

## SERMON XVI.

*God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—*  
JOHN III. 16.

IN these words you have the sum and substance of the gospel. In them observe :—

1. The fountain and original of all that grace and salvation which is brought unto us, God's unspeakable love to mankind : *God so loved the world.*

2. The way which God took to recover our lapsed condition, or the effect and fruit which flows from this fountain : *that he gave his only-begotten Son.*

3. The end of it : *that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ;* where take notice of—

[1.] The qualification, or the free and easy condition put upon men in the gospel : *that whosoever believeth in him.*

[2.] The benefit that resulteth to us, expressed negatively and affirmatively : *should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

First, The rise and beginning of all is God's inconceivable love : 'God so loved the world.' Where observe :—

1. The object : *the world.*

2. The act : *loved.*

3. The degree : *so loved.*

1. The word by which the object is expressed is 'the world,' which noteth mankind in its corrupt and miserable state : 1 John v. 19, 'The whole world lies in sin.' The world is a heap of men who had broken God's law, forfeited his love and favour ; they neither loved nor feared God, but were unthankful and unholy ; yet this world God loved.

2. The act : 'he loved.' The love of God is twofold—the love of benevolence and the love of complacence.

[1.] The love of benevolence is the pity and compassion of God towards man lying in sin and misery. This is understood in this place, as also in Titus iii. 4, 'The kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared.'

[2.] The love of complacence. So he loveth us when he hath made us lovely. In which sense it is said, Ps. xi. 7, 'The righteous God loveth righteousness ;' John xvi. 27, 'The Father himself loveth you, because ye loved me.' This belongeth not to this place.

3. The degree : 'so loved.' He doth not tell you how much, but leaveth it to your most solemn, raised thoughts. It is rather to be conceived than spoken of, and admired rather than conceived.

Observe from the words :—

That the beginning and first cause of our salvation is the mere love of God. The outward occasion was our misery, the inward moving cause was God's love.

[1.] Love is at the bottom of all. We may give a reason of other things, but we cannot give a reason of his love. God showed his

wisdom, power, justice, and holiness in our redemption by Christ. If you ask, Why he made so much ado about a worthless creature, raised out of the dust of the ground at first, and had now disordered himself, and could be of no use to him? We have an answer at hand, Because he loved us. If you continue to ask, But why did he love us? We have no other answer but because he loved us; for beyond the first rise of things we cannot go. And the same reason is given by Moses, Deut. vii. 7, 8, 'The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you;' that is, in short, he loved you because he loved you. The same reason is given by our Lord Jesus Christ, Mat. xi. 26, 'Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.' All came from his free and undeserved mercy; higher we cannot go in seeking after the causes of what is done for our salvation.

[2.] The most remarkable thing that is visible in the progress and perfection of our salvation by Christ is love. And it is meet that the beginning, middle, and end should suit. Nay, if love be so conspicuous in the whole design and carrying on of this blessed work, it is much more in the rise and fountain. God's great end in our redemption was the demonstration of his love and mercy to mankind; yea, not only the demonstration, but the commendation of it. That is the apostle's word, Rom. v. 8, 'God commendeth his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' A thing may be demonstrated as real that is not commended or set forth as great. God's design was that we should not only believe the reality, but admire the greatness of his love. Now, from first to last love is so conspicuous that we cannot overlook it. Light is not more conspicuous in the sun than the love of God in our redemption by Christ.

[3.] If there were any other cause, it must be either the merit of Christ, or some worthiness on our part.

(1.) The merit of Christ was not the first cause of God's love, but the manifestation, fruit, and effect of it. The text telleth, he first 'loved the world,' and then 'gave his only-begotten Son.' It is said, 1 John iii. 16, 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.' Look, as we perceive and find out causes by their proper effects, so we perceive the love of God by the death of Christ. Christ is the principal means whereby God carrieth on the purposes of his grace, and therefore is represented in scripture as the servant of his decrees.

(2.) No worthiness in us; for when his love moved him to give Christ for us, he had all mankind in his prospect and view, as lying in the polluted mass, or in a state of sin and misery, and then provided a Redeemer for them. God at first made a perfect law, which forbade all sin upon pain of death. Man did break this law, and still we break it day by day in every sin. Now when men lived, and went on in sin and hostility against God, he was pleased then to send his Son to assume our nature, and die for our transgressions. Therefore the giving of a Redeemer was the work of his free mercy. Man loved not God, yea, was an enemy to God, when Christ came to

make the atonement : 1 John iv. 10, ' Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins ;' Col. i. 21, ' And you that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.' We were senseless of our misery, careless of our remedy ; so far from deserving, that we desired no such matter. God's love was at the beginning, not ours.

*Use 1.* Is to confute all misapprehensions of God. It is the grand design of Satan to lessen our opinion of God's goodness. So he assaulted our first parents, as if God (notwithstanding all his goodness in their creation) was envious of man's felicity and happiness. And he hath not left off his old wont. He seeketh to hide God's goodness, and to represent him as a God that delighteth in our destruction and damnation, rather than in our salvation ; as if he were inexorable, and hardly entreated to do us good. And why ? That we may stand aloof from God, and apprehend him as unlovely. Or if he cannot prevail so far, he tempteth us to poor, unworthy, mean thoughts of his goodness and mercy. Now we cannot obviate the temptation better than by due reflections on his love in giving his Son for the world. This showeth that he is fuller of mercy and goodness than the sun is of light or the sea of water. So great an effect shows the greatness of the cause. Wherefore did he express his love in such a wonderful, astonishing way, but that we might have higher and larger thoughts of his goodness and mercy ? By other effects we easily collect the perfection of his attributes ; that his power is omnipotent, Rom. i. 20 ; that his knowledge is omniscient, Heb. iv. 12, 13. And by this effect it is easy to conceive that his love is infinite, or that ' God is love.'

*Use 2.* Is to quicken us to admire the love of God in Christ.

There are three things which commend any favour done unto us :— (1.) The good will of him that giveth ; (2.) The greatness of the gift ; (3.) The unworthiness of him that receiveth. All concur here.

1. The good will of him that giveth. Nothing moved God to do this but his own love. It was from the free motion of his own heart, without our thought and asking. No other reason is given or can be given. We made no suit for any such thing ; it could not enter into our minds and hearts ; into our minds to conceive, or into our hearts to desire, such a remedy to recover the lapsed estate of mankind. Not into our minds, for it is a great mystery : 1 Tim. iii. 16, ' And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness,' &c. Not into our hearts to ask or desire ; for it would have seemed a strange request that we should ask that the eternal Son of God should assume our flesh, and be made sin and a curse for us. But grace hath wrought ' exceeding abundantly, above all that we can ask or think,' Eph. iii. 20 ; above what we can imagine, and above what we can pray for to him.

2. The greatness of the gift. Great things do even force their way into our minds, whether we will or no. The gift of Jesus Christ is so great, that the love of God is gone to the uttermost in it. He hath not a better Christ, nor a more worthy Redeemer, nor another Son to die for us ; nor could the Son of God suffer greater indignities than he

hath suffered for our sakes. God said to Abraham, Gen. xxii. 12, 'Now I know that thou fearest God, since thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.' God was not ignorant before, but the meaning is, this is an apparent proof and instance of it. So now we may know God loveth us; here is the manifest token and sign of it.

3. The unworthiness of him that receiveth; this is also in the case. We were altogether unworthy that the Son of God should be incarnate, and die for our sakes. This is notably improved by the apostle, Rom. v. 7, 8, 'For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, but for a good man some would even dare to die: but God commendeth his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' The apostle alludeth to the distinction familiar among the Jews: they had their good men, or bountiful; their righteous men, zealous for the law; and their wicked men, obnoxious to judgment. Peradventure one would venture his life for a very merciful person, but you shall hardly find any to be so liberal and friendly as to venture his life for a righteous and just man, or a man of rigid innocence. But mark, there are abating terms—*scarcely* and *perhaps*. The case is rare that one should die for another, be he never so good and righteous. But God's expression of mercy was infinitely above the proportion of any the most friendly man ever showed. There was nothing in the object to move him to it, when we were neither good nor just, but wicked. Without respect to any worth in us, for we were all in a damnable estate, he sent his Son to die for us, to rescue and free us from eternal death, and to make us partakers of eternal life. God so loved the world, when we had so sinned, and wilfully plunged ourselves into an estate of damnation.

But you will say, If this mercy be so great, why are men no more affected with it?

I answer:—

1. Because of their stupid carelessness; they do not see the need of this mercy, and therefore do not prize the worth of it. If they were sensible that there is an avenger of blood at their heels, or God's wrath making inquisition for sinners, they would more earnestly run into the city of refuge, Heb. vi. 18.

2. They do not truly believe this mystery of grace, but speak of it by rote and hearsay, after others. All affections follow faith: 1 Peter ii. 7, 'Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious.'

3. They do not seriously consider the importance of it, therefore the weightiest objects do not stir us; our minds are taken up about toys and trifles.

4. They have not the lively light of the Spirit: Rom. v. 5, 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.' It is not our dry thoughts and doctrinal knowledge that will affect and change our heart, till the Spirit turneth our light into love and our knowledge into taste.

Use 3. Is to exhort us:—

1. To improve this love. It is an invitation to seek after God; for see what preparations his love hath made to recover you to himself, and will not you be recovered? God doth not hate you, and therefore

you need not flee from him as a revenging God: He 'so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.' In that capacious expression you are not excluded, therefore exclude not yourselves. And such a broad foundation of his mercy being laid, what may you not expect from it? 2 Cor. v. 19. He hath procured a remedy and ransom; as soon as you repent and believe, you shall have the comfort of it.

2. It exhorteth us also to answer it with a fervent love to him that hath given such a signal demonstration of his love to us: 1 John iv. 19, 'We love him, because he first loved us.' Men always expect to be loved there where they love, and think it hard dealing if it be not so.

3. Let your love to God be like his love to you. Love was at the bottom of all this grace; let it be at the bottom of all your duties: 'Let all your things be done in love,' 1 Cor. xvi. 14. Let your carriage apparently be a life of love: 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, 'For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again.'

II. I come now to the second branch of the text—the way God took to express his love to us: He 'gave his only-begotten Son.' Jesus Christ is so called to distinguish him from the adopted children, and to show his personal subsistence, which is by way of filiation, or being eternally begotten in the divine essence. So great was our misery, that no less remedy would serve the turn; and so great God's mercy, that he withheld him not from us.

*Doct.* The greatest manifestation of God's love to the sons of men is the giving his only-begotten Son to be their Redeemer and Saviour.

There is a twofold giving of Christ:—

1. He is given *for* us.

2. He is given *to* us.

1. He was given for us when he was sent into the world to become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and to die for our sins. This is spoken of, Rom. viii. 32, 'God spared not his Son, but delivered him up for us all.'

2. He is given to us, when we have a special interest in him, and a participation of his benefits: 1 Cor. i. 30, 'Christ Jesus is made of God to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.'

He is given for us, as he took our nature; he is given to us, as he dwelleth in our hearts by faith. He is given for us, as he undertook the work of our redemption; he is given to us, as he accomplisheth and brings about our conversion to God, and applying to us the benefits of his purchase. I shall speak of both.

I. As he is given for us, it mightily bespeaketh the love of God, and his care of our salvation. In creation, God made us after his own image and likeness; in redemption, his Son came in the similitude and likeness of sinful flesh. In creation, the angels were dignified above us, but not in redemption, Heb. ii. 16. He did not redeem the apostate angels. In short, this was the most convenient way for God to bring about the purposes of his grace towards man, for these reasons:—

1. That our faith might be more certain, by the appearing of the

Son of God in our nature, by his dying, rising again from the dead, and ascending into heaven, and so giving a sensible proof of our whole religion.

[1.] By appearing in human nature he had opportunity of conversing with men, to convince them of the gracious will of God, and teach them obedience to him, not only by his doctrine, but his example, and securing the truth of both by the many miracles which he wrought in the days of his flesh: John vi. 27, 'Him hath the Father sealed;' that is, owned, acknowledged, demonstrated, that whatever he did or said was the will and good pleasure of God.

[2.] By his dying he satisfied the justice of God, and so maketh a way for the course of his mercy to us, that we might obtain release and pardon of all our sins and transgressions against the law of God: Rom. iii. 25, 26, 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God,' &c.

[3.] His rising again from the dead was a visible satisfaction to the world that his sacrifice was accepted: Rom. iv. 25, 'Who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.' The unbelieving world by that supreme act of power have no reason to stand out against his faith and doctrine.

[4.] By his ascending into heaven, the truth of eternal life was more confirmed, for thereby he gave us a real demonstration of that glory which he spoke of and promised to his disciples and followers: 1 Peter i. 21, 'God raised him from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.' He himself is entered into that happiness, and we shall follow him.

2. That our hope might be more strong and lively, being built upon the example of Christ and his promises to us. The example of Christ is of great support to us in all our troubles, for if we fare as he fared in this world, we shall fare as he fareth in the world to come. Therefore we are said to be 'begotten to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,' 1 Peter i. 3; that is, have a ground of hope and cheerful assurance, as he by his sufferings came to his reward and crown, so shall we obtain the matter of his promises: 1 John ii. 25, 'And this is the promise which he hath promised, even eternal life;' John xii. 26, 'If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.'

3. That our love to God may be more fervent. If God had saved us some other way, the salvation had been something less; for according to the degrees of the gift, so is our obligation. Now God would oblige us at the highest rate, and therefore he gave his only-begotten Son to die for us. It is said, he 'spared not his own Son,' Rom. viii. 32. There is a twofold not sparing—either in a way of impartial justice, or in a way of transcendent bounty; the last is chiefly intended in that place, though the other is not altogether excluded. He delivered him up to die for our sakes. Now surely this should gain much upon us, when God thought nothing too good to part with for our salvation.

4. It makes our obedience more ready, for Jesus Christ came to

live by the same law that we were bound to: Gal. iv. 4, 'When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.' Yea, to obey God at the dearest rates: Heb. v. 8, 9, 'Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered: and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.' He submitted unto and performed the whole law: his obedience cost him dear, since an ignominious and shameful death was a part of it.

II. God, that gave Christ for us, giveth him also to us, and with him the benefits of pardon, reconciliation, adoption, and right to eternal life, if we be duly qualified. The offer is made in the gospel: on our part there is required only a thankful acceptance of Christ on his own terms. This also is the greatest gift, for the other is in order to this, and this is the completing of it, and applying it for our comfort. I shall prove it by three reasons:—

1. Without Christ there is no recovery of what we lost.

2. No removal of that misery we incurred.

3. No obtaining of what we should desire and pursue after as our proper happiness.

1. No recovery of what we lost. What did we lose by the fall?—the image and favour of God, and fellowship with God.

[1.] The image of God was defaced by sin. Man abode not in the honour of his creation, but became as the beasts that perish. Now the restitution of this great gift we only have by Christ, who is the pattern and author of it. The pattern: 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' The author: Titus iii. 5, 6, 'Not by works of righteousness which ye have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.' Till we are in him, and be one with him, we have not this great benefit: 2 Cor. v. 17, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.' We are destitute of that image of God wherein we were created, and better we had never been born, unless new born.

[2.] The favour of God, which is an immediate consequent of his image. God delighted in man as innocent, but man sinful is the object of God's wrath, loathing, and aversion. Therefore Christ died to recover man to the love and favour of God: 2 Cor. v. 14, To make peace between the offended sovereign and subject offending; to interpose between God angry and man guilty. Now this breach continueth till we are reconciled by Christ, till we love God, and are beloved by him. And better we had been in a lower rank of creatures, than to continue under God's displeasure; for the misery of the beast dies with them, death puts an end to all their pains at once; but the wrath of God, not appeased by Christ, continues on the sinner for ever.

[3.] Fellowship with God was lost by the fall. Man was driven out of paradise, and shut out of God's presence by a flaming sword (Gen. iii. 24), the emblem of his wrath, and all intercourse was broken off; but Christ came to open the way, 'by whom we have access unto God

with boldness and confidence,' Eph. iii. 12. Heb. iv. 16, 'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in a time of need.' We need daily access to God, we cannot live without him. How can we look him in the face with any comfort when we have no mediator? we cannot have any serious thoughts of him without trembling.

2. There is removal of that misery which we have incurred, which is the death and curse wherein we are involved by sin. As long as the curses of the law stand in full force against us, we can have no firm confidence; if we look to time past, there is a huge heap of sins, the least of which is enough to sink us into hell; if we look to time present, our nature being not yet healed, our hearts swarm with divers lusts, and we are ready to sin again; if to time to come, death, hell, and judgment affright us. Christ findeth us where Adam left us, in the highway to hell and damnation: John iii. 18, 'Condemned already;' and to hope for any release, unless it be upon God's terms, is to make him untrue and unjust. Certainly God will not break his word, and disturb the order of his covenant for your sakes. Therefore how will you escape the curse and condemnation of the law if Christ be not given to you?

3. There is no obtaining of what we should desire and pursue after as our proper happiness, but only by Christ. Man was made for God, and cannot be happy without him, and he is most completely happy in the full enjoyment of him. Now there is no coming to that blessed state but by Christ: John xiv. 6, He is the way to the Father. The most eminent sense is with respect to our final blessedness, when we come into his immediate presence: so 1 John v. 11, 'This is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.' It is Christ alone that can put us in the way, and bring us home to eternal bliss.

*Use 1.* Is to confute the world's opinion, who measure God's love by outward things or worldly felicity. Alas! the love or hatred of God is not known by these things, Eccles. ix. 1, 2, neither can the heart of man be satisfied with them; these things can give us a bellyful, but not a heartful, Ps. xvii. 14, 15. Those that take up with the creature, never felt the weight of sin, are not serious in matters of eternal concernments. The only true happiness is in having God for our God, Christ for our Redeemer, the Spirit for our sanctifier and comforter.

*Use 2.* Is to excite us to bless God for Jesus Christ. The apostle doth frequently in all his groans and afflictions: Rom. vii. 25, 'I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord,' &c.; 'Blessed be God for the grace of Jesus Christ,' whereby we have pardon for what is past, and grace for the future to perform what God will accept. So 1 Cor. xv. 57, 'Thanks be to God, which gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' God by Christ hath given us the victory over sin, death, and hell. So should you, especially in the Lord's Supper—it is an Eucharist—be thankful that God hath given Christ for us, which is an unspeakable gift. And now he cometh to give him to you, afford him a hearty welcome into your souls as you take him, and apply him by faith, and give up yourselves to him as his redeemed ones. You



come to look upon Christ, who made his soul an offering for sin; he is here represented as crucified before your eyes, and is by God specially offered to your acceptance, and with him pardon and life. You must be joyful and thankful for these great gifts and benefits, so dearly bought, so surely sealed, so freely offered, and in the sense of all this devote yourselves to God.

*Use 3.* Make it your main care to see if Christ be given to us. Without him you cannot have any true remedy against evil, nor any solid hope of good. Certain it is that in our natural estate we were without him. Is there a change? The two great ends for which Christ came were, to appease God, and to be the principle of a new life. Is Christ given for these ends? Have you received him? Do not think Christ fell from heaven into your bosom whether you would or no. Did you ever feel your misery without him, and cry mightily to God, Give me Christ, or else I die, and perish for ever? I confess, conversion is not always evident in feeling, but it is in the effect and fruit. What fruits have you then abiding in you? The great fruit of Christ being given to you is the Spirit's dwelling in you: Rom. viii. 1, 'But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.' The great work of the Spirit is to sanctify the soul to the service of him that redeemed us: Titus ii. 14, 'Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.' Clear this, and the cause is decided.

III. I come now to the third part of the text, which is the end of this love, 'That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have life everlasting;' where I observe—

1. The connection of our duty and privilege. Christ died to procure a covenant wherein pardon and life is offered to us upon gracious terms. In the gospel we must observe what God hath promised, and what we must do; both must be alike acceptable to us, the duty as well as the benefit, or else we consent not to the whole tenor of the covenant.

2. The universality of the proposal, that *whosoever* believeth in him; no sorts of men are excluded from the remedy but those that exclude themselves by their impenitency and unbelief.

3. The nature of this act and duty which giveth a right and title to the benefits offered, and that is believing: no more is mentioned here. But none truly believe but those that carry themselves accordingly, or perform the duties which that belief calleth for. If it be such a lively operative faith, it will secure our title to these benefits.

4. The benefits are negatively and positively expressed; negatively, they 'shall not perish; positively, but 'have everlasting life.'

[1.] The negative expression is mentioned, partly because of our former deserts; we incurred the sentence of eternal death, which is taken off from penitent believers; they shall not be condemned with the unbelieving world: partly because of our present fears; guilt presents destruction before our eyes, but the cause of that is taken away as sin is remitted and weakened: and partly to support us in our troubles: they may be afflicted, but not perish for ever; chastened, but not destroyed; not for perdition, but amendment.

[2.] The positive part is expressed partly to show our heavenly Father's love, who cannot be satisfied till he hath brought us into his immediate presence; and partly to answer the desire of the faithful, who long for everlasting communion with him; we cannot be satisfied till we be for ever with the Lord, in a perfect state of subjection to him, and fruition of him.

*Doct.* That faith is the way which God hath appointed whereby to receive benefits by Christ.

I. What faith is.

II. How this is to be understood.

III. Why the gospel covenant layeth so much weight on it.

What is faith? Surely it concerns us to know it, since the scriptures speak so much of it everywhere. There are in it three things:— (1.) Assent; (2.) consent; (3.) trust.

1. A firm and cordial assent to this truth, that Jesus is the Son of God and Saviour of mankind, who came down from heaven and suffered for our sins, and became the foundation of that new covenant which offereth pardon and hopes of bliss to all those who, feeling the burden of their sins, will trust their souls upon Christ's redemption and ransom, and forsake the world, the flesh, and the devil, and take him for their only Lord and Saviour, that by him they may return to God. This assent is a part of faith, but this is not all. The reasonable soul in man hath life, sense, appetite, and motion, as the souls of the beasts have; but this is not the difference between us and them: besides sense, life, and appetite, we have reason and discourse. So here, knowledge and assent are implied in faith, but more is required to make it justifying and saving. Assent is good as it is inductive of other things, or leadeth on other things, to wit, choice and trust; and it is not only good, but necessary, lest we build without a foundation. It was of great weight heretofore, when Christ's person and doctrine was more questioned and contradicted: John viii. 24, 'Unless ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins;' lose all the benefit of his coming. It is said, 1 John v. 1, 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.' It was a mighty thing then to believe and profess Christ to be the Messiah, and to cleave to that profession, whatever temptations they had to the contrary. But I dare not leave the decision of men's spiritual estate upon that trial only; the bleak winds that blew then in their faces, blow now on our backs; and it is as dangerous now to deny Christ to be the Messiah, as it was for them to profess it. However, assent is still necessary, to put the greater life and power into our faith; for if the fire were well kindled, it would of itself break out into a flame. The stronger our assent is, the more powerful to beget love and dependence on God's promises, obedience to his commands, and perseverance notwithstanding temptations. This assent, to do its work, must be firm and cordial.

[1.] Firm. You must believe unfeignedly that Christ is the Messiah and Redeemer of the world: Acts ii. 36, 'Let the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made this Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.' The word signifies *safely*, they may venture their all upon it: John xvii. 8, 'They have known.' There is a common customary superficial belief, that men take up upon the

credit of their forefathers, and the consent of the country where they live, and there is a sound persuasion of the truth of the gospel wrought in us by the Spirit of God. And though human credulity doth little, yet this last serveth to renew the soul: Mat. xvi. 17, 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father which is in heaven;' when Peter had said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' This makes us victorious over the devil, the world, and the flesh: 1 John v. 5, 'Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?' If this important supreme truth were well believed, it would doubtless prevail against the allurements of the world and the flesh, and make men see that they have something else than this deceitful world to look after. Truths go to the quick when soundly believed.

[2.] Cordial. Many seem verily to be persuaded that Jesus is the Son of God, but are no way affected with this mystery of grace, nor changed. The devils may give a bare assent to this great gospel truth. Compare Mark v. 7 with Mat. xvi. 16, the confession of the devil with the profession of Peter. The devil owned Jesus to be the Son of the most high God, as well as Peter, the Son of the living God. Austin's observation is very good: *Hoc dicebat Petrus, hoc dicebant demones, Petrus ut Christum amplecteretur, demones ut Christus ab iis recederet*—Peter said the same thing, and the devil the same thing; Peter said it that he might embrace Christ, the devils that he might depart from them. It is one thing to be of this opinion that Christ is the Saviour of the world, another to accept and receive him into our hearts.

2. The next thing which I shall observe in faith is a consent to receive Christ as God offereth him to us in the gospel: John i. 12, 'To as many as received him,' &c. He gave power to become the sons of God to as many as believed on his name.

[1.] It is not a rash consent, but such as is deliberate, serious, and advised. When we assure men that God in the gospel calls them to accept of Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and that they shall be pardoned and saved, they are ready to say with all their heart; but they do not consider what it is to receive Christ, and therefore retract their consent almost as soon as it is given. Therefore Christ directeth us to sit down and count the charges, that we may allow for opposition and temptations, Luke xiv. 28-33. When you have considered his strict laws, made a full allowance for incident difficulties and temptations, and can resolve, forsaking all others, to cleave to him alone for salvation.

[2.] It must not be a forced and involuntary consent, such as a person maketh when he is frightened into a little religiousness for the present, but would never mind it, nor yield to it, if he were in a state of full liberty. It may be in a distress or pang of conscience; by all means they must have Christ; or when sick are afraid to die, or under some great judgments; as the Israelites when they heard the thundering on Mount Sinai: 'All that thou hast commanded us, we will do,' Deut. v. 27. No; this will not serve the turn: the will must be effectually inclined to Christ, and to God the Father by him, as our

ntmost felicity and end. All Christ's people are a willing people, Ps. cx. 3.

[3.] It must be a resolved consent, a fixed, not an ambulatory will, which we take up for a purpose, or at some certain times for a solemn duty or so. No; you must 'cleave to him with full purpose of heart,' Acts xi. 23. Trample upon everything that would separate you from him, Phil. iii. 8, 9; Rom. viii. 36, to the end. It must not be a feeble consent, such as is contradicted by every foolish and hurtful lust, but a prevalent consent, such as can maintain itself against difficulties and temptations, and the oppositions of the flesh, and control all other desires and delights.

[4.] It must not be partial, but a total, universal consent; not only a consent of dependence or trust, to accept of Christ as our Saviour, but a consent of subjection to him as our Lord: Col. ii. 6, 'As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.' Many would have Christ and his benefits, but they would not yield that he should reign over them: Luke xix. 27, 'Those mine enemies, that would not I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me.' But the true believing implieth a taking of Christ and his yoke: Mat. xi. 29, 'Take my yoke upon you,' &c. Christ and his cross, Mat. xvi. 24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' It is accompanied with a resolution to obey his laws and keep his commandments, that we may abide in his love.

3. The third thing in faith is trust, spoken of Eph. i. 13, 'In whom ye trusted, after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.' Trust is a dependence upon Christ for the blessings which he hath procured for us, and promised to us; and is represented by the metaphors of staying the mind on God: 'Isa. xxvi. 3, 'Thou keepest him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.' By the staying of the mind is intended its fixedness and stability, when, being satisfied with the promises, we can comfortably wait for the event and issue. The other metaphor is, committing ourselves to God: 2 Tim. i. 12, 'For I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.' When we can trust our all in Christ's hands, knowing that he can give us that righteousness whereby we may stand before God, and have comfortable access to him, and at length give us that eternal life which is our supreme happiness. When you can trust him for deliverance from the guilt, power, and punishment of sin, and for the beginning, strengthening, and preserving of grace in us to everlasting life, you have obtained a good degree of faith. Only for the further opening of this trust, I must observe to you:—

[1.] That this trust respects all Christ's offices, which are, prophet, priest, and king. You trust him as a prophet when you give up yourselves as his disciples to the conduct of his word and Spirit, being persuaded that he will infallibly teach you the way to true happiness: John vi. 68, 69, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' This trust is our remedy against all false

religions; for what should draw us from the true and chief doctor of the church? You trust him as a priest, when you believe the value of his merit and sacrifice, and comfort yourselves with his gracious promises and covenant, and come to God with more boldness and hope of mercy upon the account of his intercession, especially in your great extremities, Heb. iv. 14–16. Therefore we may pray confidently, and make an open and free discovery of our wants and requests to God, who will relieve us, and do what is best for us in a fit season, when we most want it and least expect it. We must trust him as a king, when we become his subjects, and are persuaded that he will govern us in truth and righteousness, in order to our salvation, and defend us by his mighty power till he hath brought us to glory and blessedness: 2 Tim. iv. 18, ‘The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.’

[2.] That this trust is practical, and is not to be determined by our confidence so much as obedience and resolution to take the way which God hath prescribed, that we may obtain the blessings which he hath promised to us. This consideration is necessary, partly because God or Christ will be trusted no farther than he hath obliged himself, and so far we may depend upon him. Now Christ hath only obliged himself to be ‘the author of eternal salvation to those that obey him,’ Heb. v. 9. Partly because this obedience is difficult, self-denial is required, Mat. xvi. 24, ‘Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself,’ &c. A surer note of our faith than a confidence or a presumption that we shall fare well enough though we indulge the ease and desires of the flesh, and gratify our interest in the world; and therefore, faith being an obediential confidence, doth confute these vain conceits. Many think they may the more boldly venture on sin, the more they believe, or seem to believe, the grace of God in Christ. Others think all their business is to get a victory over their consciences, and though they do not deny their lusts, yet if they can be strongly persuaded that God will be merciful to them in Christ, they shall not perish but obtain everlasting life. No; we must obey, we must deny ourselves, or else we do not trust Christ to bring us to heaven in his own ways and methods, but trust to some vain conceits of our own.

II. How this is to be understood, ‘that whosoever *believeth*,’ since many other things are required of us, as repentance, mortification of sin, self-denial, new obedience or holiness? Luke xiii. 5, ‘Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.’ Mortification: Rom. viii. 13, ‘If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.’ Self-denial: Luke xiv. 26, ‘If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.’ New obedience or holiness: Heb. xii. 14, ‘Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.’ I answer—All truths are not delivered in one place, and therefore a solitary faith will not bring us to heaven, but that which is seconded with other things. But more distinctly:—

1. Faith is not required to exclude other things that are connexed with it by the ordination of God. For every one that believeth Christ, believeth the whole gospel to be true. Except against one part and you

may except against all the rest. Now it is evident in the gospel that without regeneration, repentance, and holiness, no man can be saved and see God ; therefore every one that believeth in Christ must trust him to obtain it in the way that he hath appointed and promised to give it.

2. Faith is not required to exclude other things that are included in the nature of it, or flow as genuine effects from such a cause. A purpose of obedience is included in the nature of faith, and actual obedience is the fruit of it. Every one that believeth Christ receiveth him in all his offices ; therefore a purpose of obedience is included in the nature of it ; and if faith be sincere, universal obedience in self-denial, mortification, and our duty to God and men, will naturally be derived from it. Therefore, as he that is to entertain a king makes reckoning of his train, and that he will not come alone, so every one of whom faith in Jesus Christ is required must reckon that his faith must be evidenced to be sincere by the fruits of it.

III. Why is faith required, that we may receive benefit by Christ ?

For these reasons :—(1.) In respect of God ; (2.) In respect of Christ ; (3.) In respect of the creature ; (4.) In respect of our comforts.

1. In respect of God, that our hearts may be possessed with a full apprehension of his grace, who in the new covenant appeareth not as a revenging and condemning God, but as a pardoning God. This reason is rendered by the apostle, Rom. iv. 16, 'It is of faith, that it might be of grace.' The law brought in the terror of God, by being the instrument of revealing sin, and the punishment due thereunto : ver. 15, 'The law worketh wrath, for where there is no law there is no transgression,' no such stinging sense of it ; but the gospel brought in grace. The law stated the breach, but the gospel showed the way of our recovery. And therefore faith doth more agree with grace, as it makes God more amiable and lovely to us, and beloved by us, by the discovery of his goodness and grace. The saving of man by Christ, that is, by his incarnation, life, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension, do all tend to possess our hearts with his abundant grace. To the same tend also his merciful covenant, gracious promises, and all the benefits given to us ; his Spirit, pardon, and communion with God in glory, all is to fill our hearts with a sense of the love of God. And all this is no more than necessary ; for a guilty conscience is not easily settled, and brought to look for all kind of happiness from one whom we have so much wronged. Adam, when once a sinner, was shy of God, Gen. iii. 30 ; and sin still makes us hang from him. Guilt is suspicious, and if we have not one to lead us by the hand, and bring us to God, we cannot abide his presence. For this end serveth faith ; that sinners, being possessed of the goodness and grace of God, may be recovered and return to him by a fit means. In the new covenant, repentance more distinctly respects God, and faith respecteth Christ : Acts xx. 21, 'Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' Repentance respects God, because from God we fell, and to God we must return. We fell from him, as we withdrew our allegiance, and sought our happiness elsewhere ; to him we return, as our rightful and proper happiness ; but faith respects the Mediator, who is the only remedy of our misery, and the means of our eternal

blessedness. He opened the way to God by his merit and satisfaction, and actually bringeth us into this way by his renewing and reconciling grace, that we may be in a capacity both to please and enjoy God; and that is the reason why faith in Christ is so much insisted on, as our title and claim to the blessedness of the new covenant. It hath a special aptitude and fitness for our recovery from sin to God, because it peculiarly respects the Mediator by whom we come to him.

2. With respect to Christ.

[1.] Because the whole dispensation of grace by Christ cannot well be apprehended by anything but faith; partly because the way of our recovery is so supernatural, strange, and wonderful, that unless we believe God's testimony, how can we be persuaded of it? That the carpenter's son should be the Son of that great architect and builder who framed heaven and earth; that life should come to us by the death of another; that God should be made man, and the judge a party, and he that knew no sin be condemned as a criminal person; that one crucified should procure the salvation of the whole world, and be Lord of life and death, and have such power over all flesh as to give eternal life to whom he will;—reason is puzzled at these things; faith can only unravel them. Partly because the comfort of the promises is so rich and glorious, and the persons upon whom it is bestowed so unworthy, that it cannot easily enter into the heart of a man that God will be so good and gracious to us: 1 Cor. ii. 9, 'Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things God hath prepared for them that love him.' Therefore, sense and reason could look for no such thing. Faith is necessary, and a strong faith, that it may work upon us. These are things which we could neither imagine nor hope for. Partly because the chief of our blessings lie in another world, and nature cannot see so far off, 2 Peter i. 9. Partly because Christ's most sincere people are afflicted with so many difficulties, and so seemingly forsaken; and temptations to unbelief are many and pressing, that it is hard to maintain any life in ourselves unless we have faith, that is, a strong assent and invincible trust. Well, now, consider for what good reason God requireth faith. Sense only looks to things seen and felt; reason seeth effects in their causes, and yet but probably; but faith is a believing such things as God hath revealed, because he hath revealed them; and surely this only can sustain us in the expectation of God's grace and mercy unto eternal life. Whilst we are employed in duties so opposite to the bent of the carnal heart, and have so many temptations to the contrary, what can support us but a strong and lively faith?

[2.] Till we believe in Christ, we can have no comfort or use of all his offices. How can we learn of him the way of salvation, till we believe him to be the prophet sent of God to teach the world the way to true happiness? Mat. xvii. 5, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.' How can we obey him, unless we believe in him that he is our Lord, who hath power over all flesh, at whose judgment we must stand or fall? Acts xvii. 30, 31, 'Now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man

whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead.' How can we depend upon the merit of his obedience and sacrifice, and be comforted with his gracious promises and covenant, and come to God with boldness and hope of mercy in his name, and be confident that he will justify, sanctify, and save us, unless we believe that he is a priest, who once made an atonement, and continually makes intercession for us? Heb. ix. 25. In the days of his flesh, when any came for any benefit to him, he put him upon his trial, 'Believest thou that I am able to do this?' Mark ix. 23, 'Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.' 'Believest thou that I am able?' to Martha, John xi. 26. Thus they were not capable of any benefit till they believed.

3. With respect to that holiness and obedience which God expected from the creature. Christ came to restore us to God, which he doth both as a Saviour and lawgiver to his church; and till we believe in him, both these qualities and functions miss of their effect.

[1.] As a Saviour, he came to take away the curse of the law, and to put us into a capacity to serve and please God, by giving us his Spirit to renew our natures and heal our souls: Isa. liii. 5, 'The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed;' 1 Peter ii. 24, 'Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead unto sin, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed.' We shall never mind our duty, nor be capable to perform it, unless we believe that he is such a Saviour.

[2.] As a lawgiver, obliging us by his authority to live in obedience unto God. The kingdom of the Mediator is clearly subordinate to the kingdom of God; for he came not to vacate our duty, but to establish it; he came to restore the lost groat to the owner, the lost sheep to the possessor, the lost son to the father. As the grace of Christ doth not vacate the mercy of God, so the authority of Christ, that *novum jus imperii*, doth not free us from the authority of God. Now, who will submit to an authority that is not convinced of it, or doth not believe it? But when once we believe, then we bow heart and knee.

4. With respect to our comfort. Often in scripture faith is represented as a quieting grace. The comfort, quietness, and peace of the soul dependeth much upon faith in Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, which banishes our fears, and makes us in our greatest hardships to trust Christ with all our happiness, and to feast the soul with a constant peace and everlasting joy. Whether this world be turned upside down and be dissolved; whether we be in poverty and sickness, or in health or wealth; whether we be under evil repute or good; whether persecution or prosperity befall us, how little are we concerned in all these if we 'know in whom we have believed?' 2 Tim. i. 12. Heaven is where it was before, and Christ is at the right hand of God; how little then should all these things disturb the peace and comfort of that soul that shall live with God for ever? Ps. cxii. 7. But sin is our greatest trouble. If sin be your trouble, I answer, Is it your infirmity or iniquity? If infirmity, 'There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus,' &c., Rom. viii. 1. If iniquity, break



off your sin by repentance, and then there may be comfort for you; for Christ came to save us from our sins.

*Use 1.* Is to confute men's presumptions of their eternal good estate, whereby many damnably delude their own souls.

1. Some, when they hear that whosoever believeth shall be saved, have a carnal notion of Christ, that if he were alive they would own him, and receive him into their houses, and use him more friendly than the Jews did. This is but a knowing Christ 'after the flesh,' 2 Cor. v. 16. He is not to be received into your houses, but into your hearts. Besides, we do not know our own hearts, or what we should have done if we had lived then; a person of such contemptible appearance as Christ was, and so free in his reproofs of the sins of the times, would not have been for our turn no more than theirs. The Jews said, Mat. xxiii. 30, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been guilty of the blood of the prophets.' The memory of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram was as detestable to the carnal Jews as that of Judas and Pontius Pilate to Christians; but they were not a whit the better men, no more are we.

2. They do great reverence to his name and memory, profess themselves Christians, and abhor Turks and infidels. No; this will not do neither. Many prize Christ's name that neglect his office; honouring the physician without taking his remedies never brought health. They have learned to speak well of Christ by rote after others, but they do not savingly and sincerely believe in him to cure and heal their souls, and suffer him to do the work of a mediator there. The other respect is to be ascribed to the chance of their birth: they have the happiness to be born there where Christ is the God of the country; that which makes others Turks and infidels makes them Christians: but though they stand upon the higher ground, they are not the taller men.

3. They are very willing to be forgiven by Christ, and to obtain eternal life; but this is what mere necessity requires them. They will not suffer him to do his whole work, to sanctify them, and fit them to live to God, nor part with their nearest and dearest lusts, and come into the obedience of the gospel; or at least, if Christ will do it for them, without their improving this grace, or using his holy means, they are contented. But 'having such precious promises,' and such a blessed Redeemer, we are to 'cleanse ourselves,' 2 Cor. vii. 1. The work is ours, though the grace be from him. So Gal. v. 24, 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.'

4. Some have a strong conceit that they shall be saved and have benefit by Christ. This, which they call their faith, may be the greatest unbelief in the world; that men living in their sins shall yet do well enough is to believe the flat contrary of what God had spoken in his word: 1 Cor. vi. 9, 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor drunkards, nor effeminate persons, &c., shall inherit the kingdom of God.' It is not strength of conceit, but the sure foundation of our hope, that will support us; nor are they the most happy who have the least trouble, but who have the least cause.

Use 2. Do we believe in the Son of God? Here will be the great case of conscience for settling our eternal interest.

1. If we believe, Christ will be precious to us: 1 Peter ii. 7, 'Unto them which believe, he is precious.' Christ cannot be accepted where he is not valued when other things come in competition with him, and God will not be prodigal of his grace.

2. Where there is true faith, the heart will be purified: Acts xv. 9, 'Purifying their hearts by faith.'

3. If you do believe in Christ, the heart will be weaned from the world: 1 John v. 4, 'For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

4. If you have the true faith, it works by love: Gal. v. 6, 'For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith, which worketh by love.'

By these things will the case be determined. Then the comfort and sweetness of this truth falls upon your hearts, that 'God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

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## SERMON. XVII.

*See, I have set before thee this day life and good, death and evil.—*  
DEUT. XXX. 15.

MOSES, the man of God, having acquainted the people with the tenor of God's commandments, both concerning worship and civil conversation, doth enforce all by a pregnant exhortation, laying before their eyes the blessings of obedience, and the plagues and curses that should overtake them in case they should decline from the ways of the Lord thus recommended to them; in all which he showeth himself not only as an ordinary preacher speaking by way of exhortation and doctrinal threatening, but as a special prophet speaking by way of prediction, and that with such clearness and certainty that these few chapters may be looked upon as an exact calendar and prognostication, wherein the good or bad days of this people are expressly calculated and foretold; yea, comparing events with the prediction, you would rather conceive Moses his speech to be an authentic register and chronicle of what is past than an infallible prophecy of what was to come: nothing good or bad hath befallen this people from the beginning to this day but what is here foretold. What is more largely declared upon in this exhortation is contracted into a narrow room and summary here in the text: 'See, I have set before thee this day life and good, death and evil.'

In the words observe:—

1. The matter propounded, in two pairs, that have a mutual connection one with another: *life and good, death and evil.*