

follow the guidance of it ; as the wise men, that took a long journey to see Christ, followed the star that went before them, till it brought them to the house where Christ was, Mat. ii. 9, 10. [See this more largely handled in the next sermon.]

SERMON VII.

Be not ye therefore partakers with them.—EPH. v. 7.

WE have handled in the 6th verse—

1. A caution, ‘ Let no man deceive you with vain words.’

2. A denunciation, ‘ For these things’ sake the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience.’

Now I come to—

3. A dissuasion ; this is in the text, and is inferred out of the former verse ; where we have—

[1.] The evil dissuaded from, *συμμέτοχοι αὐτῶν*, ‘ Be not partakers with them,’ that is, do not join with them in their evil ways, by committing these and the like sins.

[2.] The reason, ‘ Therefore ;’ that is, because the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience, do not join in their sins, that you may not be involved in their punishment ; as Rev. xviii. 4, ‘ Be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.’

Doct. The dreadful estate of the children of disobedience should keep us from joining with them in their evil ways.

Here let me show you—(1.) Who are children of disobedience ; (2.) The misery of their condition ; (3.) Why this should deter us from being partakers with them.

I. Who are children of disobedience.

1. Those who are not only sinners, but stubborn, obstinate, and ignorant sinners ; such as are prone to all evil, and are not only indisposed, but averse from all good. Both parts of the character must be minded. They presently do what lust biddeth them, and are at the beck of a temptation, but all the reasons in the world shall not persuade them to do what God commandeth them. They are as wax to Satan, but as a stone to God. They find an irresistible force in temptations : Prov. vii. 21, 22, ‘ With her much fair speech she caused him to yield ; with the flattery of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks.’ But as to good, they are not only weak and indisposed, but cannot endure to be subject to God. The more holy any creature is, the more readily does he obey God : Ps. ciii. 20, ‘ Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word.’ But for others, a small matter serveth their turn ; neither promises nor threatenings will gain them to their duty.

2. This good is either to be determined by the light of nature or the light of the gospel.

[1.] Wicked men are called 'children of disobedience,' because they rebel against the light of nature: Job xxiv. 13, 'They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the way thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof.' They have light enough to condemn their practices, yet live in them: Ps. liii. 4, 'Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge?' Yes, they know better; but the light hath no authority to bind them to their duty, it doth rather irritate their corruptions, than break the force of them; and therefore justly are they left to destruction: Ps. ix. 17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.' They do not improve the natural impressions of God, and the distinction of good and evil that is written upon their hearts; they drown the voice of reason and conscience.

[2.] Those that have heard the gospel, and will not suffer themselves to be persuaded to embrace the blessed offers made therein, nor will they give up themselves to the obedience of Christ. Their condition is more terrible, for these are desperately sick, and refuse their remedy: 1 Peter iv. 17, 'For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?' Their condition is more deplorable and desperate than that of other men; for they will not enter into the kingdom of God when invited thereunto, though they do so apparently need this healing dispensation. There are two things in the gospel—the doctrine of salvation, what God hath done on his part; and the counsels of salvation, what we must do on our part.

(1.) The doctrine of salvation, or the rich preparations of grace which God hath made for our recovery. On God's part, 'All things are ready,' Mat. xxii. 4. He hath given his Son to die for us, and to be the foundation of that new and better covenant wherein pardon and life are offered to us. But this is coldly entertained by many; either they do not consider it: Mat. xxii. 5, 'They made light of it;' or they do not believe it: 1 Cor. ii. 14, 'For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned;' or they do not apply and improve this blessed offer, that it may be 'the gospel of our salvation,' Eph. i. 13. There is not a cordial assent or lodging the truth in the soul: 'My word hath no place in you,' John viii. 37. Whatever general profession there is made of believing this doctrine, there is no room for it in their hearts, they believe it not heartily so as to affect it, and so as to build upon it for the saving of their souls. It is not received by sound evidence, as is seen by the little influence it hath upon them, by the doubts and questionings that frequently arise in their minds whenever they are serious; by their hatred of those that seriously embrace this truth, by the scorn they cast upon those that improve it to a holy conversation and godliness. Alas! generally it is received in the christian world, as it was said of the reports about Christ's resurrection, as an idle tale or vain dream: Luke xxiv. 11, 'And their words seemed unto them as idle tales, and they believed them not.' And the doctrines of Christ, heaven, and hell, and judgment to come are made matter of scoffing and mockage: 2 Peter iii. 3, 'Knowing this, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?' and the root of men's disobedience is unbelief.

(2.) The counsels of salvation, or what we must do on our part, that we may partake of the righteousness and Spirit of Christ: Luke vii. 30, 'But the pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves.' There is the counsel which God giveth us, if we will have sin pardoned and be eternally happy. Many look to what he hath done for us; but they do not seriously consider what he hath required of us. We are to obey the counsels of the gospel, as well as to believe the doctrines of the gospel. Now what hath God required?

(1st.) That we should believe in Christ as the redeemer of the world, with such a faith as may make him precious to us, and value his grace above all the world: 1 Peter ii. 7, 8, 'Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto they were also appointed.' The apostle divideth the hearers of the gospel into believers and disobedient; and there he showeth what Christ is to believers, 'precious,' as the alone refuge and sanctuary of distressed souls, who are ever hungering and thirsting after Christ, and more of his renewing and recovering grace. The other party are the disobedient, and to them he is 'a stone of stumbling,' with allusion to them that travel by land, and 'a rock of offence,' with respect to them that travel by sea. They are loose and careless in this matter (we do not speak of every disobedience, but of wilful disobedience), they are 'a froward generation,' Deut. xxxii. 20. Preach and say what we will, it moveth them not; teach them their duty, warn them of their danger, all is to no purpose; they still reject Christ, and despise his benefits, and refuse to take on them his yoke, or embrace the noble and heavenly life. To the serious and broken-hearted, he is their life, light, food, strength, righteousness, and all; but to others a fancy, or nothing. Believing in Christ is God's great command: 1 John iii. 23, 'And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.' Therefore it is called 'the obedience of faith;' Rom i. 5, 'Made known to all nations by the obedience of faith,' Rom xvi. 26; 'And bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,' 2 Cor. x. 4. But the rebellious world little valueth God's authority; they are so addicted to paltry vanities, and their own will and lusts, that they slight the offered Saviour, and all the grace he tendereth to them.

(2d.) Repentance is another part of the counsel given to us. Christ told his disciples what they should do to perform their charge: Luke xxiv. 47, 'And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.' And the apostles pressed it on all that would enter into the gospel kingdom: Acts ii. 38, 'And Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins;' Acts iii. 19, 'Repent, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.' Now repentance implieth an hearty detestation and renunciation of our former ways, whereby we have offended God, and a serious dedication of ourselves to his use and service. Now many regard not this, and though they hear their personal sins reproved, and the curses of the law denounced against

them, yet they hold on their course still, and cannot be persuaded to leave those sins ; and when God would heal them, they will not be healed, but are wholly led by their corrupt affections, and will not be persuaded to abandon their bewitching lusts : 2 Chron. xxx. 8, ‘ Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord ; ’ (Hebr. Give your hand unto the Lord). We press men to return, and not keep God out of his right any longer ; but we do but water a rock, and seek to mollify a flint, that yieldeth not ; nor will they strike hands with God. We cannot bring it to a bargain or thorough conclusion, so as to lay down the buckler, and say, ‘ Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? ’ Acts ix. 6.

(3d.) New obedience. This is part of the counsel of God to you if you would be saved : Heb. v. 9, ‘ He is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him ; ’ Isa. i. 19, ‘ If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. ’ And grace teacheth us, Titus ii. 12, ‘ That, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. ’ We should be sober as to the government of ourselves, righteous as to our carriage to our neighbour, godly as to the Lord himself, not defrauding him of his due worship, internal and external, love, trust, delight, reverence, daily commerce with him in company and alone. Though we persuade these things by the strongest and most cogent arguments, yet still there are some that will be intemperate, incontinent, that will not live soberly ; christians that will not live soberly, that cannot bridle the desires of the flesh ; unrighteous christians, that will not make conscience of giving every one their due ; and ungodly persons that forget God days without number. Though much of this duty be evident by natural light, and necessary to preserve a comely order in human society, yet neither restraints of conscience nor the laws of men or God will keep them within the bounds of their duty ; but men will be disobedient still, and run out into many excesses and disorders, without all shame, especially when they have habituated themselves to some evil custom and practice : Jer. xiii. 23, ‘ Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil. ’ Alas ! who is able then to preach away the cup out of the drunkard’s mouth, or wantonness out of the heart of the unclean person ? Yea, to bring vain people to part with a fashion, or a recreation, which hath often been a snare to them ? they are brought under the power of these things, and cannot leave them. A child of God may err and straggle out of his way through ignorance or incogitancy, or be overcome and borne down through the violent incursion of a temptation. It fareth with them as with the wise men who came a long journey to seek Christ ; when they went out of the way, the star left them, but they stayed not there till the star appeared to them again. So God’s people may straggle from their duty, but they do not rest there. But the children of disobedience cannot cease from sin in the several kinds wherein they are captivated : 2 Peter ii. 14, ‘ Having eyes full of adultery, and cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls ; an heart they have exercised with covetous practices : cursed children, they have forsaken the right way. ’ It is their element, out of which they cannot rest.

3. This obstinacy and disobedience is aggravated—

[1.] From the person who is disobeyed. It is not our counsel, but God's. To weary and grieve men who do entreat them to forsake their sins and seek after God, is ill, for they must give an account: 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.' But that is not all: Isa. vii. 13, 'Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?' They rebel against God himself while they shake off his authority: Ps. xii. 4, 'Who have said, With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own, who is lord over us?' and refuse to accept his gracious offers: Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' It redounds to the contempt of God, who hath provided such an excellent salvation for us in Christ. You despise him that speaketh from heaven, as well as weary them that speak on earth: Heb. xii. 25, 'See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.'

[2.] From the manner of the persuasion, which is by the word and Spirit. In the word there are the highest motives to allure, the strongest arguments to persuade, the greatest terrors to scare men out of their sins. For motives, God outbiddeth them that bid most for your hearts; he offereth you an eternal infinite happiness, both for your bodies and souls. A little dreggy delight, profit, honour, or vain pleasure is nothing to it; it is not worthy to be compared with it. In other cases we would take the best bargain; here is life, and pleasure, and honour, for evermore: Ps. xvi. 11, 'In thy presence is fulness of joy; and at thy right hand pleasures for evermore.' Here are the strongest arguments to persuade God's authority: James iv. 12, 'There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.' Christ's love: 2 Cor. v. 14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' For terrors, God doth not tell us of mean penalties, but of a pit without a bottom, a worm that shall never die, a fire that shall never be quenched: Mark ix. 44, 'Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.' Is hell a vain scarecrow, where the damned spirits are perpetually exercised with a bitter remembrance of what is past, a sense of what is present, and a fear of what is to come? If all this will not work, what will do? Ps. lviii. 4, 5, 'Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder, that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.' An allusion to charming for the taming of serpents, which were used in those eastern countries; not to approve them, but to improve a vile practice. Men will hold on their way, say God what he will to the contrary. See the words of the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xiii. 11, 'But the people would not hear.' But this is not all. The motions of the Holy Spirit go along with it: Acts vii. 51, 'Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost;' ye stop him in his sanctifying work, and refuse the help that God offers, which maketh it the more heinous.

[3.] From the plenty of offers. God hath called often and long: Prov. xxix. 1, 'He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall

suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' It is dangerous to slight frequent warnings; these are obdurate in their sins.

[4.] From the concomitant dispensations of providence. When our obstinacy and resolved continuance in sin is not broken by afflictions; as Pharaoh was Pharaoh still from first to last. Ahaz had a brand set upon him: 2 Chron. xxviii. 22, 'And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord; this is that king Ahaz.' God may break their backs by his judgments, but not their hearts: Prov. xxvii. 22, 'Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.' Spices bruised and pounded are more fit for medicine, but these depart not from their luxury, profaneness, and uncleanness, when they are not softened by mercies: Isa. xxvi. 10, 'Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.' God shall not have their heart for all this; they despise his goodness: Rom ii. 4. 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?'

4. This disobedience, the longer it is continued, the more it is increased. There is a natural averseness from God. Take a man in his pure naturals, he hath nothing to incline him to God; but the longer we continue in it, we every day make ourselves seven times more the children of hell. Still it increaseth till it come to the height of senseless judicial hardness of heart: Zech. vii. 11, 12, 'But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ear that they should not hear; yea, they have made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law.' So still they grew more and more disobedient.

II. The misery of their condition. It is either matter of sense or matter of faith; of sight, because of present judgments, or foresight, because of the threatenings of the word.

1. It is matter of sight, as God doth inflict remarkable judgments on obstinate sinners in this life, to teach his children to beware of their sins. These judgments are either spiritual or temporal.

[1.] Spiritual. These men are in a miserable and voluntary servitude both to sin and Satan; and both are the basest masters that anyone can have. To sin: Titus iii. 3, 'For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures.' They do all things which their lusts command, and cannot by any reason be persuaded to shake off this yoke. The less they feel this bondage in themselves, the more dangerous it is, and the more they are obnoxious to it; for then both will and mind is oppressed, and they know no better things. They that are slaves by force are not in so bad a condition as they that are slaves by consent, that sell their souls, their religion, their God, their Christ, their happiness, their all, for a little brutish satisfaction, and are so governed by their carnal affections that they know not how to come out of this thralldom, but suffer the beast to ride the man, and have gotten such an habit and course of sinning, that they are wholly enslaved by these brutish pleasures, and cannot help it. To Satan: The other master

is the devil; they are of his party and confederacy: Eph. ii. 2, 'Wherein in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience.' Their hearts are Satan's shop and proper workhouse, where his weapons of defiance are formed against God. They carry on a defensive war, shutting up their hearts against all his invitations to repentance and offers of grace, so that God can get no entrance there. An offensive war, as they do not only despise his offers, but hate his ways. Thus God hangeth up some in chains of darkness for a warning to the rest.

[2.] Temporal judgments; for the wrath of God that cometh on the children of disobedience is not to be confined to the other world; much of it cometh upon them here; as when it is said, Heb. xiii. 4, 'Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge;' that is, punish, not only eternally after this life if they repent not, but also temporally in this life; yea, though they may repent, as is evident in David, who, though he repented, yet he suffered grievously for his adultery. If God's own children will act the part of the children of disobedience, they smart for it; for this is necessary to prevent the taint of their example in the world. Well, but these judgments are not lightly to be passed over, especially when they are executed before our eyes, and God cometh near and close to us, for they are the holy and righteous dispensations of the wise God; not things casual, indeterminate, or done at random, nobody knoweth by whom, or to what end and purpose. You cannot imagine that a holy, just, and wise God should have no end and scope in what he doth. The scripture calleth often God's judgments 'his arrows.' Now these are not shot at rovers, as the man that killed Ahab drew a bow at a venture. No; God hath a certain and steady aim at which he levelleth and directeth his shaft; and God's aim is our instruction. All his judgments are speaking lessons and real warnings, that we may not involve ourselves in the same sins, and so in the same punishment. They are appointed, not only for our admiration, but our instruction: Zeph. iii. 7, 'I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction.' God promiseth it to himself that the world will not be so stupid as to run the hazard of the same fearful judgments which have overtaken others: Deut. viii. 19, 20, 'I testify against you this day, that you shall surely perish, as the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord;' Deut. xix. 20, 'And those that remain shall hear, and fear, and henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.' When any malefactor was executed, and found out by God's justice, he expected they should make this use of it: Deut. xvii. 13, 'And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.'

2. It is matter of faith and foresight. And so by this wrath of God is meant eternal destruction, which cometh upon them for their disobedience, which is a sin of the highest nature, and a chief cause of their damnation. At death they feel the sad effects of it: 1 Peter iii. 19, 20, 'By which he also went and preached to the spirits in prison, which were sometimes disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah.' They had God's word then, for Noah was 'a preacher of righteousness,' 2 Peter ii. 5. They had the Spirit then, for God saith, Gen. vi. 3, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with

man.' Well, then, these children of disobedience, when their body is sent to the grave, the soul is sent to hell; which the psalmist expresseth by being torn in pieces: Ps. l. 22, 'Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' So for the day of judgment: 2 Thes. i. 7, 8, 'The Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel.' The great business then is to convince the reprobates of their disobedience. They see then how many warnings and invitations they have despised; so many sermons, so many stings in the conscience. Those that despise his richest grace now, how glad would they be of one favourable look from Christ! It is not simplicity that is their ruin, but obstinacy and impenitency in sin, for which they shall have no excuse or cloak: John xv. 22, 'If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin.'

III. Why this should deter God's people from being partakers with them. Here I shall inquire—(1.) What it is to be partakers with them; (2.) Why God's wrath should deter us from this?

1. What it is to be partakers with them.

[1.] There is a principal sense, and chiefly intended here, that we should not follow their example. We are not so ready to anything as to follow ill examples. Man is a ductile creature; they had need be well resolved for God and holiness who are not carried down the common stream. The example of the multitude hath a great force to pervert mankind: Isa. vi. 5, 'I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips,' Eph. ii. 2, 3, 'The spirit that ruleth in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in time past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind;' 1 Peter iv. 2, 'That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.' It doth at least take off the odiousness of sin, and reconcile the hearts of men to it. It is hard to be singular, and not to follow a multitude, though in an evil way; for by common practice things are authorised: Gal. ii. 13, 'Peter dissembled, and the other Jews dissembled also with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.' Now lest this should prevail with us, the apostle would have us consider the danger; we involve ourselves in the same punishment if we take not heed of the sin: 'Because for these things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience; be not ye therefore partakers with them.' God punisheth the disobedience of his people very sharply.

[2.] There is a limited sense of the phrase: 1 Tim. v. 22, 'Neither be partakers of other men's sins.' There it signifieth not committing the same sins, but being accessory to the sins of others. Some are ringleaders and chief actors in a sinful course; others are assessors and abettors. Now how many ways may we partake of the sins of others?

(1.) By counselling; as Jonadab gave Amnon pernicious counsel how to fulfil his carnal and incestuous desires, 2 Sam. xiii. 5.

(2.) By alluring and enticing; as Prov. i. 10, 'My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.' Hear God persuading rather than a carnal companion enticing.

(3.) By consenting ; as Ahab did to Jezebel's plot to destroy Naboth, 1 Kings. xxi. 19. His part was less in the sin than hers, therefore his punishment was less than hers ; the dogs licked his blood, but they devoured her body.

(4.) By applauding or flattery, and lessening the sin : Rom. i. 32, ' They not only do these things, but have pleasure in those that do them.' So some are glad when they can draw others to drunkenness, or inflame others with lust.

(5.) Conniving, contrary to the duty of our place : 1 Sam. iii. 13, ' I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.' Their sin was a sin of commission, but his a sin of omission, and so he came into a fellowship of the guilt. Now as we should not imitate the sin, and so make it ours, so we should not be any way accessory to these sins, and so be partakers in the guilt, as when we have power to hinder the sin and do it not.

2. Why the wrath of God should deter us from this.

[1.] Because of the impartiality of God's judgment ; he will not only punish heathen sinners without the pale, but christian sinners who profess and own the true religion ; for there is no acceptance of persons with God : 1 Peter i. 17, ' And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's works.' There by ' person ' is meant either Jew or Greek, christian or pagan ; if there be any difference, it is worse with them, and wrath will come upon them first, because they know more of God's mind, and have greater obligations and advantages of doing his will : Rom. ii. 9-11, ' Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the gentile ; but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the gentile : for there is no respect of persons with God.'

[2.] Because of the greatness of his mercy. That God will instruct us at their cost, and sealeth our instruction on their backs, scourgeth them so sorely in our sight, is for a warning to us. And in this sense is that fulfilled, ' Prov. xxi. 18, The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressors for the upright ;' that is, God will make them spectacles of his judgment, that he may make us objects of his mercy. Now it is stupidity not to observe the instances of God's wrath on others, that we may not be made instances ourselves. David trembled when he saw Uzzah smitten, 2 Sam. vi. 9 ; so should we when God avengeth the quarrel of any commandment, as he frequently doth in his providence : Rom. i. 18, ' For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ;' and Heb. ii. 2, ' For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward ;' surely then it concerneth us to lay it to heart.

Use 1. To show us that we are not to be idle spectators of God's judgments on others, but judicious observers and improvers of them. Observe here—(1.) The use of observing God's providences on others ; (2.) The manner of it.

First, The use and benefit of observing God's providences is great in these particulars—

1. To cure atheism : Ps. lviii. 11, 'So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.' They that know what to think of God's providence before shall find that God doth govern the affairs of the world as a righteous judge. Were men greater students in providence, and did they observe what judgments he bringeth to light every day, they would soon see that God is not indifferent to good and evil, that he taketh care of things below; that the world is not governed by blind chance, but with great wisdom, and justice, and equity. It is not only the cavil of the wicked: Mal. ii. 17, 'Ye have wearied the Lord with your words; yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? when ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?' As if God did approve of wicked men, and were not a just and impartial judge, or there were no providence at all. But it is the temptation of the godly: 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, and washed my hands in innocency.' The poet Claudian—

'Res hominum tanta caligine volvi
Aspiceret, letosque diu florere nocentes,
Vexarique pios.'

He much doubted—

'Curarunt superi terras? an nullus inesset
Rector? et incerto fluerent mortalia casu?'

But at length—

'Abstulit hunc tandem Ruffini pœna tumultum,
Absolvitque Deos.'

He would no more call in question God's providence and the just government of the world.

2. To make us more cautious of sin, that we meddle not with it. God's judgments feed our holy fear and awe of God, and so stir up watchfulness and care for our own safety, that we may not fall into like offences, or do anything that is displeasing unto God. We have to do with a just and holy God, who we see is tender of his laws, a God that will not be dallied with. When he beginneth to execute his judgments against the children of disobedience, we should fear for ourselves. When Uzzah was stricken, 'How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?' saith David, 1 Chron. xiii. 12. Will not God be so severe to me if I behave myself irreverently? Certainly it is stupid incogitancy when God puts such examples before our eyes and we are not affected with them. The Gibeonites were more wise and cautious, Josh. ix. 3; when they saw the cities of Ai and Jericho destroyed, and their inhabitants cut off by the sword, they did not expect the coming of Joshua, but sent messengers to him, and by a wile struck up a covenant before he came any farther. Or as that captain, when two before him with their fifties were destroyed by fire, he fell upon his knees before the prophet: 2 Kings i. 13, 14, 'And besought him, and said unto him, O man of God! I pray thee let my life, and the

life of these fifty, be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties, with their fifties; therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight.' But our stupidity and blindness is such that we are not moved with these judgments so as to be more cautious: Prov. xxii. 3, 'A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.'

3. To humble us, and make us more earnest in deprecating the wrath of God, and suing out our pardon in Christ. We see sin goeth not unpunished. Alas! if God should enter into judgment with us, who could stand? Ps. cxliii. 2. When we see his judgments executed upon others, every humble heart will sue out his pardon. What miserable wretched creatures should we be if God should stir up all his wrath against us!

4. To make us thankful for our mercies and deliverances by Christ, that, when others are spectacles of his wrath, we should be monuments of his mercy and grace. Were it not for the Lord's pardoning and healing grace, we had been in as bad a condition as the worst: Rom. xi. 22, 'Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise also thou shalt be cut off.' When the Israelites saw the Egyptians drowned in the waters, they saw the more reason to bless God for their own escape; and Moses pens a song of thanksgiving, Exod. xv. Our deserts are in part represented to us in the bitter experience of others. It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not condemned with the world, and left to perish in our sins; but that we see by their sufferings what an evil and bitter thing sin is.

Secondly, The manner of making these observations. This is needful to be stated, because men are apt to misapply providence, and to sit as a coroner's inquest on the souls of their neighbours, and so rather observe things to censure others than for their own caution. These pervert the providences of God, and speak to the grief of others whom God hath wounded. Shimei was one of this sort of men: 2 Sam. xvi. 7, 8, 'Come out, thou bloody man, thou man of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned, and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of thy son Absalom; and behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man.' As if God had been calling him to an account for the injuries done to Saul's house, and his rebellion against his father-in-law was punished by the rebellion and usurpation of his own son. Such bold glosses and comments do men put upon providence, and make it speak their own language, and so they pry into God's secrets without God's warrant and direction.

Rules concerning the observation of God's providences towards others.

1. Certain it is that judgments on others must be observed. Providence is a comment on the word, and therefore it is stupidity not to take notice of it. They that will not observe God's hand shall feel it. If we will not take the warning at a distance, and by others' smart and rebuke, there is no way left but we ourselves must be taught by experience. He that will plunge himself into a bog or quagmire, where others have miscarried before him, is doubly guilty of folly, because he

neither feareth the threatening, nor will take warning by their example and punishment. Observe we must : Amos vi. 2, 'Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; from thence go ye to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?'

2. This observation must be to a good end; not to censure others, that is malice; or justify ourselves above them, that is pride and self-conceit, condemned by our Lord Christ: Luke xiii. 2-5, 'And Jesus answered and said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them: think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.'

3. In making the observation, we must have a care that we do not make providence speak the language of our fancies.

[1.] There must be a due reasoning from the provocation to the judgment, *sed non e contra*; not judge of the wickedness of the person by the judgments on the person; as the barbarians at Melita showed little reason and less charity in misconstruing the passage of the viper that fastened on Paul's hand, that therefore 'he was a murderer,' Acts xxviii. 4. The dispensations of God's providence are commonly alike to good and bad, Ecces. ix. 1. By a sudden stroke God may take off the godly as well as the wicked. Josiah died in the same way that Ahab did, by an arrow in the battle, after being disguised, 2 Chron. xxxv. 23; Jonathan died in the field by the hand of the uncircumcised, as well as Saul, 1 Sam. xxxi. 1, 2. Did Simon Magus break his neck? so did good old Eli, 1 Sam. iv. 18. We cannot conclude some great sin from the judgment. No; our reasoning must be the contrary: Prov. xxi. 12, 'The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked, but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.'

[2.] Sometimes the sin is clearly written on the judgment, and the name of the sin is engraven on the rod wherewith we are scourged: Judges i. 7, 'As I have done, so God hath requited me.' There are some remarkable circumstances wherein sin and judgment meet: Obad. 15, 'As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee.' The judgments were a signature and impress on them. The Israelites' children were drowned in the waters; so were Pharaoh, and all his nobility, and men of war.

[3.] When the judgment treadeth on the heels of the sin, as Zimri and Cosbi perished in the very act of their sin; and Herod was immediately smitten with lice when he usurped divine honour, Acts xii. 22, 23.

[4.] When by the very means by which they hope to secure themselves, and so, whilst they think to avoid their danger, they hasten and increase it. The builders of Babel, being afraid of scattering, would build a stupendous tower for a place of retreat, Gen. xi. 4. God confounded their language, and by that means they were scattered. Jero-boam, to secure the kingdom to his house, sets up calves at Dan and Bethel, 1 Kings xii. 26-28. This became a snare to his house to cut

it off, 1 Kings xiii. 34. The Philistines threatened Samson's wife to burn her and her father's house with fire unless she would betray her husband's secrets, Judges xiv. 15. She doth so, and Samson taking his revenge; they fulfilled what they threatened, Judges xv. 6. The Jews being afraid lest the Romans would take jealousy of the people's following of Christ, consult to kill him, John xi. 48; and for that reason wrath came on them to the uttermost. Zedekiah disobeyed God for fear of mockage, Jer. xxxviii. 19–22; and the Chaldeans, when they had taken the city, put out his eyes, Jer. xxxix. 7. Thus they readily fall into those evils they would most gladly escape. Now it is much for the instruction of the world that these things should be noted.

[5.] When they fall by those means by which they seek to entrap others: Ps. ix. 15, 16, 'The heathens are sunk down in the pit which they made, in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgments which he executeth; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hand. Higgsaion, Selah.'

[6.] When the word, *κατὰ ῥήτον*, in the express letter, is made good on wicked men: Hosea vii. 12, 'I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard.' When the word doth fully take effect as it is laid down, it is fully accomplished; and the danger they would not believe they are made to feel. Thus 'every morning he bringeth his judgments to light,' Zeph. iii. 5.

SERMON VIII.

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now ye are light in the Lord: walk as children of light.—EPI. v. 8.

THE apostle having dissuaded them from foul practices, which would be a blemish not only to christians, but heathens, he now exhorteth them to walk suitably to their profession and that blessed estate into which they were translated. Change of state calleth for a different course of life. You were darkness, and if you had so continued, we could look for nothing else from you than the works of darkness. But when you become light in the Lord, you must 'walk as children of the light,' as those that know their way, and see their danger, if they go amiss: 'For ye were sometimes darkness,' &c.

In the words we have—(1.) An antecedent; (2.) A consequent, or an argument and an inference.

First, The antecedent, or argument, is taken from their present compared with their past estate, what they are with what they were. Formerly they were heathens, and did as other heathens do, but they were now become christians; and if christians, they should live christianly. Both estates are spoken of in the abstract, 'darkness' and 'light;' *scelus pro scelerati*. If we call a wicked man wickedness itself, we say more than if we only said that he were a naughty or wicked