' We are to keep all avenues and passes, but especially to fortify the weakest parts. And in the general let me tell you, there may be a defect in the understanding, but the great cause of all miscarriage is the falseness of the heart ; therefore how can weak hearts bear up against strong temptations ?

6. Consider how many guards God hath set upon man, who is apt to fly out upon all occasions. There is an external guard, the magistrate, who is to watch for thy good, Rom. xiii. 4, that nothing may fall out that may disturb human society. But because that is a lax innocence that doth only exempt us from the danger and stroke of the law, and all sins do not intrench upon the welfare of human society, there is a closer guard upon us. God hath made us and our fellow-christians to be one another's keepers : Heb. iii. 12, ' Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.' In ' any of you ;' as not in yourselves, so not in others : ver. 13, ' But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' We must not hate another, and suffer sin upon him. But because duties of common love and charity are often omitted, therefore this is a debt of justice. Some are appointed by way of office and charge : Heb. xiii. 17, ' Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves ; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief.' It is a grief to them when they cannot give a good account of you to the Lord. But church officers cannot be everywhere ; they cannot follow you into your families, and closets, and retirements, or pry into every corner ; and therefore there is an invisible guard upon you, the holy angels : 1 Cor. xi. 10, ' For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head, because of the angels ;' 1 Tim. v. 21, ' I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things, without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.' The angels observe you when anything unseemly passeth from you in worship or in ordinary conversation. A man can hardly be alone ; wherever he goeth, there are good and bad angels in his company. Now because the angels cannot know the heart unless it be by guess and ratiocination, therefore there is a spirit in man which knoweth the things which are in man : 1 Cor. ii. 11, ' For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him ?' Conscience is God's

deputy, and doth accuse and excuse by turns. Whithersoever we go, we carry an accuser and a witness about with us. None can escape this domestic tribunal. Conscience is either troublesome or quiet as we behave ourselves; your own thoughts will be upon you, and your hearts reproach you. A godly man would not hazard the checks of his own conscience, and therefore prevents the cause and occasion of them. But because conscience is often stupefied and benumbed, there is besides this the Spirit of God, who observeth all that we do. The Spirit cannot be blinded, and therefore cannot be mistaken; not a motion in the soul but he is acquainted with it. The good motions are of his own operation, the bad oppose his work. He witnesseth our sincerity: Rom. ix. 1, 'I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.' He is grieved with our disorders, Eph. iv. 30, therefore we ought to walk circumspectly.

7. Because there are so many spies upon us, who may make an ill use of our failings.

I shall instance in three—Satan, wicked men, and weak brethren.

[1.] Satan. The devil is our enemy; he is called our adversary: 1 Peter v. 8, 'Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.' He watcheth to get some advantage against us: 2 Cor. ii. 11, 'Lest Satan should get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices.' He seeketh how to work upon our mistaken judgments or carnal affections: 1 Cor. vii. 5, 'That Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.' He observeth us in all our postures, and lays many temptations in the way, and hath hidden secret darts to mischief our souls which we think not of. Now shall not we be watchful and circumspect?

[2.] Your way is most eyed by wicked men, who also watch for your halting: Jer. xx. 10, 'For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him.' Besides that we are in the sight of God and his angels, we have many enemies who will triumph in our miscarriages, and so strengthen themselves in their wickedness. They would fain draw something from us that may be either a justification of them or matter of sport to them. To surprise a child of God in his nakedness is their mirth, as the sight of Noah's nakedness was to cursed Ham. John Baptist's head in a charger is an usual dish at most men's tables; reports, true or false, concerning some eminent servant of God gratify and feed their prejudices. There is an envious desire in man to blast eminency, especially religious eminency, because it upbraideth and reviveth guilt in the minds of others, and therefore the world would have somewhat to blemish them. Because they will not come up to the holiness of others, they seek to take others down to themselves, and hope their censure shall excuse their not imitating their graces and virtues. The apostle telleth us, 1 Cor. iv. 9, that God's servants are set forth to be made 'a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.' Who would not then watch over himself when others watch over him? So that their very slanderers are a help to watchfulness; as one chose rather to live among

his enemies than his friends, to make him wary and cautious, for then he should be sure to hear of his faults. I am sure the word of God enforceth strictness upon this account: Col. iv. 5, 'Walk in wisdom toward them that are without.' And David prayeth for direction because of his observers: Ps. xxvii. 11, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies;' in the margin it is, 'because of my observers.' In short, they had need be circumspect themselves who are to reprove others, both by word and deed.

[3.] There are weak brethren, which are enough to bind us to circumspection if there were no other argument, for fear of offending Christ's little ones, or prejudicing any one who is hopefully coming on in the way of religion. To lay stumbling-blocks in the way of young converts is a great sin; it is like killing a child in the womb by a stroke: 2 Kings v. 26, 'Is this a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants?' Is this a time to receive bribes, when a Syrian nobleman had been but newly gained to a reverence and respect of the God of Israel? Take heed you do not stumble them: Mat. xviii. 6, 'But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.' Better suffer a violent and ignominious death than prejudice and hinder the salvation of any.

Use. Of reproof.

1. Of those that scoff at strictness and accurate walking. These scoff at that which is the glory of that religion which they do profess, that which God aimed at, that which Christ purchased, that which the Spirit worketh. They are guilty of persecution: Gal. iv. 29, 'But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.' That persecution was scoffing and mocking about the inheritance; we are as much in the favour of God as the precisest of them all: Gen. xxi. 9, 'And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had borne unto Abraham, mocking.' Will a father take it well that a slave should mock his child because he is like him? You will say, It is not their holiness and purity you laugh at, but their folly and preciseness. But is it foolish to be tender of God's laws? Which is better, to conform ourselves to God's will or men's sinister fashions and customs? Can a man keep at too great a distance from sin? But it is preciseness and fond scrupulosity. So did the conversations of christians seem to the old pagans: 1 Peter iv. 3, 4, 'For the time past of our lives may suffice us to have wrought the will of the gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries. Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.' And shall it be so among seeming christians? Have we not the same bible? do we not believe the same creed? are we not baptized into the same profession? and will you blame them for being strict and serious for that in which you are vain and loose? Can God be too much loved, or Christ too much prized, or a man more holy than Christ hath required? And will you oppose the practice of those things which your religion calleth you to as well as them, and please yourselves with the name, and hate them because

they have the power? You will say you hate them for their hypocrisy and dissimulation, and their other miscarriages, notwithstanding their seeming strictness. Surely it is not sin you hate, for then you would declaim more against the profane, in whom sin is more notorious. The plain truth is, your hearts cannot away with their godliness; and if you did hate sin in them, you would pity their persons, not scoff at, but reprove them: Phil. iii. 18, 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ.' It may be they have their failings; but will you cast yourselves into the sea because they are fallen into a ditch? Or doth it become a man infected with leprosy to cry out upon another because he hath a pimple in his face? And especially to fall upon the whole generation of the just, as if you would judge of a street by the sink and kennel, or of the sound grapes by the rotten ones.

2. It reproveth them that think men are more nice than wise, that we make more ado than needeth when we press men to a constant watchfulness and serious diligence in the heavenly life. Oh, consider, we have slippery hearts, and live in the midst of temptations, and are to approve ourselves in the sight of the holy God, who expecteth to be glorified by us. And we are not to give just cause of offence to men, 'neither to Jew, nor gentile, nor to the church of God,' 1 Cor. x. 32. We are to take heed that wicked men be not hardened by our example, nor weak brethren scandalised. We are by a constant exercise of grace to maintain comfortable communion with God, to cherish clear and lively hopes of eternal life, especially in an age when men are to recover the credit of religion after the professors of it have miscarried so foully. In short, we that believe eternity, that there is a heaven and a hell, and that every action of ours is in its own nature a step either to life or death, how circumspect should we be! Alas! loose christians make the world believe that hell and heaven are but things spoken of in jest. Should not we therefore 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling?' Phil. ii. 12. What sense have men of the world to come, when they do so little in order to it? What is that you call religion, that you can get it and keep it up without so much ado? A man may have estate enough for two men, and yet not be satisfied; the best hath scarce grace enough for one. Here is the mischief of it, men are for moderation in nothing else but religion, and there a little serveth the turn.

3. Some slight strictness as a thing out of date, since they know their liberty by Christ. Alas! all the doctrines of grace do enforce it, not lessen it: Titus ii. 11, 12, 'The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.' Else they are abused: Jude 4, 'Turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.' Christ's death and sufferings show us the vileness of sin, and what a high price God hath put upon his law. He is gone into heaven, not to resign up his kingdom to Satan, but to make intercession for grace; not only to pardon, but mortify sin. The whole frame of the covenant doth oblige us to this strictness: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and

glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;’ Mat. v. 19, ‘Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.’

4. It reproveth those that profess themselves children of light, but live at large; though they do not scoff at strictness, yet they slight it, and so show themselves fools rather than wise; they miss the comfort of the spiritual life, and are only acquainted with the toil and trouble of it.

Use 2. Is to exhort us to this duty. You have had motives enough before, now I shall give you some helps.

There are some graces necessary, and some practices.

First, For graces which are necessary, such as these—

1. Knowledge; for without knowledge neither heart nor life can be good: Prov. xix. 2, ‘That the soul be without knowledge is not good.’ David prayeth, Ps. cxix. 34, ‘Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law.’ It is a matter of much skill to be a thorough christian.

2. Not only knowledge, but prudence. That differeth from knowledge, as folly doth from ignorance. That referreth all things to practice: Prov. ii. 10, 11, ‘When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee;’ Hosea xiv. 9, ‘Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them.’

3. Watchfulness, and heed that nothing unseemly pass from us. Those that are rash and indeliberate, and live at haphazard, can never walk accurately: Prov. xix. 2, ‘He that hasteth with his feet, sinneth.’ In the text βλέπετε, ‘See that ye walk circumspectly;’ that is, use great caution. Conscience must act the part of the watchman, and stand porter at the door, examine what goeth in or out, that nothing may be a snare or an offence: Prov. iv. 23, ‘Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.’ That the heart may be still kept pure and loyal for God.

4. The fear of God: Acts ix. 31, ‘They walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.’ This is a grace never out of season: Prov. xxiii. 17, ‘Let not thine heart envy sinners; but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long;’ Prov. xxviii. 14, ‘Happy is the man that feareth always;’ that is, with a fear of reverence, for slavish fear is a terror. Set yourselves always in God’s sight; our whole time is spent in it.

5. Diligence, that we may both remove impediments of good and avoid occasions of evil, that you may take an accurate inspection of your whole life and conversation. Frequently examine your ways, whither they tend: Prov. iv. 26, 27, ‘Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.’

6. A tender conscience. Make conscience not only of gross sins, but lesser escapes. Some walk ἀτάκτως, disorderly, 2 Thes. iii. 11, but do you walk ἀκριβῶς, circumspectly. Do not wittingly tread one

hair's-breadth out of the way, nor run into any sin, much less live in it, be it never so small and profitable in the esteem of the world: Prov. vii. 2, 'Keep my commandments, and live, and my law as the apple of thine eye.' The eye is offended with the least dust.

Secondly, Helps by way of practice.

1. Fix your end; for when the end is fixed, the means may be the better suited; it shineth to us all the way along: 'If thine eye be single, thy whole body is full of light,' Mat. vi. 22; Prov. iv. 25, 'Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.' We should mind all things with respect to our end.

2. Take an account of the way you walk in: Ps. cxix. 59, 'I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies;' Lam. iii. 40, 'Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.'

3. Seek a good guide. Use much prayer to God, that he may direct you: Prov. iii. 5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy path;' Ps. cxliii. 10, 'Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.'

4. Renew your covenant, and often engage yourselves afresh to this strict and holy walking, because the strength of former resolutions is soon spent: Ps. cxix. 106, 'I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.'

5. Season the heart with strict principles. Two principles I shall commend to you—

[1.] That the greatest suffering is to be chosen before the least sin. In suffering, the offence is done to us; in sin, to God. The evil of suffering is but for a moment, the evil of sin for ever. Sin separateth you from God, but afflictions do not, but bring you nearer to God. The least sin allowed maketh our sincerity doubtful and questionable: Ps. lxxvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.' Small sins have met with great judgments. Adam for eating an apple was turned out of paradise; Uzzah for touching the ark was smitten with death; Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for one lie; the evil angels were thrust out of heaven for an aspiring thought; Zacharias was struck dumb for unbelief; Lot's wife for looking back was turned into a pillar of salt; Moses for a few passionate words was shut out of the land of promise; David for a proud conceit in numbering the people brought a plague upon them. Now God is the same, and hateth sin as much as ever. No man is driven to a necessity of sinning. We imagine a necessity when we commit one sin to avoid the temptation of another, but God never reduceth a man to that strait. If you mean it of evils of sin, it is false; if of evils of punishment, it is true; if of evils of sin and punishment together, it is most true. A man may be often put to suffer for sin that is offered to his choice, but never to sin that he may not sin. We reduce ourselves to sinful straits.

[2.] Another strict principle is, that a man cannot be too strict. There is no *nimium* in the essentials of religion or the solid parts of godliness. A man cannot be too holy and too righteous; a man cannot love God too much, or Christ too much, nor serve him too faith-

fully. What is the meaning then of Solomon? Eccles. vii. 16, 'Be not righteous overmuch.' There may be too much of that which is but pretended righteousness. The best fall short of what God's word and the necessities of their souls require. The world accuseth them of preciseness, but their consciences accuse them of negligence.

(1.) God's precepts are very strict: Mat. xxii. 37, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' God is to be loved without measure and limitation. 'To think this is too strict is to blaspheme his holy law.

(2.) Patterns of holiness are very high. God's worthies: Heb. xii. 1, 'Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.' The angels: Mat. vi. 10, 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' God himself: 1 Peter i. 15, 'But as he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.' Wherein then is this over-righteousness? I answer—Not in the end, not in necessary diligence about the means; but when the means are not proportioned to the end, but one duty shuts out another; in some things the devil may tempt us to over-doing

[3.] Another strict principle is, that the least sin allowed makes our sincerity questionable: James ii. 10, 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' It is good to stand at the greatest distance from sin; to go too near the brink is dangerous: 1 Thes. v. 22, 'Abstain from all appearance of evil.' They that do all that they may do usually do more than they should. Small sins may procure great trouble, if God sets them home upon the conscience.

SERMON XIX.

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.—EPII. v. 16.

THESE words contain a new direction to the children of light. Two things there are in it—(1.) A duty, 'Redeeming the time;' (2.) The reason of it, 'Because the days are evil.'

First, In the duty there is the act and the object. Both must be explained.

1. The act, *ἐξαγοραζόμενοι*, buying; or, as we render it, 'redeeming.' Grotius and some others conceive it may be explained by the words of Nebuchadnezzar to the astrologers, as they are rendered by the Septuagint, Dan. ii. 8, 'Ye would gain the time,' *ὅτι καιρὸν ὑμεῖς ἐξαγοράζετε*. And others think the meaning is, that by their wary carriage they should shift off dangers, and gain as much time as they could to honour God in the world. To this purpose also they draw in that, Col. iv. 5, 'Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.' But besides that this exposition would