

THE PREFERENCE OF DUTIES:

MORALS BEFORE RITUALS.

But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.—MAT. IX. 13.

THESE words are part of Christ's plea for his converse with publicans and sinners, at which the pharisees took offence.

Three answers he maketh :—

1. From their necessity, represented in a proverbial speech : 'The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.'

2. From the end of his commission : 'I came not,' as the doctor of the church, 'to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'

3. Here is a third, suggested in the words read to you, by a saying of the prophet Hosea, chap. vi. 6, where a general reason is intimated, that a ceremony of the Levitical law must not hinder a necessary duty of the moral law. Therefore his conversing with them for their edification was not unlawful nor uncomely, for all rituals must give way to morals ; and so those laws of not accompanying with a heathen, or an unclean person, were never intended to be a bar to an act of mercy or charity, especially spiritual mercy and charity. And therefore, though they held the publicans profane, and unworthy their conversation (therein also stretching the law), yet Christ, without any breach of decorum, might converse with them for their good ; for if acts of mercy and charity are to be preferred before the ceremonies of the worship of God, this act of rescuing and saving a soul is to be preferred before all these ritual restraints of conversation with those who were supposed to be unworthy or legally unclean. And it is notable, these words are brought, not only to vindicate this fact of Christ, but secretly to tax the pharisaical hypocrisy of those who place religion in rituals more than morals. Elsewhere you find Christ at this argument again on another occasion, but to the same end and purpose : Mat. xii. 7. When the pharisees frowned because the disciples plucked ears of corn for their necessity on the Sabbath-day : 'If you had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless.' So that this

one sentence is notably useful to condemn pharisaism, or, which is all one, close hypocrisy, and withal to set us right in the true religion.

In the words observe:—

1. Christ's preface.

2. The words of the prophet quoted.

Christ's preface is to be regarded: 'Go ye, learn what that meaneth.' And in the other place, 'If you had known what this meaneth.' This showeth that it is a point which deserveth well to be studied by us—this saying of the Lord by the prophet, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.'

Where observe:—

1. The form is negative, but in the sense it is to be understood comparatively: 'I will have mercy *rather than* sacrifice.' So when Paul saith, 1 Cor. i. 17, 'Christ sent me, not to baptize, but to preach the gospel'—not *chiefly* to baptize, but *rather* to preach the gospel; so here it is not a simple negation, but a comparative, that he approved of moral duties more than sacrifice.

2. Observe the two things compared—mercy and sacrifice. In the prophet Hosea there is another word, 'I desired mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings.' Mercy comprehendeth the duties of the second table, as the knowledge of God the duties of the first table. Now this piety towards God, and charity towards our neighbour, was more acceptable service towards God than all the rites of their external worship.

Doct. There is much to be learned from God's expressing himself in his word that he liketh mercy to them that stand in need of it, better than the offering of the richest sacrifice.

I frame the point so as it may comply with Christ's scope and purpose.

Three things especially we learn in it:—

I. The respective value and preference of duties.

II. The guise of hypocrites, as our Saviour pincheth and taxeth the pharisees often by this point.

III. The excellency of mercy.

I. I shall speak to the respective value and preference of duties, and there I shall lay down these propositions.

1. All that God commandeth must be respected, and obedience endeavoured, partly because his laws are all holy, just, and good: Rom. vii. 12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good'—viz., that law by which he was convinced, and which had brought such trouble in his heart; holy, as being the copy and draught of God's holiness; just, as doing no wrong, no infringement of our just freedom; good, as profitable to direct and perfect our operations—nothing therein is in vain or useless. And partly because they are all ratified by the same authority: Exod. xx. 1, 'God spake all these words,' not *these words*, but *all these words*: 'He that said, Thou shalt not commit adultery, said also, Thou shalt not steal;' as the apostle improveth the observation: James ii. 11, 'For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.' God hath expressed his will in one thing as well as another. And partly because in conversion we have grace given to obey all: Eph. iv. 24, 'The new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness.' It

is not only fitted for righteousness, but holiness; not only for holiness, but righteousness. As the sun is placed in heaven, that he may shed abroad his influence everywhere, and nothing is hidden from his heat and light, so is grace planted in the heart, that it may diffuse itself in a uniform obedience, and that we may be holy: 1 Pet. i. 15, 'As he that hath called us is holy, in all manner of conversation.' The heart is framed to resist every sin, and to observe all the commands of God. The new creature never cometh maimed out of the birth, or wanting any part. Well, then, holiness and righteousness must ever go together, and the obedience to both tables be inseparable. We must 'serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days,' Luke i. 75; not in holiness only, or in righteousness only, but in both.

2. Though all are to be respected, yet all duties are not equal, nor all sins equal. A vain thought is not so heinous a crime as the killing of a man; and to blaspheme and curse God is a greater sin than an idle word, and idolatry than stealing of a shilling. Though all God's laws stand by the same authority, yet the matter of all is not of a like moment and consequence. And therefore the sins and duties are greater and lesser, according to the importance of the law: Mat. v. 19, 'Whosoever shall break one of the least of these commandments, and shall teach men so to do, shall be least in the kingdom of heaven.' There are commandments which may be called the least, and there are others which may be called the greatest—*De ordine modum*, the order showeth the weight. The fundamental article of the covenant is to have God for our God, and to prefer natural worship before instituted, the means stated before manner and time, God before man, parents before others.

3. Simple duties of the first table are greater than duties of the second. Christ himself saith, Mat. xxii. 38, that 'this is the first and great commandment.' They must needs be the greatest, because the object of them is greatest: 'God is greater than man,' as it is said, Job xxxiii. 12. To oppose a prince in person is more than to oppose his mean officer. He that sinneth against his neighbour sinneth against God, but not so immediately, 1 Cor. viii. 12. And 2dly, because this is the great bond on the heart to enforce the duty of the second, the conscience of our duty to God: because I love, or fear, or would honour God, therefore I perform my duty to man for the Lord's sake. And so we turn second table duties into first table duties; and so alms is a sacrifice, Heb. xiii. 16; and so obedience to masters is obedience to God, Eph. vi. 6. And as they enforce, so they regulate; for we are to obey them in the Lord, and so as will stand with a higher duty we owe to God: Acts iv. 19, 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.' So that these are the greatest duties. But yet this must be understood so as the comparison be rightly made; the chief of the first table with the chief of the second, the middle with the middle, the least with the least, externals with externals; otherwise not. Disobedience to parents is more than an irreverent speech of God; adultery a greater sin than coldness in worship; stealing than not giving. The people made many prayers, but their hands were full of blood, Isa. i. 15. And therefore the order must be rightly conceived: first, love to God, then love to

men; first, the worship of God, and then duty to men in our several relations; first, acts of outward worship, then acts of outward respects to men—duties of piety, and also justice and charity. Thus the circumstantial and ceremonial duties of the first table must give place to the necessary and moral duties of the second. But when the comparison is duly made in the same rank, those laws which do simply and directly respect God are to be preferred before those duties which concern men; and sins of the highest degree against the first table are greater than sins of the highest degree against the second; and in duties, the love of our neighbour must give place to the love of God; as the love of father and mother, wife, children, friends, brethren: Luke xiv. 26, 'If any man hate not father and mother,' &c., 'he cannot be my disciple.' God is chief, and most worthy of respect.

4. Moral and substantial duties should chiefly be made conscience of, and ought to take place of ceremonial observances, though belonging to the first table; for so in the text is mercy preferred before sacrifices. Which is to be regarded to a double end; partly, that we may not rest in them as the better part of our duty. If men submit never so much to external institutions about religion and worship, and think to satisfy their consciences therewith, yet they will not at all be accepted and approved of God. No. He looketh more to moral obedience than positive commands concerning the externals of religion. And therefore you have morals of the first table, or the second, often compared with, and preferred above the externals of religion; as 1 Sam. xv. 22, 'Hath the Lord any delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness as idolatry.' It was spoken upon the occasion of Saul's sparing Agag, and the fat of the cattle for sacrifice, when he was to destroy man and beast. At other times it is compared with duties of the second table. The moral duties of the second table are better than the ceremonial duties of the first. If we be scanty in the one and abound in the other, it is a note of a hypocrite: Rom. xiv. 17, 18, 'The kingdom of God standeth not in meats and drinks, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' If a man do these things, he shall be accepted of the Lord, and approved of men. There are two expositions of that place, both equally probable; the one more general, that righteousness is taken for all new obedience, and peace for peace of conscience, resulting from the rectitude of our actions, and joy in the Holy Ghost for supernatural comfort, which the Holy Ghost puts into our hearts, by reflecting on our privileges by Christ, and the hopes of the world to come. Now, Christianity lieth not in outward observances, but in solid godliness. The other exposition is in a more limited sense; that by righteousness, is meant just dealing; by peace, a peaceable, harmless, inoffensive sort of living; by joy in the Holy Ghost, a delight to do good to one another, not dividing from, or hating, censuring, excommunicating one another for mere rituals, but pleasing one another to edification. These morals are more acceptable to God, and approved of men, than a furious zeal for lesser things, which belong to the ritual part, or external order of religion. It is an argument of a better spirit to be more zealous for morals and substantial than

rituals; certainly without them we shall be of no account with God. And partly to¹ that, when moral duties come in competition with ceremonial, the moral duties at that time must take place of the other, and all positive commands concerning the externals of religion give way to them. The Lord never appointed the ceremonies of the first table to hinder works of mercy prescribed in the second; therefore the mercy must be done, and the sacrifice left undone: as the Sabbath is both broken and kept when there is an evident necessity of preserving the creature. When David fainted, it was a moral duty to relieve him, though there were no bread at hand but the shew-bread: 1 Sam. xxi. 4, 'There is no common bread under my hands.' And Christ urgeth that, Mat. xii. 3, 4, 'Have ye not read what David did when he was an hungered; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for them which were with him, but only for the priests?' In an extraordinary case of necessity, the shew-bread is as common bread. Now the reason is plain, because positives bind only in certain cases, but we are everlastingly obliged to things moral. Therefore externals must give way both to obedience and mercy. Internal acts of worship are never dispensed with.

5. Sacrifices come under a double consideration, as they relate to Christ, the substance of them all, or as external performances rested in by that people.

[1.] In the first consideration, their gospel lay much in sacrifices, and the main duties of godliness were exercised about them, as brokenness of heart: Ps. li. 17, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.' And faith in Christ, Heb. ix. 13, 14, 'For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works, to serve the living God?' And covenanting with God, Ps. l. 5, 'Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice;' and Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.'

[2.] In the second consideration, the outward bare offering, considered in itself, without faith and repentance, so God disclaimeth it: Isa. i. 11, 'Bring no more vain oblations;' and Isa. lxvi. 2, 3, 'He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol.' Their great confidence was in their sacrifices. God, therefore, showeth how loathsome these things were to him, without that disposition of soul which should accompany them; being such persons as those were, he would take no offering at their hands. The Lord in all ages is uniform and like himself, in approving and enjoining duty, and in disliking sin. Morals are always prized by him before externals, and an impartial respect to necessary duties was more to him than the

¹ Qu. 'too'?—ED.

greatest pomp of outward worship. It was so then, and it is so now. Pride, and malice, and envy, are greater evils than ceremonial uncleanness, and to fear God and work righteousness a greater duty than the best sacrifices. The performance of external duties is not, and never was, a sufficient testimony of true piety; nay, without the love of God and men, and a uniform obedience to his holy will, is mere hypocrisy.

6. When the breach of a ceremonial precept bringeth with it the transgression of a moral precept, and is (without any absolute necessity) imposed in neglect and contempt of the law of God, then we are to run all hazards, rather than to transgress in the smallest externals; because though the matter enjoined be but small, yet the contempt of God is a great sin, and our sincerity and obedience to God is a great matter. As for instance, when Antiochus pressed the Jews to eat swine's flesh, which in case of great extremity no question they might do, yet when he pressed them out of contempt of the law, they chose rather to be tortured to death than to yield to it. And for this they are registered martyrs: Heb. xi. 35, 'They were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might receive a better resurrection.' There is a plain allusion to the story in the book of the Maccabees, concerning Eleazar, and the woman with her seven sons, so cruelly tortured. But these commands were contrary to the laws of God. Should they have said, 'God will have mercy, and not sacrifice'? No; in such a case God will have sacrifice, and not mercy. Though often advised to yield, they would not abate a jot of their zeal. For though the case be but in externals, yet there is a renunciation of our relation and obedience to God's law. So Daniel opening his windows, and praying three times a day, as he was wont to do, Dan. vi. 10. That circumstance might have been forborne, you will think, in a case of such imminent peril of life. No; he would neither forbear praying nor opening his windows; he had wont to do so before, and without dishonouring God and renouncing his profession, he could not forbear to do so now. The promise of audience, made to Solomon at the dedication of the temple, required this ceremony as an effect of faith: 1 Kings viii. 42, 43, 'When they shall pray towards this house, then hear thou in heaven.' And David saith, Ps. v. 7, 'In thy fear I will worship towards thy holy temple.' The temple did shadow forth the body of our Lord Christ, the mediator, in whom only our prayers and services are accepted with the Father, which Solomon respected in looking towards the temple. But the chief reason is, the necessity of profession, and open profession too, against this impious law, contrived by the malice of his enemies to make him afraid. Now, to show he was not frightened from his duty, he openeth his windows, and would not forego any circumstance of his duty to God. I might instance in circumcision (as urged by the false apostles), as necessary to our justification: Gal. v. 2-4, 'Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law: Christ is become of none effect unto you. Whosoever of you are justified by the law, you are fallen from grace.' Such is the difference when God calleth us to the profession of a lesser truth. Therefore the case may be such that externals may bear great weight.

7. If the externals of God's worship instituted by himself must give place to mercy, then externals of human institution ought much more to give place to mercy. Sacrifices were of God's institution, and a way of expressing their obedience and thankfulness in his worship; yet God saith, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.' And twice is this applied by Christ—to mercy towards the souls of men in the text, and mercy concerning the bodies of men, Mat. xii., to defend the disciples rubbing the ears of corn, because they fainted for hunger. Then by like reason, where the urging of externals may cross mercy to the souls of men, by depriving them of the means of edification, and the gifts of a lively ministry, or crossing mercy to the bodies of men, by depriving them and their families of their necessary support and maintenance, in such a case they should 'learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.' And the peace and edification of the church is more valuable than that of a private man. In all external positive institutions, the apostles often urge charity to the souls of men, for which Christ died, that we neither wound them with sorrow or sin, as the sure rule to guide us, either in practising or forbearing our liberty: Rom. xiv. 15, 'Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died.' So 1 Cor. viii. 11, 'And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died;' that is, the scandalous abuse of this knowledge. In short, if any great damage to the souls or bodies, scandal or inconvenience, should come upon urging these externals, surely they should be forborne; for if it be the will and pleasure of the King of kings and Lord of lords that matters commanded by his affirmative precepts should be forborne for charity's sake, men should be persuaded to remit of the rigour of their impositions in this kind, though the things imposed were indifferent, and the practice of them in some cases a duty; yet if it would destroy charity, we are to leave our prayers, public and private, forsake a sermon to save the life of our neighbour; nay, to quench the fire burning his house; nay, to help his cattle out of the ditch. But I will prosecute this no further.

Let me now make some use of what hath been said.

1. Let us take heed that we be not of the number of them that are serious and zealous in some things, but not in all. Partial zeal hath always been the note of hypocrites; as the pharisees were earnest for externals, but neglected justice and charity. Saul is an instance of partial zeal in destroying the Gibeonites and sparing the Amalekites: 2 Sam. xxi. 2, 'Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.' He was expressly commanded to root out the Amalekites, but he spared Agag out of seeming pity; but useth barbarous cruelty in seeking to root out the Gibeonites, who were to be preserved by oath and covenant; and this he is said to do in his zeal. Not a true zeal, surely, as aiming at God's glory; for it tended much to his dishonour to have them destroyed, who were new proselytes, and professing religion, and had put themselves under God's protection; but a preposterous hypocritical zeal, of aiming, as he pretended, at the welfare of the commonwealth of Israel: his main intent was popular applause, and to gratify them who envied the Gentiles should be incorporated into God's people. An hypocrite's conscience is not uniform,

but brought upon the stage for a turn. I shall give you another instance in Jehu, mighty zealous in destroying the idolatry of Baal, which was the idolatry of the house of Ahab ; but not only cold and indifferent, but resolute against the destroying the calves of Dan and Bethel, which was the idolatry of Jeroboam : 2 Kings x. 28, 29, ' Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel. Howbeit, from the sins of Jeroboam, wherewith he made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from them, to wit, the golden calves in Dan and Bethel.' Reasons of state persuaded the one, and dissuaded the other. His interest lay in ruining the house of Ahab, and in taking care that the tribes might not revert to the house of David. Thus you see men zealous in some things may grievously sin in others. Therefore, my beloved, be you careful to regard all God's commands in their place ; piety in its place, justice in its place, mercy in its place. The Jews, after they had smarted in Babylon, were zealous against idols, but robbed God of his dues, never took care to restore the riches of the temple. Therefore the apostle taxeth this partiality of zeal : Rom. ii. 22, ' Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege ?' The latter prophets tax them much for that crime. The Jewish form still is hatred of idolatry, insomuch that they think that all the plagues that come upon them is for the idolatry of their fathers, especially in the sin of the golden calf in the wilderness ; and translate the scene of their repentance far enough from themselves, that they may not see their present sins, both in breaking the moral law and despising Christ. And every party is observed to have their form ; one special commandment which they stick unto, which they are zealous for, whilst they neglect the rest. The reproaches of our enemies, saith the pharisee, are only for the fourth commandment,¹ but neglect the rest ; zealous for the Sabbath, but unconscionable all the week after. Oh, let there be no occasion for this ! Others seem to make little reckoning of other commandments, and insist only upon the fifth, obedience to superiors. The charge is sometimes carried between the third and sixth² commandment ; they will not swear, but will lie, and slander their neighbours. I mention these things to show what need we have to be uniform in our obedience unto God.

I will mention but one motive. They that do not obey all, will not long obey any, but where their interest or inclinations require it, will break all : as Herod did many things, but one command stuck with him—his Herodias, and that bringeth him to murder God's prophet, Mark vi. 20. One sin keepeth possession for Satan, and that one lust and corruption may undo all. A bird tied by the leg may make some show of escape ; so do many think themselves at liberty, but the fowler hath them fast enough.

2. Let us not rest in outward duties of worship, and place our zeal there, for that is an ill spirit that doth so, it is the badge of pharisaism : they keep a fair correspondence with God in the outward duties of his worship, but in other things deny their subjection to him ; the main reason is, because externals of worship are more easy than the denial of lusts. The sensual nature of man is such, that it is loth to be

¹ Qu. ' The reproaches of our enemies saith, the pharisees are only for, &c.'—ED.

² Qu. ' Ninth' ?—ED.

crossed, which produceth profaneness. Wherefore do men ingulf themselves in all manner of sensuality, but because they are loth to deny their natural appetites and desires, and to row against the stream of flesh and blood, and so to walk in the way of his own heart, and the sight of his eyes? Ecces. xi. 9. If nature must be crossed, it shall be crossed only for a little, and in some slight manner; they will give God some outward thing, which lieth remote from the subjection of the heart to him, therefore be zealous for externals; and this produceth hypocrisy, gross hypocrisy, and dissembling, whereby we deceive others, and get a good name among others, by a zeal and fervency for God's outward institutions. And this close hypocrisy or partiality of obedience, is that whereby we deceive ourselves, exceeding in external actions and duties, while we neglect those substantials wherein the heart and life of religion most lieth: such are the love of God, contempt of the world, mortification of the flesh, the heavenly mind and holy constitution of the soul, firmly set to please God in all things.

Once more; that this deceit may be more strong, men are apt to exceed in outward observances, or by-laws of their own; and this produceth superstition, either *negative*, in condemning some outward things which God never condemned, as those ordinances of men which the apostle speaketh of, Col. ii. 21, 'Touch not, taste not, handle not;' or *positive*, in doing many things as duties, and crying them up as special acts and helps of religion, which God never instituted to that end and purpose: Mark vii. 7, 8, 'Teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.' The spirit and genius of superstition lieth in this—neglecting many things which God commandeth, but multiplying bonds and chains of their own making. Sacrifices enough! God shall have anything for the sin of their souls, Micah vi. 6, 7. Thus these three great evils, profaneness, hypocrisy, and superstition, do all grow upon the same stem and root. First, men must have an easy religion, where the flesh is not crossed, but no mortifying of lusts, no exercising ourselves to godliness. They can deny themselves in parting with a sacrifice, but the weighty things of piety, justice, and mercy are neglected. God shall have prayers enough, hearing enough, if the humour and temper of the body will suit with it. They can fast and gash themselves like Baal's priests; whip their bodies, but spare their sins; but the heart is not subdued to God. They can part with anything better than their lusts, and disturb the present ease of the body, by attending on long and tedious duties, rather than any solid and serious piety.

II. The next lesson which we learn is, the guise of hypocrites; for our Lord intimateth that these pharisees had great need to learn the importance of that truth, as being extremely faulty: 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.'

I. The first thing notable in hypocrites is a partial zeal; they have not an uniform conscience; are very exact in some things, but exceedingly defective and faulty in others. The good conscience is entire and universal: Heb. xiii. 18, 'We trust that we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.' The sincere purpose and intention of his heart was to direct his life according to the will of God in all things. Though every one hath his failings, yet the will

and constant endeavour of a sincere heart is to govern himself universally according to the will of God in all points of duty, whether they concern God or man : as it is said of Zachary and Elizabeth, Luke i. 6, That they 'walked in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless,' The renewed conscience doth approve all ; and the renewed will, which is the imperial power in the soul, the first mover and principle of all moral actions, is bent and inclined to obey all ; and the new life is spent in striving to comply with all. But it is not so with hypocrites. They pick and choose out the easiest part in religion, and lay out all their zeal there, but let other things go : in some duties that are of easy digestion, and nourish their disease rather than cure their soul, none so zealous as they, none so partial as they. Now, a partial zeal for small things, with a plain neglect of the rest, is direct pharisaism ; all for sacrifice, nothing for mercy. Therefore every one of us should take heed of halving and dividing with God : if we make conscience of piety, let us also make conscience of justice ; if of justice, let us also make conscience of mercy. It is harder to renounce one sin wherein we delight, than a greater which we do not equally affect. A man is wedded to some special lusts, and is loth to hear of a divorce from them. We have our tender and sore places in the conscience, which we are loth should be touched. But if we be sincere with God we will keep ourselves from all, even from our own iniquity, Ps. xviii. 23 ; such as is most incident to us by temper, or custom of life, or course of our interests. To baulk or break with God, out of private reasons of pleasure, honour, or profit, or any corrupt interest, is to prefer these things before God, and to set up another chief good in our hearts, and to prefer it before his favour. Thus in general.

2. They place all their godliness and righteousness in outward observances or external discipline, and so their religion is more in the flesh and in the letter than in heart and spirit ; as the pharisees rested in outward worship only, or some external rules, without the inward and real duties either of the first or second table. Mat. xxiii. 25, they 'cleansed the outside of the cup and platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess ;' and ver. 28, 'Ye appear outwardly righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.' And everywhere they are represented as painted tombs without, but had much hidden uncleanness and corruption within. There was an outward formality and show of religion, when they denied the power thereof. They should join obedience to God and love to their neighbour with their outward sacrifices ; but these things were of little value and esteem with them. Now, what sacrifices were to them, that external ordinances are to us ; and what their rituals were, the same is the mode and garb of profession among us. And, therefore, external profession, or the performance of external duties according to our way, is not a sufficient testimony of true godliness. For Christ saith, Mat. v. 20, 'Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Their righteousness was an outside righteousness, without that inward constitution of soul which doth belong to a renewed heart, and yet carried on in such a way, and applauded by men, that

the Jews had a saying, That if but two men out of all the world went to heaven, the one should be a scribe and the other a pharisee. O Christians! it is one thing to approve ourselves to God, who searcheth the heart, and another thing to approve ourselves to men, who look only to the outside and fair appearance without. A renewed heart, that is unfeignedly set to please God in all things, is more than all the pomp of external duties. And, therefore, we should study to give evidence of this by making conscience of obedience, as well inwardly as outwardly, growing in holiness all the days of our lives. This will be comfortable to us, and this will be approved of God hereafter, even such an holiness as is manifested in all the parts of our conversation, in outward carriage and secret practice, common affairs, and religious duties; in the worship of God, and charity and justice to men: Phil. iii. 3, 'We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh.' When there is a serious bent, and the true spiritual affections of a renewed heart towards God and man, and we do not rest in outward duties, but are still growing in internal grace, faith, hope, and love, and are still purifying the heart and life, that we may constantly glorify God, and do good to men, this is that which is over and above the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees: our duty is to serve God in the spirit, and to bring the inward man in subjection to him, without which externals are of little worth.

3. They were more in love with ceremonies than with substance. Sacrifices, which belonged to the ceremonies of the law, were in high esteem with them; but godliness, justice, and mercy were of little regard. And as outward things were preferred before inward, so the lesser things before the weighty: as to their duties, tithing mint, and anise, and cummin; but they have omitted the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, faith. 'These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone,' Mat. xxiii. 23. Formality and hypocrisy maketh men wise about that which is least to purpose. They make a business about ceremonies, but neglect the substance of religion. They enlarged their phylacteries, which were scrolls of parchment on which the law was written, but took no care of having the law of God written upon their hearts. Hypocrisy is an odd, trifling zeal, which runneth out upon little things. So for avoiding sin, Mat. xxiii. 24, 'They strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.' More scrupulous in a little sin than a great; in small sins very scrupulous, in greater matters very adventurous. And because this is one of the main things here intended, I shall give you instances and reasons.

[1.] Instances to prove that hypocrites have such an odd conscience that straineth greatly at a small thing. We have them everywhere out of the word of God. Herod's making conscience of his oath, but not of shedding innocent blood: 'The king was sorry: nevertheless, for his oath's sake,' &c., Mat. xiv. 9, he caused John the Baptist to be beheaded. A sinner is holden in bonds which he might lawfully break; rather than Herod will break his rash oath John shall lose his head. Of such an odd complexion is the conscience of carnal men. So the Jews, when Judas laid down the hire of his

treason, and cast the money at their feet, Mat. xxvii. 6, 7, 'It is not lawful,' said they, 'to put it into the treasury, because it is the price of blood;' pretending to be afraid to offend in the least things, when they had offended in the greater. They boggled not at betraying innocent blood, and yet they would not meddle with the gain when it was thrown back to them. Another instance of the like conscience is John xviii. 28, 'Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the judgment-hall, and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the passover.' They were careful to avoid legal pollution, and yet they were at the same time seeking the life of the Lord of glory. Just such another fit of conscience cometh upon them a little after: John xix. 31, They went to Pilate, and desired that the bodies might not hang upon the cross on the Sabbath-day, lest their great feast should be defiled. And thus you see that through formality and custom men may be strictly bound in conscience to perform the duties of ceremonial or external worship, whose consciences notwithstanding never scruple to violate the most weighty precepts of the law. Just of this nature was that solemn case of conscience, Zech. vii. 1, 2, about the keeping of their fasts, when the prophet telleth them they had higher matters to mind, the executing of judgment and showing mercy, and breaking off their oppressions, ver. 10. The Lord would not answer their cases about the fasts, some of which were needless and superfluous; but would have them break off their known sins. Hitherto may be reduced the harlot in the Proverbs, that enticed the young man to adultery, and yet she had her peace-offerings: 'I have peace-offerings with me this day,' Prov. vii. 14, with the 18th; made conscience of her sacrifices, but not of her honesty and chastity. Yea, also, we may reckon to this rank of conscience the instance of Bathsheba. Even the children of God have much hypocrisy, and an odd kind of conscience, when they give way to wilful and heinous sin. The passage is, 2 Sam. xi. 4, 'David took her, and committed adultery with her, for she was purified from her uncleanness.' That uncleanness was ceremonial only; but in the meantime she was committing a moral uncleanness, from which she was not so careful to keep herself. Well, then, the consciences of men being of such a make, well might God say, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;' substance, and not ceremony. And we have all need to take heed to ourselves that we do not boggle and startle at a shadow, when in the meantime we are stupid and senseless in sins of another nature and deeper dye, and preserve a tenderness in lesser things, when we give way to injustice and oppression.

[2.] The reasons why hypocrites never find their consciences awake so much as in matters ceremonial. I shall give these two:—

First, Because these are of easiest digestion, and will sooner satisfy the conscience. Slight duties suit best with a heart that is unwilling to come under the power of religion. Conscience is like the stomach, which naturally desireth to fill itself; and when it cannot digest solid food, it sucketh nothing but wind. They that place their confidence in their own righteousness, presently fly to their external shows. The right stating of the duties of the law, according to their due weight,

would convince them of their mistake. Therefore, that the ell may be no longer than the cloth, they confine their obedience to external observations, and so make their religion as commodious for themselves as they can. Adultery is nothing to eating flesh in Lent, or breaking some external rule. The apostle saith, 'Going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to the righteousness of God,' Rom. x. 3. Not to the way of solid righteousness and broken-hearted acceptance of Christ, but an external appearance of duty is most for their interest.

Secondly, To put the better pretence upon their vile practices, therefore they must have some external ceremonies to countenance them. Thus the pharisees, to countenance their oppressions, 'for a pretence make long prayers,' Mat. xxiii. 14. That made them be trusted by the destitute widows, whom they deceived. As Jezebel would have the formality of a fast, for the better colour of her impiety in destroying Naboth. In days of fasts, they were wont to inquire after heinous offenders, to execute the law upon them, as you may see Num. xv. 7, 8, and Ps. cvi. 30, so to stop God's wrath. So some expound that, Joel i. 14, 'Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders;' that is, call a court who may inquire into offenders, that they may be punished and reformed. So Jezebel calls a fast, for the better pretence of a court to take cognisance of Naboth's sin.

4. They make conscience, not only of externals instituted by God, but mostly of those that are devised by themselves. This very abstinence from converse with publicans was a thing not forbidden by the law, but an institution of their own; because of their frequent converse with heathens, they looked upon them as a polluted sort of men, and unworthy of their converse. So that this helpeth us to another character of hypocrites; they are zealous for human traditions, but transgressors of divine commands; God's precepts are little regarded; and so prefer their own institutions before the laws of God. So Mat. xv. 3, 'By your traditions ye transgress the commands of God;' namely, by holding that if a man had devoted his estate to God, he might choose whether he would relieve his parents. Men are mightily in love with their own customs, and place much religion in man's injunctions, and care not how they loosen or weaken the obligation of God's law by their impositions. The pharisees' great fault was, they would outdo the law in externals; and then, when they had set their post by God's post, they were more zealous for man's inventions than for God's ordinances; and this zeal is shown either by imposing upon themselves or others—imposing upon their own consciences when they lie in chains of their own making; on others when they make their own practice the rule of others: Mat. ix. 14, 'The pharisees fast, John's disciples fast, thy disciples fast not.' To this head we may reduce Saul's rash restraining the people by his injunction and oath, 1 Sam. xiv. 32, with ver. 38. The people had gotten a great victory, and Saul, out of his hypocritical zeal, commandeth them to fast till evening. Now what was the issue? The people, through faintness, could not pursue the enemy; Jonathan, that heard nothing of this curse and oath, was in danger of his life; and the people, being

hunger-starved, for greediness did eat the flesh and the blood together, contrary to God's law, Gen. ix. 4; Lev. xvii. 13, 14. Mark there: though hunger could not force to transgress Saul's commandment for fear of death, yet it forced them to break God's express commandment in eating the blood, which was so expressly forbidden. And at night, when God answered him not, Saul thought somewhat was in the matter; he goeth to cast lots, and the lot had found out Jonathan. Saul never thinketh of the breach of God's law—first by himself, in imposing a rash and sinful oath; or of the people's sin, in eating the blood with the flesh; and presumeth it must needs be the breach of that oath which he had imposed; and so, like a hypocrite, preferreth his own groundless command before the law of God, and of punishing this with rigour when the other is never spoken of. I have brought this story to show you how zealous men are for their own impositions on themselves and others, and how easily they can dispense with God's laws to comply with their own; and how drunkenness, whoredom, and fornication do not seem such odious crimes as violating man's customs and institutions and private rules of their own.

5. Hypocrites have a conceit of their own righteousness, and a disdain of others. This was the very case in the text; they were angry because Christ entered into the house of Matthew, a publican, and did eat meat there, though he had converted him. And elsewhere it is made the characteristic note of the pharisees: Luke xviii. 9, 'They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.' Men that fly to externals are soon puffed up, and nothing humbleth so much as a sound sense of religion; and a solemn exercising ourselves to godliness maketh us see and loathe ourselves and pity others. I find the pharisees enemies ever to the freeness of God's grace to sinners and the work of repentance, and that the bringing of poor sinners to salvation was the great eyesore. They call Christ a wine-bibber and a friend of publicans and sinners, because of his social and free, but sanctified, converse with all sorts of men, Mat. xi. 18. He would not take such a strict form as John did, because he would not seem to justify their pharisaical rigours. So again, Luke xv. 2, 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them;' because he went to them as a physician to heal their souls. Christ refused not familiarity with the poorest and worst, as was needful for their cure, and would not observe the humour of proud pharisaical separation, by the parables of the lost sheep and the lost groat, but confuteth it; showeth that this is the spirit of the elder brother who envied the prodigal's return; and telleth them in another place that 'Publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of heaven before them,' Mat. xxi. 31; pleadeth the cause of the woman against Simon the pharisee, Luke vii. 39. 'If this man had been a prophet, he would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touched him,' Luke vii. 47: Christ telleth him, 'She had much forgiven her, for she loved much.' Well, then, a penitent, broken-hearted sense of our own being indebted to grace, and tender compassion towards others that yet go astray, discovereth the true spirit of the gospel. But to stand aloof from others by a foolish singularity,

Isa. lxxv. 5, which say, 'Stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou.' Some, though impure and profane, counted all others unholy and unclean but themselves. This inclosing spirit is the spirit of pharisaism; an outside strictness, without that faith, love, charity, meekness, usefulness, and humility, which is the very soul and life of Christianity. Usually gifts and outward strictness puff up men with a vain conceit of their own righteousness, and a censuring and despising others. This one text showeth us both the spirit of pharisaism and the spirit of Christianity. The pharisees, who abounded in external observances, censured Christ for his free converse, disdained these penitent people whom he invited to a better life. But now true religion maketh men humble and lowly in their own eyes, by acquainting them with the desert of sin and their own misery, and maketh men pitiful and compassionate towards others, more ready to help than to censure them, and to use all ways and means to do them good. But when men would shine alone in the repute of holiness, they are envious to those who penitently return to their duty, as those servants who had wrought all the day envied those that came in at the last hour, Mat. xx. 12, or as the elder brother envied the prodigal, or Simon the pharisee repined at Mary Magdalene's¹ observance of Christ. They esteem much of their own works, merits, sufferings, and righteousness. Oh, take heed of this spirit!

[1.] The use of this branch is to press us to regard internals more than externals, and the substantials more than the ceremonials of worship, and a broken-hearted, thankful sense of our Redeemer's love before a legal righteousness. Inward worship is love, fear, and trust; outward worship is prayer, praise, hearing, reading. Outward worship is not a duty at all times, but inward worship is a duty at all times; for we should always love God, and delight in God, and trust in God. Outward worship may be omitted for a work of mercy, and in case of invincible necessities; but inward worship may never be omitted, never dispensed with. We always owe love and renewed obedience to God, and must depend upon him and delight in him. Outward worship may be counterfeited; and external worship, without holiness, is highly displeasing to God, and never pleasing but when it is in conjunction with it. Hypocrites may abound in externals, but hypocrites will not delight themselves in the Lord, nor heartily devote themselves to him, so as to serve, please, and glorify him: the inward graces cannot be counterfeited, but the outward expression may.

[2.] Be more careful of the substantials than of the ceremonials of religion, and to mind the power of godliness more than the form. The substantials of religion are the love of God and our neighbour. The circumstantial are those ways of worship which God hath appointed, whereby we are visibly to express our love to him. Now, our main care should be, in the first place, to be entirely devoted and subject to God. That was Job's character, 'one that feared God and eschewed evil,' Job i. 11. To do that we do out of love to him; obeying his laws as our rule, and depending upon his rewards as our happiness. And as to men, let us be faithful, and walk holily in our

¹ There is no good reason for believing that the woman alluded to was Mary Magdalene.—ED.

places, callings, and relations, being just and kind unto all, but having an exceeding dear love for our fellow-saints and everlasting companions. This is more pleasing to God than the costliest sacrifices, than all our flocks and herds, or any outward thing that we do for him. I take notice of those words of God to Solomon, when he was building him a magnificent temple, 1 Kings vi. 11, 12, 'And the word of the Lord came to Solomon, saying, Concerning this house which thou art building, if thou wilt walk in my statutes, and execute my judgments, and keep all my commandments to walk in them, then will I perform my word to thee, which I spake to David thy father.' God hath more respect to Solomon's faithful obedience than to that glorious building. So far do morals exceed ceremonials in religion.

[3.] That you prefer a broken-hearted, thankful sense of our Redeemer's love, before legal and conceited righteousness of our own. Christ's love to sinners is that which the pharisees mainly stumbled at. An external show and fair pretence of a good life, which had no bottom of regeneration, was the superficial righteousness of the pharisees. Nicodemus, who had been of that sect, wondered when that was pressed upon him, John iii. 4, 5. An outward conformity, which was more in show than in substance, in form and fashion than in power, was their religion; abstaining from gross sins, as murder and adultery, but not purifying the heart from lusts. Murder they made conscience of, but not of envy, malice, and hatred; theft, but not covetousness and close extortion; adultery, but not wantonness or looking upon a woman to lust after her, as you may see at large, Mat. v. Thus Christ presseth us to exceed the pharisees, who turned all obedience into an empty formality, wherein they puffed up themselves as mere men, and so had never been at the market of free grace. All their wares were their own, and their righteousness of their own spinning, and therein stood upon their own bottom, without seeking the reconciling and renewing grace of the Redeemer: Luke xviii., The proud pharisee pleadeth his own merits rather than God's grace, but the publican pleaded mercy. It was long ere Paul was brought to count all but dung and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, Phil. iii. 7-9. But on the other side, a Christian, though he maketh progress in holiness, yet, from first to last, cherisheth a broken-hearted sense of his own wants, and a thankful remembrance of his Redeemer's love, who is all in all with him, both for justification and sanctification. Before pardon, the sinner is weakened and humbled with a sense of his lost condition, and then there is a constant watchfulness, with repentance and brokenness of heart, which followeth pardon; 'loving much, because much is forgiven,' Luke vii. 47; and loathing himself, in his own sight, because of his vileness and sinfulness, after God is reconciled to him, Ezek. xvi. 63. This is the frame of heart which suiteth with the gospel state.

III. I come to the third thing—the value of mercy. I shall not speak of it at large, but only with respect to this scripture.

1. It is better than sacrifice. To sacrifice is to serve God, but to show mercy is to be like God: Luke vi. 36, 'Be ye therefore merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful.' Now, conformity to God is more noble than subjection to God; it hath more of perfection and

blessedness in it especially, than a particular external mode and way of subjection to God.

2. As it is preferred before sacrifice, so it is preferred before the external observation of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is the great institution conducing to the enlivening of other duties; mercy, not only to the souls of men as here, or bodies of men, but mercy to the bodies of the beasts: to help a beast out of a pit is a Sabbath-day's work, Mat. xii. 11, 12.

3. It is more than gospel externals of worship. The apostle had spoken of being 'not hearers of the word only, but doers also,' James i. 22. Then saith, verse 27, 'Pure religion, and undefiled before God, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep himself unspotted from the world.' Is this religion, to come to church, to hear the strictest preachers? Doth the apostle reckon this another part of religion? No; but to 'visit the fatherless and widows.' They who are truly religious have such a deep sense of God's mercy to them that they are changed into the divine nature, that they cannot but pity the miserable and afflicted. Now, the ordinances of the gospel are rational, not so carnal and servile as the ordinances under the law.

4. It is more excellent than all the gifts of the gospel. The gifts of the gospel were glorious things—gifts of tongues, gifts of healing, gifts of knowledge and utterance: 1 Cor. xii. 31, 'Covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet I show you a more excellent way.' What is that? Love, charity, mercy. Though abilities are excellent things, to be able to edify and instruct others, yet no way to be compared with the grace of charity, and the performing all our duties to our brethren out of love to God.

5. I cannot say it is above the graces of the gospel—faith and love to God; yet this I can say, that those graces are not real unless accompanied with charity: 1 John iv. 20, 'If a man say he loveth God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for if a man hateth his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' He speaketh there of love to Christ, ver. 19, 'We love him because he loved us first.' There may be a great deal of hypocrisy in professing and pretending love to Christ; and so he doth, certainly, who doth malign and persecute Christians, or not show mercy to them in their distresses. We daily converse with men, meet with objects of charity, whom we should pity; but if we do not this, which is the more easy, we will not do that which is more difficult.

6. It is the qualification of finding mercy: Mat. v. 7, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' Compassion to other men's bodies and souls gives this hope and confidence of finding mercy with the Lord, and that is all our hope.

It will be inquired into at the day of judgment: Mat. xxv. 35–41, 'For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick or in prison,

and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.'

Oh, then, let us make conscience of this duty more than ever we have done.