

faithful to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Nothing sets forth his glory so much as this. It is the glory of a man to pass by an offence; surely then it is a perfection to forgive sin; for whatever is excellent in man is much more in God.

3. Consider what a blessed comfort it is to have sin forgiven: Ps. xxxii. 1, 2, 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered: blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not sin, and in whose spirit there is no guile.' Sin is a burden to a troubled conscience, too heavy to be borne. Oh, how great a blessing is it to be eased of this burden, and to have our filthiness covered, and not to have iniquity imputed to us, not to have our sins charged upon us to our condemnation!

Use 2. To stir us up not to offend God any more, or provoke him to anger by our sins. God's mercy in remission of sin should make us more cautious in committing it. Because the old score is wiped off, let us not run on upon a new one; being washed, let us not defile ourselves again, and wallow in that mire again out of which we were so lately drawn. If God forgets and remembereth our sins no more, let us not act them over again, as if we would strive to make work for pardoning mercy, and shame and sorrow to ourselves, and set our teeth on edge with the forbidden fruit of sin, whereof we are now ashamed.

SERMON II.

I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.—
1 JOHN ii. 13, 14.

OBSERVE in these words—

1. That there are three sorts of christians, 'fathers,' 'young men,' and 'little children.'

2. Several things are ascribed to them, correspondent and proper to every age—

[1.] To fathers, that 'they have known him that was from the beginning.' The knowledge of ancient things which are past is best befitting old men.

[2.] That which he ascribeth to young men is, that they 'are strong,' that 'the word of God abideth in them,' that they 'have overcome the wicked one.' Strength for war is fit for young men.

[3.] To babes and little children, 'because you have known the Father.' Little children acknowledge their parents are dear to them, hang about them, and cannot live without them.

I shall now insist upon the first observation, the distinction of three sort of christians, 'fathers,' 'young men,' and 'little children.' The question is, whether this distinction respects the diversity of their natural age, or their different measures of growth in grace? Some apply it only to their natural age, others more properly understand it of their spiritual growth.

I shall give you the sense of these words in several propositions.

1. Though spiritual growth be most considerable here, yet natural age is not altogether to be excluded. God hath people of all sorts and sizes, some old, some in the prime and freshness of youth, others that are but newly got out of infancy and childhood. As it is hard to find out a calling wherein there are not some one or other that belong to God, so not an age wherein God hath not showed some remarkable instances of his grace. For fathers or old men, we read of Paul the aged, Philem. 9, and of Mnason an old disciple, Acts xxi. 16. Among young men we read of Josiah, 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3, 'That in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and carved images, and molten images.' He began to reign at eight years old, as soon as out of his minority. So of good Obadiah: 1 Kings xviii. 12, 'But I thy servant fear God from my youth.' In the rank of children we read of Samuel: 1 Sam. ii. 18, 'And Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child;' and of Timothy, 'that from a child he had known the holy scriptures,' 2 Tim. iii. 15. Hosanna was not displeasing to Christ in little children, yea, it was defended by him: Mat. xxi. 15, 16, 'And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were sore displeased, and said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus said unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?' God instils a measure of grace into the hearts of little ones, and is delighted in their praise according to their measure of understanding suitable to their age. He that punished little children for crying Baldpate to his prophet, defendeth little children, and accepts it as an honour when they cried Hosanna to himself. Well, then, people of all ages should apply themselves to religion. Old men excuse themselves, they are too old to interest themselves in Christ; and children are not ripe, and young men are otherwise occupied; but fathers for age should be also fathers for knowledge and godliness. It is a great blessing and a crown of honour when the hoary head is 'found in a way of righteousness,' Prov. xvi. 31; when a man is grown old and greyheaded in Christ's service, as Enoch lived three hundred and sixty-five years, and 'walked with God,' Gen. v. 22; a long age and well spent. On the contrary, how sad is it when men have spent many years unfruitfully, and are acquainted with all other things but God and their own souls, and have not as yet begun to live spiritually; when they have one foot in the grave, and are as good as dead already! As it is said of Abraham, Heb. xi. 12, 'Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead.' You never begin to live till you live in Christ. You have but told over so many summers and winters;

all that time is lost that is spent in your unregeneracy. A man may be long at sea, and yet make but a short voyage, get but a little ground, though long tossed upon the waves. Oh, bethink yourselves before your hoary head go down to the grave in sorrow! Say not, as Nicodemus, 'Shall a man re-enter into his mother's womb, being old?' This is a spiritual work that must pass upon you. God promiseth to pour out his Spirit upon old ones: Acts ii. 17, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.' Out of a ruinous heap of stones that is ready to drop in pieces, he can raise up to himself a temple for the holy Ghost to dwell in. Submit to this work before it be too late. Chimneys long foul, if they be not swept, are fired at length: 'The sinner of a hundred years old shall be accursed;' Isa. lvi. 20, 'There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days; for the child shall die a hundred years old, but the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed.' It is a difficult place; but the meaning is, that God promiseth his people long life; and if they did attain to it, and employed it merely to fill up the measure of their sins, it should not be to them a blessing, but a curse; that is, he that lives unreclaimed and unreformed shall at length prove an accursed wretch.

2. For young men, it concerneth them to apply their hearts to godliness. There is an ignorant and profane conceit which possesseth many men's minds, that it is not so necessary for young men to study the scriptures, or to trouble themselves much with thinking of heaven or the life to come, because they are young and lusty, and likely to live many years, and therefore think it more fit for them to follow the world, and mind the things of this life, and let old men alone to think of heaven and holiness. Our apostle was not of this mind: 'I write unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you.' And the scripture biddeth us to 'remember our Creator in the days of our youth,' Eccles. xii. 1. Our best and flowery years should be consecrated to God. And David would have the 'young man cleanse his way,' Ps. cxix. 9. The world thinketh, What have young folk to do with so serious a work? When old age hath snowed upon their heads, and the smart experience of more years in the world hath ripened them for so severe a discipline, then it is time to think of repentance, and cleansing the heart from sin, and providing for our last end and great account. No; God demandeth his right of the young man, that he should be seasoned betimes with grace. It is but reason that God, that gave all, should have our first and best; they glorify God most who begin with him soonest. The lusts of youth being boiling hot, need the correction of a more severe discipline. Youth are apt to be inclined to liberty and carnal pleasures, are led by the motions of the flesh, are headstrong in their passions; the devil layeth most snares for them, as those who are most prone to sin, who are like to serve him longest; and therefore, that they may not be caught in Satan's snares, they should begin with God betimes. It prevents many sins which afterward will be a trouble to us. We think tricks of youth are long since forgotten and forgiven. Oh, but the guilt of them may flash in our faces, even after they are pardoned: Ps. xxv. 7,

'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord;' Job xiii. 26, 'For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me possess the iniquities of my youth.' It will save us a great deal of trouble in age. A good man may remember old sins with new fears, that they are not pardoned. While it is easy to sin, it is not easy to believe the pardon of sin; but as a man groweth up into a greater sense and esteem of God's holiness, he will find it more difficult to believe a pardon. Now afflictions may awaken the sense of old sins, as old bruises trouble us a long time after upon every change of weather.

3. For babes or little children; they being born in sin, must also be born again. Little children are baptized and washed, for they have filthiness to be cleansed away in the laver of regeneration, as heretofore they were circumcised: Deut. xxx. 6, 'And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live;' because there is filthiness to be pared away. And many times God shameth old men when little ones get the start of them. Christ inviteth little children to come to him that he might bless them, Mark x. 16. They cannot be brought to him before they are welcome. The great God, whom heaven and earth cannot contain, deigneth to dwell in the hearts of little ones. Surely they that have the education of children belonging to them should season them betimes with good principles; they find the benefit of it ever afterward. Timothy proved the better instrument because of his good education; the apostle telleth us, that his 'faith dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice,' 2 Tim i. 5. Certainly it is much to have children brought up in knowledge, and an owning of the power of godliness. Families are societies to be sanctified to God, as well as churches. Governors of them have a charge of souls, as well as pastors. Many offer their children to God in baptism, but educate and bring them up for the world and the flesh; as the Jews: Ezek. xvi. 20, 'Moreover, thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, which thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them.' The scripture often inviteth us to a careful education of them; and there be many promises of good success: Prov. xxii. 6, 'Train up a child in the way in which he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' Dye the cloth in the wool, and not in the web, and the colour is the more durable. God worketh strangely in children, and many times rare things are found in them beyond expectation.

But now in regard of spiritual growth—

1. There is a great difference among christians; all are not of one stature, strength, and growth in godliness; as here, there are fathers, young men, and babes. He supposeth the more elderly will be fathers in Christ, and that every one hath profited according to his time and standing. So in the parable of the sower, Mat. xiii., some brought forth 'fruit thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred-fold,' Mat. xiii. 23. There is not only a difference between the good soil and the bad ground, but the bad soil is not in all places alike fruitful. Every true christian that is fruitful doth not bring forth fruit in a like measure. So

¹ Qu. 'good'?—ED.

in the parable of the talents, there is five, two, and one, Mat. xxv. 21-23. He is owned as a good servant that brought an account of his gain proportionable to his receipt. So Christ, when he giveth Peter charge of his flock, John xxi. 15, 16, 'Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.' There are varieties of tempers and degrees of strength among christians. Some are weak, or lambs; some stronger, or sheep: Isa. xl. 11, 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom; and shall gently lead those that are with young.' They all need a ministry to teach, whether lambs or sheep, whether fathers or children. So again, some are weak and some are strong: Rom. xiv. 1, 'Him that is weak in the faith, receive you.' Some need milk, and some stronger meat: Heb. v. 13, 14, 'For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe; but strong meat belongeth unto them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.' Well, then, you see there is great variety of christians, who differ, not only from the carnal and wicked, but among themselves, in several degrees of excellencies. God created Adam and Eve in their full perfection, but doth not regenerate us into our full stature in Christ.

2. It may fall out that the elder christians may be babes in Christ, and the younger christians rather fathers for their longer experience in the things of God, and for the better government of their passions. A young man may be an old disciple; as Josiah, Samuel, and King Edward the Sixth. The Spirit of God doth wonderfully discover itself in some betimes; as in Samuel, Jeremiah, and Timothy. Ignatius in his epistle to the Magnesians saith, There are some *οἱ τὴν πολιὰν μάτην φέροντες*, that they hang out the bush of grey hairs in vain, as inviting others to take notice of their folly: these are children of days, of grey heads but green wits; ancient of age, but of childish behaviour and disposition. Whereas David when young was wiser than his enemies, than his teachers, than the ancients: Ps. cxix. 100, 'I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.' Gracious abilities come not from age, but from the Spirit. He was 'wiser than his enemies,' because he consulted not with flesh and blood, but with the word of God, or his duty: as plain honesty will be found at length to be the best wisdom. He was 'wiser than his teachers,' because he contented not himself with naked doctrinal truths, but laboured with his conscience to make them profitable to himself, and so saw further by these truths into his own cause than they intended. Wiser than the ancients, or men of long study and experience, because of his diligent practice. Those who are slow and dull of conceit, by long use may grow wise; and having smarted often, learn by their own harms to be more circumspect. But now the Spirit of God can teach us in an instant, and a man well studied in God's law may excel the ancients in true zeal, knowledge, and piety. Mortified young ones may have more of this wisdom than the ancients. Ancient men try several conclusions to their own loss; but God is more ancient than they, and at one view and prospect seeth all things; if he will direct me, I am safe. Joseph young, at seventeen years old, was wiser than his brethren. Naaman's 'servant came near, and spake to him, and said,

My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much more then when he saith, Wash and be clean?' 2 Kings v. 13. Christ at twelve years of age puzzled the doctors. Young Elihu brings milder words and better arguments in the dispute with Job than his aged friends, chap. xxxii. Solomon was very wise when young. Daniel and his fellows ten times more than all the astrologers and magicians, though children, Dan. i. 17-20. Joseph taught the senators of Egypt wisdom. It is God's free grace and sovereignty, who giveth to every one as he pleaseth: Job xxxii. 7-9 'I said, Days should speak, and the multitude of years teach wisdom: but there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. Great men are not always wise, neither do the aged understand judgment.' God will not be tied to age. Some drink in religion with their milk. Jeremiah was sanctified in the womb, Jer. i. 5. And many times youth goeth before the aged in ripeness of wisdom, and in solid and settled manners, though they are so much behind them in number of years. So there are old children.

3. As to spiritual growth, some may be weak and strong, young and old at the same time, in different respects, as we see by experience. Some are weak in knowledge, rude and unsettled in the faith, who yet have a good zeal toward God, and are temperate, just, and holy, and have a great command over their affections and passions. On the other side, some are of a good understanding, and they come behind in no gift, yet are subject to carnal passions and affections, and so are babes in that respect: 1 Cor. iii. 1-3, 'And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able: for ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you strife and division, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?' Our first parents, the upper part of their souls were well furnished, yet miscarried by appetite. Solomon, who had so great wisdom, had also his foolish lusts. Therefore, the apostle biddeth us add to knowledge temperance, 2 Peter i. 5. A great measure of grace is seen in governing our own hearts. Now a christian should labour for both, for a good heart well-headed, and a head well-hearted. Of the two it is better to excel in graces than in parts. In the primitive times there was a distinction of the *ψυχικὸὶ* and *πνευματικὸὶ*; the *ψυχικὸὶ*, such as had rare perfections of learning and parts, and *πνευματικὸὶ*, spiritual. Sometimes these terms were applied to those who had attained to a higher degree of knowledge and sanctification: Gal. vi. 1, 'If a man be overtaken with a fault, ye that are spiritual restore him.' 'Spiritual' is put for a higher sort of christians. A spiritual people is not a people of parts, knowledge, and abilities, but of grace and sanctification.

4. There is a wonderful difference between christians and themselves at sundry times; so that these three degrees may be coincident. The gravest father may be as weak as the youngest child, as violently tempted as the young man. The state of a godly man is not always one and the same; sometimes they are carried into the mount to behold Christ in his glory, at another time tossed with waves and tempests, as a ship ready to sink; now rapt up with Paul into the paradise of

God, to see things which cannot be uttered, and anon they are afflicted with a messenger of Satan. Alterations and changes, calms and storms, peace and troubles, combats and conquests, weaknesses and strength, are there found in God's children; therefore the best are to walk humbly, and in a holy fear and trembling. Satan's design is against the spiritual christian, and those who are more eminent than others, to throw them into the mire, that religion may have the greater wound and dishonour. Thus did Satan desire to winnow Christ's own disciples: Luke xxii. 31, 'And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.' And the apostle biddeth the spiritual, which sometimes signifies a higher sort of christians, to 'take heed lest they also be tempted,' Gal. vi. 1; and those that stand, to 'take heed lest they fall,' 1 Cor. x. 12. It is woful when a christian of great parts and grace begins to have any confidence in himself, and falls, as Peter did. In violent gusts of wind, even cedars may fall to the ground. Therefore, as we grow in grace, we should increase in humility and godly fear.

5. All this doth not hinder but that some from their settled constant frame may be called 'fathers,' 'young men,' and 'babes.'

[1.] Fathers are such who, through long experience and much acquaintance with a godly life, do walk more evenly, and constantly, and cheerfully, and fruitfully in the ways of God than others do. In old men more constancy may be expected, or a more even and an uninterrupted course of godliness, because they are more acquainted with the snares of Satan to prevent them, more weaned from the baits of sense, and so sin hath not such a power over them; walk more cheerfully in their service to God: 1 John i. 3, 4, 'That which we have heard and seen, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. These things I write unto you, that your joy may be full;' Mat. xi. 30, 'For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light;' as knowing not only the toil, but the pleasure of obedience. Being inured to a course of godliness, it is as another nature to them; the difficulty is worn off. It is said, Ps. xcii. 14, 'They shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.' Their last works are their best works, because their salvation is nearer than when they first believed. In short, they have brought their hearts to a heavenly temper, and accustomed themselves to a heavenly course, and do delight in obedience as their perfect liberty. These, though not grown up into a perfect man in Christ Jesus, or come to their complete growth, yet have made a great advance in heaven's way.

[2.] Young men in Christ are such as have most courage, resolution, and earnestness, yet not that experience which Christ's old servants have gotten; a middle sort of christians, not so settled as the aged, nor yet altogether so weak and infirm as babes. They are more exercised with temptations, and a life of conflicts, as having many rebellious passions and inordinate desires to subdue, which being irritated by the suggestions of Satan and the baits of sense, do put them to no small trouble; that they may not dishonour religion, and put a damp upon their hopes, and obstruct their own progress to heavenly glory.

[3.] There are babes or little children, and they are of two sorts—

(1.) Some are as it were in the birth, *inter regenerandum*; it is a doubtful question whether they are regenerated, yea or no; have the grace of the third or fourth ground. Of such the apostle speaketh, Gal. iv. 19, 'My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.' They are such whose evidences of regeneration lie under ground, and much in the dark; so that as to outward appearance there is little of the life of God to be seen in them. Their apprehensions of the love of God are very uncertain; the beauty of the image of Christ is hardly discernible in them. They have good inclinations, will not turn off from the holy ways of God, but keep waiting upon them until grace be impressed upon them in a fairer character. They prize the favour of God, and nothing can satisfy them without it, though as yet they have no persuasions of it. They have a sense of religion, though it cannot stand up in such considerable strength against temptations.

(2.) There are others who hang upon the breast, as infants that are new-born, can hardly live between one ordinance and another: 1 Peter ii. 2, 'As now-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby.' They cry after their Father, though with a lisping and stammering tongue. They take pleasure in the tenders of grace, and cannot live without renewed applications of the sensible comforts of God's presence; must be dandled on the knees, cannot digest the frowns of a father, and are not yet hardened for conflicts and the stricter severities of religion.

Use 1. If there be 'fathers,' 'young men,' and 'children,' then—

1. Let us 'not despise the day of small things,' Zech. iv. 10; not in ourselves, nor others. Not in ourselves; let us not conclude a nullity of grace, though we be in the lowest form of christians. There is the highest measure, and that is heroical grace; and there are some in the middle rank, some that are yet conflicting with great temptations; some in the lowest, weak, and unsettled rank, and yet would not quite turn from God for all the world. It is ground that bringeth forth thirty or sixty, but not a hundred-fold. Lambs belong to Christ as well as elder sheep; babes as well as young men and fathers. The ear of corn that hath thirty grains is carried into the barn as well as that which hath sixty; and in the family of God there are little children as well as grown persons. He is a good servant that had but two talents, and gained but two. Christ rebuketh those who kept little children from him; much more will he receive spiritual babes. Strait-necked vessels are long in filling, yet if we be but filled, it is our comfort. Christ would not have us break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, Mat. xii. 20.

2. Let us not despise the meanest degree of grace in others. Time was when every one was a babe in Christ, and time may be when those who are but babes may grow old men: Mat. xx. 16, 'So the last shall be first, and the first last.' If we be higher, let us bless God: 1 Cor. iv. 7, 'Who maketh thee to differ?' not only from the carnal, but from those who begin to have a sense of religion, and have some sincerity, though not that perfection as others have. The apostles often persuade the strong to be charitable and indulgent to those who are weak,

and not to despise and contemn them : Rom. xiv. 1, 'Him that is weak in the faith, receive you.' He biddeth them to take the weak into his bosom with much pity and compassion. So his rule of peace : Phil. iii. 15, 16, 'Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded : and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall even reveal this unto you. Nevertheless whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.' Though strings in tune must not be brought down to those out of tune, and the weak must not guide the strong, yet we must bear with their weaknesses, even with their affectation of pre-eminence, and not crush them and suppress them. How patient and condescending was Christ to the disciples, notwithstanding their dulness and corruptions!

Use 2. Let us consider in what rank we are, that we may wisely apply ourselves to the duties proper to our condition. Usually that which old men want is fervour; that which young men want, if they know their hearts, is sincerity: the one must beg quickening grace, as David doth often in Ps. cxix. That which the other should most labour after is a sincere love to God and holy things. There may be a strong love where there is not a sincere love; a moral sincerity not to dissemble, but not a supernatural sincerity, when their love is a pure flame, not enkindled nor fed with anything but fire from heaven. Many have zeal, but they know not what spirit they are of. Old professors are more heavenly, young men more active in present duties. Now it is good that one age should borrow of another; that young men should consider their end, and old men be doing for God while they have any opportunity. The old are more prudent, the young more zealous. Our zeal should be seasoned with prudence, and our prudence quickened by zeal.

Use 3. To awaken us to labour after the highest rank of grace; it is the aim and purpose of every believer to be in the highest form. Luke speaketh only of a hundred-fold, Luke xviii. 31, to show that we should not content ourselves with less. God is the more honoured the more fruitful we are: Phil. i. 9, 'And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in all knowledge, and in all judgment or sense;' John xv. 8, 'Herein is my Father glorified, if ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. The more perfect, the more like God; for we are required to be holy as he is holy, and to be perfect as he is perfect, Mat. v. 48. Therefore, as we must not always be babes, so not always young men. When men have lived long, and have time and other means to improve themselves both in knowledge and grace, they are very culpable before God: Heb. v. 13, 'For every one that useth milk, is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.' They had teaching enough, and yet are babes in grace: John xiv. 9, 'Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long with you, and hast thou not known me, Philip?' Oh, do not keep in low things! To be always weak and always carnal doth highly provoke God.

Again, look after growth and strength according to your means: Mat. viii. 10, 'Christ marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel;' Mark vi. 6, 'And he marvelled at their unbelief.' God proportioneth our trials, not according to what we have *de facto*, but *de jure*, according to what we

might have been. They that have great means, and long experience, and much acquaintance with God, have great temptations.

Lastly, How sad will it be for aged christians to be infants in grace ! 2 Chron. xvii. 3, 'And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David.' That there should be spots and blemishes in those who are stars of the first magnitude, how sad is this !

SERMON III.

I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that was from the beginning, &c.—1 JOHN ii. 13, 14.

THE apostle beginneth with the fathers, or grown christians ; he describeth them from their long acquaintance with God in Christ, ' You have known him that was from the beginning.' So that they are fathers with our apostle who are not only experienced in worldly things, but that which is a much greater honour to them, have attained to the saving knowledge of Christ.

Doct. In the distinction of christians, they are fathers who best know him that was from the beginning.

1. Here is the object to be explained, ' Him that was from the beginning.'

2. The act, what kind of knowledge it is that constituteth ' fathers.'

3. What is herein proper to fathers, or how this can be any ground of a distinction between them and others ; since all christians are to know Christ, it is indispensably required. And, secondly, babes are also said to know the Father.

I. For the object, ' By him that was from the beginning,' is meant Christ, who is also thus elsewhere described : John i. 1, 2, ' In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God : the same was in the beginning with God ; ' 1 John i. 1, ' That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes.' This title is given to Christ to note two things (as Zanchy noteth well), that he is from the beginning, *quoad virtutem salvificam et quoad personam.*

1. As to his office and saving efficacy, so he was the ' Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,' as to God's eternal purpose and decree, Rev. xiii. 8.

2. As to his personal subsistence, so ' his goings forth were from everlasting,' Micah v. 2 ; John xvii. 5, ' And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory that I had with thee before the world was.' These two are great points, both his eternal generation and his eternal designation to the office of mediator ; and both these are often pressed in scripture, but the first principally by our apostle.

[1.] His eternal designation to the office of mediator is often pressed :

Titus i. 2, 'In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began;' 2 Tim. i. 9, 'According to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.' This is pressed upon a double account—partly to show the immutability and unchangeableness of his grace; it is eternal like himself. The terms of it are fixed long before the world was. And partly to obviate both heathenish and Jewish cavils. To them Jesus Christ seemed a new god of a few years standing, whereas both the heathenish and Jewish religion boasted of their antiquity; whereas indeed all other religions were but novelties, and Christ and his gospel the only true ancient religion, as being the result of God's eternal thoughts.

[2.] The other point, Christ's eternal subsistence; that our apostle doth much insist upon both in the gospel and this epistle, because of some ancient heretics, Ebion and Cerinthus, with their followers, who denied it in his time, as in our times many now do. Well, then, Christ being from the beginning, signifieth the eternity of the Son of God, which is the great lesson which maketh impression upon fathers. To be from the beginning beareth divers senses; sometimes it noteth the time of the delivery of the law: 1 John ii. 7, 'I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning.' Sometimes for the first principles, or erecting or setting up of the gospel-state: Luke i. 2, 'Even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.' Sometimes for the first institution of a thing: Mat. xix. 8, 'But from the beginning it was not so.' The fall is so called, John viii. 44, 'He is a liar from the beginning.' The creation is so called, Gen. i. 1, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.' But none of these are meant here. It is sometimes put for all eternity; for it is said, Prov. viii. 23, 'I was set up from everlasting, or ever the earth was.' Christ had not only his proper and perfect subsistence before the incarnation, but also before the first point of time, wherein God began to create all things.

Now because this is a weighty point, and the joy of our faith, and the strength of our confidence, and the readiness of our obedience, and our thankfulness to God for the mystery of our redemption, and our victory over the world, and our eternal happiness and felicity doth much depend upon Christ's being the eternal Son of God, I shall do two things—(1.) I shall show you what the scripture saith concerning his being from the beginning; (2.) The benefit of such a meditation.

(1.) What the scripture saith concerning Christ's existence, or personal subsistence, before he was conceived in the virgin's womb.

(1st.) Some places express that existence without any notation of time, but only that he had a being before his incarnation: John vi. 33, 'The bread of God is he that cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world;' ver. 38, 'For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me;' ver. 62, 'What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?' These and many other places prove that Christ was in heaven before he was upon earth. How long, it is not said; but there he was in a state of glory, which he enjoyed before he came down and was made flesh. The Jews, that understood the meaning of these expressions,

took them in this sense ; for it is said, John vi. 41, 42, 'The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know ? how is it then that he saith, I come down from heaven ?' They knew his meaning, but his words were a riddle to them, because they looked only to his human nature ; but they suffice to prove to christians that he had a being before he was incarnate.

(2*d.*) There are other scriptures which assign a time, but do not go so high as the creation : John viii. 58, 'Before Abraham was, I am.' To say nothing of that form of speech, 'I am,' which is God-like, Exod. iii. 14, that which I now plead for is, that Christ was before Abraham was. So 1 Cor. x. 9, 'They tempted Christ in the wilderness ;' called 'the angel of God's presence ;' and Moses 'esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt,' Heb. xi. 26. These places prove that he was long before he was incarnate.

(3*d.*) Some scriptures show that Christ was as soon as the world was, as the text ; and Prov. viii. 22, 'The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.' So from the 22*d* to the end of the 31*st* verse, wisdom is brought in describing her antiquity in many words ; that she was present in creating of the world ; that wisdom was Christ, who is often called 'the Wisdom of the Father ;' and here all along speaketh as a person, and as a person distinct from the Father. So John i. 1, 2, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.' Christ is called 'the Word,' as being the interpreter of his Father's mind ; and he is said to be 'with God,' as a person distinct from God ; and he is said to be 'in the beginning,' when all created things got a being and beginning ; as Gen. i. 1, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ;' and in many other places. God made the world by him, Heb. i. 2 ; and therefore he had a being when the world was made. Because our shallow conceptions can follow eternity no further, but only over the border of time, therefore it is said, 'in the beginning,' and 'from the beginning.'

(4*th.*) That Christ was before the world was : John xvii. 5, 'And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was ;' Heb. i. 10, 'And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands.' And the apostle proveth that this is spoken of the Son, ver. 8, 'But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever ; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.'

(5*th.*) That Christ was from all eternity : Micah v. 2, 'But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.' That this is spoken of Christ cannot be denied by the citation, Mat. ii. 6, 'And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah art not the least among the princes of Judah ; for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.'

(2.) The benefit of this meditation.

(1st.) To further the joy of our faith, in that we see the infinite worth that is in his sufferings to satisfy justice and to expiate sin. He that is from the beginning, who is the eternal Son of God, he offereth to pay a ransom for us. Mere man would not have been of sufficient dignity to interpose between God and man, and to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. Man was grown hateful to God by reason of sin, but Christ reconciled him by offering up himself: Heb. ix. 14, '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?' Acts xx. 28, 'To feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.'

(2d.) To increase the strength of our confidence against all assaults of the enemies of our salvation: 1 John v. 5, 'Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?' What cannot the Son of God do? He is able to maintain the elect against all the temptations of Satan, frowns of the world, and all the opposition we undergo from the rebellions of the flesh. The mighty God will be a prince of peace, Isa. ix. 6. So John xiv. 1, 'Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.' Faith gets sure footing in his essence and attributes; no creature can stand out against God.

(3d.) That we may be more apprehensive of the greatness of his love, which we shall never be till we consider the dignity of his person. He that was 'God over all, blessed for ever,' Rom. ix. 5, that had little need of the sons of men, for what can God want? yet he came to seek and to save them for their own good; not to receive from them, but to give to them. He was happy and glorious from all eternity: 'Who being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God,' Phil. ii. 6. He was not thrust down, but came down. The angels that exalted themselves were degraded: 2 Peter ii. 4, 'For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell.' We can never understand the depth of Christ's condescension, nor the merit of his sacrifice, but by reflection upon the height wherein he stood when he undertook our cause and business. That he that was in the form of God should appear in the form of a servant; that the great God should come as an infant into the world, wrapped up in swaddling clothes, laid in a cratch, walking up and down, partaking of all the miseries incident to mankind, and at length hang and die upon a cross; are these small matters to you? That the Almighty God should be debased to the weakness of a child and feeble infant, and the fountain of life should die!

(4th.) To show the readiness of our obedience, that we may receive his doctrine, and obey his laws; that we may not be ashamed of his truth, and the profession of his name. He was from the beginning, while yet the world and all the glory of it lay in the womb of nothing; and shall not we give up ourselves to love, and serve, and obey him? Shall things in time frighten or entice us from the duty which we owe to him who was before all time? He can crush his enemies and protect his friends, supply your wants, relieve you in distress; for in him the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth bodily, Col. ii. 9; Heb. ii.

1-3, 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;' Heb. xii. 25, 'See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.' Let us be willing to do anything and suffer anything for so excellent a Lord.

(5th.) To increase our reverence, and that the ignominy of his cross may not obscure his glory, nor lessen his respect in our hearts, but that we may have high and honourable thoughts of our humbled Lord in his lowest estate. When we are meditating only upon his humiliation, the natural atheism which is in our hearts is apt to turn those thoughts into a snare, and our respects to the majesty of Christ are abated. Therefore we ought again and again to consider his divine nature, and that glorious estate wherein he was from the beginning, so to balance our thoughts of his humiliation. These are compounded: Isa. ix. 6, 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.' Mary's child, yet God's son; a counsellor, yet the mighty God; the prince of peace, but the everlasting father. If we despise him as the carpenter's son, let us remember he is the great architect who hath built the whole world: Heb. xi. 10, 'For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' If we stumble at his being a child, let us remember also that he is the everlasting Father. If we are offended at his being on the cross, let us think of him as sitting on the throne, and coming to judge the world.

(6th.) To draw our hearts from all created things, and to lessen our respect to worldly vanities, that so our minds and hearts may more look after those things which are eternal and glorious. He that was before the world was will be when the world shall be no more. Christ as God is 'from everlasting to everlasting,' Ps. xc. 2. To him should we look, after him should we seek: Rev. i. 8, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty;' ver. 11, 'Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last;' Rev. ii. 8, 'These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;' Rev. xxii. 13, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.' The first cause and the last end. It is for everlasting blessedness, for the enjoyment of an eternal God, for which our souls were made. He that was from the beginning, and will be when all things end, he should take up our minds and thoughts. How can we have room for so many thoughts on fading things when we have an eternal God and Christ to think of? What light can we see in a candle when the sun shineth in his full strength? All things in the world, like flowers, serve only for their season, and then wither; and that season is a short one. Thou gloriest in thy riches and pre-

eminence now ; but how long wilt thou do so ? To-day that house and land is thine, but thou canst not say it will be thine to-morrow. But a believer can say, My God, my Christ, is mine to-day, and will be mine to all eternity. Death taketh all from us, honours and riches, strength and life ; but it cannot take God and Christ from us. They are ours to all eternity.

II. What kind of knowledge it is that is here spoken of. There is a twofold knowledge—(1.) Speculative and historical ; (2.) Practical and saving.

1. Speculative and historical, which is but an airy speculation of divine things : with this most content themselves. The Jews had *μόρφωσιν τῆς γνώσεως ἐν τῷ νόμῳ*, Rom. ii. 20, ‘ a form of knowledge ; ’ and so hath the formal christian : 2 Tim. iii. 5, ‘ Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof ; ’ a map or model of gospel-truths. There are different degrees of this,—a memorative knowledge, such as children have, when the field of memory is planted with the seeds of knowledge ; as children that are taught to speak of divine mysteries, God, Christ, heaven and hell, sin and righteousness, by rote. As the philosopher observed of young men, that they learned the mathematics with all their hearts and minds, but moral things only to talk of them, *τὰ μὲν οὐ πιστεύουσιν οἱ νέοι ἀλλὰ λέγουσι*, rather to rehearse them, and say after others, than believe them. As some rather hear the sound of music than mind the melody and harmony, so they learn divine things, but they do not mind or believe the certainty of those things of which they are instructed ; this is the lowest form of speculative knowledge, such as is in children, and those that are childlike affected. Another degree above this is an opinionative knowledge, when they do not only charge their memories, but have a kind of conscience and judgment about these things, so as to be orthodox and right in opinion, and so bustle and contend about that way of religion in which they have been educated, or suiteth best with their fancies and interests. But yet wisdom entereth not upon the heart, Prov. ii. 10. They make men disputers of this world, but not serious practisers of godliness. They have a religion to talk of, but not to live by. They may know much of religion in the notion, and it may be more accurately than a serious christian ; as a vintner’s cellar may be better stored with wine than a nobleman’s, but they have it for sale, not for use ; so these may dispute for their religion to better effect and purpose than a serious godly man, who yet hath a more intimate perceiving of the truth, though he cannot so accurately form his notions. These are useful in the church, as a rotten post may support a living tree, or as negroes and slaves dig in the mines to bring up gold for others. But for an intimate, deep, heart-affecting knowledge, that is proper to the christian that receives the truth, not only in the light of it, but in the love of it : 2 Thes. ii. 10, ‘ They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.’ A blunt iron that is red hot will pierce further into an inch board than a sharp tool that is cold. There is yet beyond these a higher degree of speculative and historical knowledge, and that is when men have some kind of touch upon their hearts ; but it is too slender and insufficient to stand out against all temptations when they rise up in any considerable

strength. So we read of some that may be 'enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,' Heb. vi. 4, 5. They may 'escape the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ,' 2 Peter ii. 20. It is hard to conceive how such practical and important truths should be understood and considered without some touch upon the heart. Thus it may affect men in part, and produce some partial reformation, and some profession and confession of the truth, and they may have some experience of it in some measure, but do afterwards reject it, and prefer sin before it.

2. Practical and saving. The truth and soundness of our knowledge is mainly known by the effects. We are to 'know him that was from the beginning,' so as—

[1.] To believe in him, and to venture our eternal interests in his hands: Ps. ix. 10, 'For they that know thy name will put their trust in thee;' 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;' depending upon the sufficiency of his merit, and righteousness, and power to secure us against all the enemies of our salvation.

[2.] To know him so as to esteem and prize him: Phil. iii. 8, 9, 'Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith.' Saving knowledge is always joined with a high esteem of Jesus Christ; when we prefer him above all other things: Mat. xiii. 45, 46, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls; and when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.' It must be such a knowledge as weaneth the heart from the world and worldly vanities.

[3.] To know him so as to embrace him with love and desire: John iv. 10, 'If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.' Christ is then more savingly and rightly known when he is desired and embraced with our dearest affections. No knowledge is allowed for knowledge in scripture but the affectionate knowledge: 1 Cor. viii. 1-3, 'Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him.' If our knowledge of God be joined with a sincere love to God and Christ in all temptations, then it is a right knowledge.

[4.] To know him so as to obey him: Jer. xxii. 16, 'He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the Lord.' This was to declare their knowledge by the effects; as many men's actions are an implied blasphemy, if you run them up into their principle: Ps. xxxvi. 1, 'The transgression of the

wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes ;' Titus i. 16, 'They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate.' So many men's conversations speak out their faith and knowledge, and those holy principles which are rooted in their hearts, 1 John ii. 3, 4. Our evangelist will best explain himself : 'Now,' saith he, 'hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' Thus in scripture dialect we are said to know no more than we practise, and our actions to give a better image of our thoughts and imaginations than our words, and the latent principles in our minds are discovered by the course that we take rather than by bare profession. A lie is *falsum cum intentione fallendi*—a falsehood spoken with an intent to deceive. To live a falsehood is more than to speak a falsehood ; they deceive the world and deceive their own souls. Certainly that man hath no religion that hath no God, and he hath no God that preferreth his base lusts before obedience to his precepts. It is but a perjured profession that our carnalists make of the knowledge of God and of Christ, the greatest lie that ever was told, and such a lie as reflecteth upon the honour of God, for they profess a religion which they abhor. All their worship is a lie, and their profession a plain perjury, whilst they live as if they were baptized in the devil's name to be his bondmen, and had sworn to cherish worldly and fleshly lusts, and not to mortify them ; as if in their baptism they had entered a protestation against God and Christ.

III. What is herein proper to fathers, or how can this be a ground of distinction between them and others, since all christians are indispensably bound to know Christ ? John xvii. 3, 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.' And babes are said to 'know the Father.'

Answer first, to the first particule.

1. Whatever is said of either age, fathers, young men, or babes, doth certainly belong to all ; as to overcome the wicked one, so to know him that was from the beginning. To know the Father is common to all the ranks, only most eminently in one more than in the other. As all sorts of ages have reason, only wisdom is eminent in the aged, strength in the young, affection to parents in the babes.

2. There is some peculiar fitness in these characters, and in the several ages mentioned ; as—

[1.] Plenitude of knowledge belongeth to the ancient : Job xii. 12, 'With the ancient is wisdom, and in length of days understanding.' Old men have had a great opportunity to gather wisdom ; and where should we go for wisdom but to them ? Wisdom and knowledge are among the fathers.

[2.] Old men are versed in the knowledge of ancient things, and love to discourse of things done long ago. So the apostle commendeth his fathers, or old men, for that they have known the Ancient of days, or the eternal Son of God, which maketh them more happy than all that knowledge which they have gotten by many years or long experience in the world.

[3.] Their knowledge is different from the knowledge of others, as begetting—

(1.) A more rooted affection. Young christians have greater qualms and sick fits of love, but these are ‘rooted and grounded in love;’ Eph. iii. 18, 19, ‘That they may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.’ At first our affection to God and heavenly things may more quickly and fervently put forth itself, as the early blossoms in the spring, which are soon withered. The strongest qualms and fits of affection are upon our first acquaintance, and while religion is a novel thing, and our love wholly showeth itself in sensitive expressions. The tide and current of our love may run strong while it is not dispersed into the several channels of obedience. They have at first strange transports of soul, but afterward it cometh to be rooted into a solid affection and fixed bent of heart toward God, and is that disposition of soul which is called godliness, and is distinguished from holiness: 2 Peter iii. 11, ‘What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?’ An addictedness and devotedness to God as our chief happiness and last end.

(2.) Their knowledge begets experience. Knowledge is put for the experimental feeling of the work of grace upon our hearts: Phil. iii. 10: ‘That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death;’ Phil. i. 9, ‘And I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment,’ or in all sense. Now this kind of knowledge is in the fathers; more in old christians than in others; God and they are of long acquaintance: Job xxii. 21, ‘Acquaint thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.’ They have had long trial and experience of him in removing their doubts, answering their prayers, and fulfilling his promises, and so experimentally know him more than others.

The other part of the objection I shall discuss when I come to the last branch; only the object is diversified, though the act be the same. Old men in the gospel find the Ancient of days; and children find a father, and know him more distinctly: 2 Peter i. 5, ‘Add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge.’

SERMON IV.

I write unto you fathers, &c.—1 JOHN ii. 13, 14.

USE 1. To teach us who are fathers, or in the highest rank of christianity.

1. They are such as are more delightfully employed in the exercises of godliness. I ascribe this to fathers, partly because they are acquainted with the pleasures of obedience: 1 John v. 3, ‘For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are

not grievous.' And they have tasted that the Lord is gracious, 1 Peter ii. 3; and *optima demonstratio a sensibus*—the surest proof is taken from sense: they 'know the grace of God in truth,' Col. i. 6. And partly because by long custom they have inured themselves thereto, so that it is become another nature to them. They are alive unto God; and what a man doth with naturalness, he doth it frequently, constantly, and easily. We see in all other things this giveth readiness and promptness. Man is naturally averse from God, and custom addeth a stiffness to this bent: Jer. xiii. 23, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.' By custom and continuance men are habituated in evil, that it becometh a second nature to them. Now when men are settled in a good course, there is somewhat answerable. They are in their element when they are speaking of God and heavenly things; they do a thing kindly when they are acting for God. The carnal nature will return, and violent temptations will much unsettle us; but surely it is an advantage to have walked in a godly course for some long space of time, to be an old disciple. The apostle speaketh of Timothy that he did naturally care for their estate, Phil. ii. 20.

2. They do more wisely manage the affairs of the spiritual life. The scripture speaketh of being 'wise to salvation,' wise in that which is good: Rom. xvi. 19, 'But yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.' And the children of God should be 'wise in their generation,' Luke xvi. 8. Without this practical wisdom there is no escaping the snares of the deceiver, and getting safe to heaven. Now this wisdom is more in the old than the young believer. As to the young, see 1 Tim. iii. 6, 'Not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil;' *νεόφυτον*, a late convert, or young christian, or one newly come to the faith; such an one is more various and uncertain in his motions, hath not that spiritual prudence, and that measure of circumspection, which old exercised christians have, and so is far more likely to fall into the condemnation of the devil than the experienced. On the other side, consider what advantages they have, as knowing their helps and hindrances: Heb. v. 14, 'But strong meat belongeth unto them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.' They know the craft of Satan: 2 Cor. ii. 11, 'Lest Satan should get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices.' They have felt the bitterness of sin: Ps. li. 6, 'In the hidden parts thou shalt make me to know wisdom.' They know what hindrances they shall have from the devil, world, and flesh, and how they may resist occasions of evil, defeat the policies of the devil, and grow wise to salvation, and the world may not divert and distract them from the love of God and the exercise of godliness. Experience hath made them wise to decline the rocks upon which they dashed heretofore. In all arts and trades men attain greater niceness and skill by pains and observation. And shall a christian gain nothing by long practice and continual watchfulness? Surely the blows and foils received have made them skilful, and wary to disappoint the assaults of the enemy.

3. They are more fixed in the truth against the seduction of error

This is in the text. The seducers of that age denied the godhead of Christ; and it always holdeth good: Eph. iv. 14, 'That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.' There is an estate of childish ignorance and infirmities, and there is above this a kind of growth and growing age, whilst we are making progress towards perfection; and above this there is our manly age. In our younger time there is a simplicity and easiness to credit all that is presented to us. Babes in Christ are weak in all the parts of the new man, in knowledge, prudence, faith, love, patience. But now we must not be always children, not always weak and unsettled. Surely as we grow in years we should grow in knowledge and prudence; the aged have more a spirit of discerning, more solidity in judgment, and stability in truth, and are not so easily transported with the vain and giddy notions of an unsettled head. Errors are as palpable deviations from the way to glory as profaneness and gross sins. Therefore it is a part of the perfection of a christian to be settled against them, which advantage the aged have above others, as the testimony of Christ is more confirmed in them, 1 Cor. i. 6; 1 John v. 10, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.' They have arguments at hand in their own bosoms. What was before in their books is transcribed upon their hearts; thither they can repair, and find reasons enough to confirm them in the truth. This testimony in ourselves doth most befriend the main and great articles of christianity, though it also confirmeth the several parts of it. They that have felt benefit by the truth are most likely to know the mind of God in lesser things: John vii. 17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' He that hath felt sin bitter can never be tempted to think it is no great evil; so he that hath felt Christ sweet cannot but prize him and cleave to him above all. The long experience of the fruit of duties confirms them against those delusions which would draw us from them.

4. Their hearts are brought into a more settled, heavenly temper. In christians of a lower rank there is a greater inconstancy in their choice; though they are not as the half-convert, double-hearted and unstable, James i. 8, yet very uncertain in their motions; but afterwards they bring their hearts into a more even, holy frame, and a more fixed bent towards heavenly things: Col. i. 23, 'If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.' A man at first hath not disentangled his heart from the snare of worldly felicity, and therefore his mind and heart is scattered to so many vain impertinent objects, and they are busied more about transitory pleasures, and therefore are shifting off and on, and so darken the spiritual life by the eruption of the carnal nature; and therefore David beggeth, Ps. lxxxvi. 4, 'Rejoice the soul of thy servant, for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul;' and the apostle, 2 Thes. iii. 5, 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.' Their hearts are straight set towards God and heavenly things. The apostle presseth christians,

that looked in a short time to appear before God and receive their wages, 'to be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord,' 1 Cor. xv. 58. A man may be steadfast in the main, though somewhat moved and shaken, but the apostle would have us not only be steadfast but immovable. A tree that hath long stood out against many stormy winds is the more firmly rooted; so a seasoned christian that hath gone through all weathers. But men that have not solid rooting wave hither and thither. There is initial grace, and a radiated state of grace.

5. They oftener meditate of God, his word, and works, and providence. The reasons why I think the more aged sort of christians are known by their meditation, are partly because, being past learning, they improve their knowledge by meditation. They have had a long time to make provision, and hoard up spiritual treasure; and now they bring it forth: Mat. xii. 31, 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things.' And partly because meditation is a difficult work for young beginners, who have not so good a stock to spend upon, and so are more empty and barren; they are not as yet cleansed from vain and idle thoughts, nor have inured themselves to self-government. But now long experience hath taught the aged christian what a hindrance it is to have their hearts pestered and disordered with vanities, how it deadeneth their prayers; and therefore they through themselves with holy thoughts of God in Christ, who is the beloved of their souls. They feast themselves upon him with the dearest and most delightful apprehensions: Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord;' Cant. i. 13, 'A bundle of myrrh is my beloved unto me; he shall lie all night between my breasts.' They often meditate of God, his infinite majesty, his everlasting being, his power, wisdom, goodness, and mercy. His word: Ps. cxix. 97, 'Oh, how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day;' ver. 103, 'How sweet are thy words to my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!' His works: Ps. viii. 3, 4, 'When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained: what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?' His judgments on the wicked: Ps. lviii. 10, 'The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked;' Ps. xxxvii. 34-36, 'Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree; yet he passed away, and lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.' In every age some of the wicked are made spectacles of God's threatened judgments before the eyes of his people. Every man in his own time maketh his remarks and observations, as the prophet had his observations in his time. These the believer layeth up in his heart, which feedeth his faith, and calmeth his passions, and awakeneth his zeal, preventeth rash judging by present appearances. His provision for his people: Ps. xxxvii. 25, 'I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.' His providence to themselves.

They have been long students in providence. Making good his promises : Josh. xxiii. 1, with the 14th, 'And it came to pass, a long time after the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old. And behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth ; and ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you : all has come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof ;' Gen. xlviii. 15, 'And he said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day.' He provided for all our wants, delivered us in all our dangers. How lovely is it for old men to talk of the promises of God, and his mercies that have been of old ! As David : Ps. xxv. 6, 'Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving-kindnesses ; for they have been ever of old.'

6. They can more feelingly than others speak of the shortness, misery, and sinfulness of the present life : Gen. xlvii. 8, 9, 'And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou ? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years : few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and I have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.' Jacob had many removings from place to place, and knew by experience that here is no abiding city. Young men are *ἐνέλπιστοι*, full of worldly hopes. Though others have tried the world before them, yet they think it will succeed better with them : Ps. xlix. 13, 'This their way is their folly ; yet their posterity approve their sayings.' Though others found themselves fondly deceived and frustrated, yet they that succeed them go in the same track ; 1 Chron. xxix. 15, old David confesseth so much : 'For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers ; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is no abiding.' They know the disappointments of a naughty world.

7. They are more weaned from the delights of sense, and have long used to moderate themselves within the bounds of sobriety : Titus ii. 2, 'That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.' Old age being cold and dry, is desirous to warm and moisten itself ; and therefore need this caution, they must take heed that they be not mocked with wine and strong drink. Noah and Lot, who lived so long, yet had not got a command over their appetite. They should be examples of sobriety ; a tipping old man, what a disgrace is he to his grey hairs ! But with the children of God it is otherwise, they know how to spend every day and winter's night in another fashion than in eating, drinking, sporting, and playing. Anna went not out of the temple, and old Simeon waited to see God's salvation.

8. They think and speak of the world to come, and the blessed state of the faithful in the most lively manner, as apprehending it sure and near : 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'For this cause we faint not ; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day ;' 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall

give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing;’ Rom. xiii. 11, ‘And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.’ By the course of nature it will not be long ere they are with God; therefore their hearts work the more strongly after it. Natural motion is swifter toward the latter end, when it comes nearer the centre.

9. They attain unto greater soundness and integrity in the essentials of religion: Titus ii. 2, ‘That the aged be sober, temperate, sound in faith, charity, patience.’ In that verse somewhat is said to the aged, as they are old men, and somewhat as old christians. They that have the most effectual apprehensions of the greatness, goodness, and wisdom of God, and of their own sin, the need of Christ and grace, the truth and excellency of the life to come, and the vanity of this life, are the best christians. They who are most conformed to Christ in humility, meekness, and lowliness of mind, esteeming others better than themselves, that have most hatred of sin, and care to subdue it, and victory over it, and can most deny the flesh, its irregular desires, and bear the inconveniences of it, and whose greatest delight is in God himself, these are the grown christians.

Use 2. To show how much it concerneth fathers in years to be fathers in grace, and to be more eminently religious than others, that they may be a pattern and example to them. First, it conduceth to God’s honour. If young men and children should only profess religion, you would take it for indiscretion and hotness of spirit; young punies, they know not what they do. Moses ‘when he was grown in years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,’ Heb. xi. 24. Fathers, when they served God in their ripest age, and for many years, and yet are not weary of his service, this is an honour to him. Secondly, for your own comfort, what a support and staff is godliness to old age, when decays of nature are recompensed with the increase of grace, the weakness of body with soundness of mind! 2 Cor. iv. 16, ‘For which cause we faint not; but though the outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.’ The mind is fresh and vigorous when the body is weak. When the eye is dim, as in old Israel, it can see God the invisible one. If with Barzillai we lose our taste, yet we find sweetness in the bread of life. If we die, Christ is our life. Alas! many old men are like vessels long abroach, nothing left in them but the lees and dregs of ignorance and sin. How miserable are such old men, when ignorant of God, and mindless of heavenly things, in part or in whole, when they do not seek after God! In part, when yet weak, very babes in knowledge or grace; weak, unwise, feeble in things of God, and so may easily be foiled by temptations, and miscarry foully. Their example swayeth much; if they are only dead sticks, they do but cumber the ground. But how good is it to leave a sweet scent of religious conversation behind them!

Use 3. That the aged in years and grace must be written unto—

1. That they may persevere in godliness. They are not yet out of the reach of temptations. Men that have made some long profession of the name of Christ may suffer a great abatement of their former integrity in their latter days. It is not with them as it was at first. We read

of some that 'left their first love,' Rev. ii. 4; there was a great decay, though not an utter extinction. It is said, 2 Chron. xvii. 3, 'The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David;' who in his latter time fell into scandalous crimes, as his adultery with Uriah's wife, the murdering of Uriah himself, and the numbering of the people. And it is the opinion of some divines that he never recovered a like measure and proportion of grace as he had before. The like may fall out to others, partly from the continual presence of temptations. The devil continually suggesteth evil, and as an importunate suitor, and by perseverance in his suit, may at length prevail. The world we daily converse with, objects to which we are accustomed, taint the mind. A deformed object which is continually in view seemeth less deformed. Indwelling lusts long restrained may break out again, as roses nipped in the summer near about bearing time bear in winter. Satan still waiteth, and his temptations do importunately return upon us. I confess this is no excuse, yet it may be a cause. Satan's continued temptations should make us more watchful. Long experience of the vanity of worldly things should wean us from them, and lust long kept under is the more easily bridled. Yet the continual presence of temptation showeth the daily necessity of gracious helps and means. Partly by their own security. A man of long standing, being secure of salvation, may grow remiss and negligent; and supposing that he hath grace, and is possessed of the love of God, may think that there needeth not such diligence as when he was doubtful. And if he go round in his accustomed tract of duties, may carry it as if he were now past all danger, and so insensibly decayeth. After the first labours of regeneration, and the difficulties of reconciliation with God are past over, and freedom from the terrors of the law in part obtained, and they have gotten some peace and confidence, then they are in danger of this security: Rev. iii. 17, 18, 'Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thy eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.' It is not spoken to beginners, and persons unacquainted with Christ, but to old lukewarm professors. Well, then, there needeth watchfulness to the very last. Man is a very changeable creature; therefore we should always stand upon our guard. Partly because the course of temptations may be altered; the devil doth not always play the same game. As it is said of Joab, 1 Kings ii. 28, 'Joab turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom.' In his old age he miscarried. A man may withstand one kind of brunt, and yet fail in another. The children of God prosperous differ from the children of God afflicted. We had need be provided for all weathers: Phil. iv. 12, 'I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.' The young prophet withstood the king, yet was overcome by the enticings of the old prophet, 1 Kings xiii. 4, with the 19th. Lot, that was chaste in Sodom, miscarried in the

mountains, where were none but his own family. When conscience is cast asleep, even a child of God may fall into the grossest sins. David's heart smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment, yet afterwards fell into uncleanness and blood, and lay asleep in it a long time, till Nathan the prophet roused him up. Well, then, the fathers must be written unto, as well as the young men and babes. You would think it a great misery if a mariner, after he hath weathered out all tempests at sea, should suffer shipwreck in the haven's mouth; so for you to do an unseemly action after you have long professed yourselves servants of Jesus Christ, and have been assisted by him in several conditions.

2. They must be written unto first, that their growth may be promoted; that they may be stirred up to more seriousness, and more diligence, and more fruitfulness.

[1.] After so long a standing, and so much means, more growth and tendency towards perfection may be justly expected from them: Ps. xcii. 13, 14, 'Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God; they shall bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing.' The courts of God are a kindly soil; they that grow there are kept fresh and lively, and fruitful towards God. The decay of the outward man doth not hinder the renewing of the inward. Their last works are better than the first; they shall have great liberty and delight in God to the last: Isa. xl. 31, 'They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.' When nature seemeth to be clean spent, there is a sweet supply of spiritual strength. Eagles are vigorous, they fly strongly and swiftly, and renew their youth; some say by casting their bill when their upper beak groweth crooked with age, and shooteth up the lower; or rather by moulting and casting their feathers: Ps. lxxxiv. 10, 'They go on from strength to strength' in the heavenly journey, always get ground; we should always be learning something; as we grow older, we should grow wiser and better.

[2.] Their manifold experience should make them better. It is a miserable thing to pass under so many providences, and not to be bettered and improved by them: Deut. xxix. 2-6, 'And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, and the signs and those great miracles: yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day. And I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot. Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink; that ye might know that I am the Lord your God.' Surely none live long in the world but they have much experience of the bitterness of sin: Jer. ii. 19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts.' It is dangerous meddling with forbidden fruit. Of the vanity of the

creature: Ps. cx. 96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection.' Some find it to their bitter cost. This vanity doted on and trusted in causeth vexation of spirit. Oh, the naughtiness of the world! John xv. 19, 'If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of this world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' Satan's indefatigable malice: 2 Cor. ii. 11, 'Lest Satan should get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices;' 1 Peter v. 8, 'For the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.' On the other side, oh, the comfort, peace, and blessedness that attendeth holy walking! Micah ii. 7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' Ps. cxix. 56, 'This I had because I kept thy precepts.' This peace, this comfort, this joy in the Holy Ghost. Of God's hearing prayer: Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.' Seasonable relief in difficulties and straits: Ps. xlvi. 1, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.' The sweet revivings in afflictions and trouble: Rom. v. 3-5, 'And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.' Fulfilling of promises: Ps. xviii. 30, 'As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all those that trust in him;' and many such like. Now it is an argument of spiritual stupidity and folly, that a christian should be trained up for a long time in these things, and be not a jot the wiser; if his faith be not stronger, his love to God more fervent, and hatred of sin more lively and earnest; if he cannot wait upon God with a more composed spirit in the midst of this world's uncertainties; therefore they are to be excited and written unto.

Use 2. Is to show us what is a proper meditation for the aged christians—God's ancientness and eternity. Their thoughts should be more taken up about this, about him who was before all things, and will be when all things shall be no more. Surely they that are going out of the world, they should not be contented with anything that had once a beginning, and within a little while will have an end; their great business is to know the eternal God, and eternally to enjoy him. They have had long experience of the transitory nature of earthly things, which should weaken temptations, and blare the glory of them in their eyes. They are going to converse with him immediately who 'in the beginning laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of his hands: they shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou change them; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail,' Heb. i. 10-12, Ps. cii. 25, 26. Christ is eternal, and cannot be perishing or die; and this is the rock of the church's comfort. God from the mount of eternity beholdeth all successions and changes of the creature, but he cannot be changed. The world may be changed, and we, being mortal, may be changed, and must be changed that we may inherit eternal life; but he from the beginning to the end is still the same, and shall destroy all enemies, consume the world with fire, and eternally glorify the saints. We are but of yesterday, and to-morrow

we shall be gone, but 'Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.' Though days and years are in a continual flux and motion about him, yet he is the same for ever, he is the beginning without beginning, and the end without end; before all, after all, and in all. Think often of his unchangeableness; but consider also your own vanity, whose glory and perfection is like a summer flower, or like a vapour ascending for a little time. Our purposes are soon broken off, and made of none effect.

SERMON V.

I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one, &c.—1 JOHN ii. 13, 14.

WE come now to the second rank of christians, such as are called young men. They are described—

1. By the perfection proper to their age, 'Because ye are strong.' As old men are noted for wisdom, so young men for strength: Prov. xx. 29, 'The glory of young men is their strength.'
2. The subordinate cause or means, 'And the word of God abideth in you.'
3. The effect and fruit, and that is victory over Satan, 'And ye have overcome the wicked one.'

That which is said concerning this rank and order may be comprised in these propositions—

1. There are a middle sort of christians, who may be called young men.
2. These above others are exposed to temptations and conflicts.
3. That which is most eminent in this age and rank of christians is strength.
4. This strength they have because the word of God abideth in them.
5. Those that have the word of God abiding in them overcome the wicked one.

Prop. 1. That there are a middle sort of christians, who may be called young men.

So the apostle frameth the distinction; and the reason of the thing carrieth it, for experience telleth us that there are some christians or believers who have felt comfort in Christ, tasted the good word of God, and are affected with the offers of an heavenly life, and thereupon have renounced the devil, the world, and the flesh, that they may seek their happiness in God through Christ; yet they have not attained to that strength of grace and comfort, nor that experience in the ways of godliness, as the fathers have gotten; neither do they walk therein so evenly and constantly as they do; so that they cannot be placed among the

higher sort of christians; neither yet are they so weak and unexperienced as the babes. It will not be lost time a little to show more particularly wherein they differ from the fathers, or the old and more experienced christians, and from the babes and younger sort.

1. From the fathers they differ—

[1.] Because they are not so well settled in an heavenly frame of spirit. Though they set their faces heavenward, yet they are often apt to look back, and are not so constantly exercised about heavenly things, or doing all things to eternal ends, but that they are cumbered with many vain, loose, and roving imaginations and dreams of riches, preferment, worldly pomp, and ease and honour; as if that God whom they have chosen for their portion were bound to provide these things for them, and in that measure wherein they crave them. In this rank I place the disciples before the pouring out of the Spirit. I cannot count them babes, they being so long then trained up in Christ's company; nor yet fathers, because before the solemn pouring out of the Holy Ghost they had not attained to the perfection of the gospel-spirit, which is not the spirit of this world, but the earnest of a better inheritance. Therefore we find them troubled when Christ telleth them of the cross, and how hard a matter it was to enter into the kingdom of God, Mark x. 26. Contending among themselves who should be greatest (and that in a time when the passion was near at hand, Luke xxii. 21, 24), the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons (no doubt set a-work by them, Mat. xx. 21) came to Christ with this request, 'Grant that these my two sons may sit the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left in thy kingdom.' There were many pleasant dreams about worldly happiness in the hearts of christians. The apostles and their friends did dream of an earthly kingdom of Christ, and worldly honours to be distributed to his servants and followers, though Christ did often warn them to the contrary, and seek to prepare them for the cross. And doth not the love of the dignities, and honours, and profits, and pleasures of the world still creep into the hearts of believers, and tickle and inveigle them with many a vain thought and corrupt lust? Surely yes. Witness their frequent thoughts of turning the tide and stream of affairs, and comforting themselves more with hopes of seeing their desire upon their enemies, and of temporal ease, than of the heavenly felicity; their vain wishing for what others have, and misliking that which is their own; their offence at God's providence, if he doth not find them meat for their lusts, and maintain them at such a rate as they fancy. Yet if we should say, they have no grace, we should condemn the generation of the just, and speak against plain experience.

[2.] In that they have not so much superiority and command over their affections and passions as the fathers have; though they are not at the beck and command of every foolish and hurtful lust, yet they are often assaulted and perplexed, yea, overcome with the rebellion of their carnal affections and inordinate passions, which put them to no small trouble. To these the apostle speaketh, Col. iii. 5, 'Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness which is idolatry.' Paul himself had his violent paroxysms: Rom. vii.

19, 21, 23, 'For the good that I would I do not; but the evil I would not, that I do. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.' And David was fain to keep his mouth as with a bridle, Ps. xxxix. 1. They see a great need of curbing their passions, and reforming their thoughts, and bridling their tongues.

[3.] In that they are not so wise and experienced in the spiritual warfare, and therefore are often foiled, though they do also often overcome. Unruly affections may unsettle and distemper them. In their prosperity they may remit of their fervency, zeal, and diligence. In adversity they may have despondency and distrustful thoughts at God's providence; murmuring and discontent may break out: Ps. xxxi. 22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes;' Ps. cxvi. 11, 'I said in my haste, All men are liars.' In their callings, they may bewray too much earthly-mindedness and discontent and carnal aims; the inexperienced are easily surprised, and the evils they groan under are neither at once nor easily subdued; they are often distempered with inward lusts and outward occasions.

2. From the babes they differ—

[1.] Because they have been longer engaged in the practice of godliness, and so they have a more serious consideration of their state and ways, that they may avoid sin and the occasions thereof. They have so much acquaintance with the heavenly life as to see the need of watching, praying, and striving: Mark xiii. 37, 'What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch;' 1 Cor. xvi. 13, 'Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit yourselves like men, be strong;' Ps. xxxix. 1, 'I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me.' Those affections and passions which were wont to be common matters with them, they pray more often and earnestly against them, and so stand upon their guard. Though they are not totally overcome, yet they resist the occasions of sin, and have a holy jealousy over themselves lest they be overtaken. Those things which were not much regarded in times past, that were passed over as things pardoned of course, are now thought of with shame and bitterness.

[2.] They are more diligent in the use of means. Their continual work is to subdue their passions and corrupt inclinations, to weaken their rebellious desires, and defeat temptations. They heartily purpose and covenant with God to bring their hearts into a better frame: Ps. cxix. 112, 'I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always, even to the end.' They busy themselves about getting spiritual furniture and strength, even the complete armour of God, whereby they may stand out against the assaults of the wicked one: Eph. vi. 12, 13, 'For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.' None knoweth the need of the spiritual armour, nor is so earnest to get it, as this kind of christian;

being continually exercised with conflicts and temptations, he would not be unprepared, and knoweth the malice of Satan, and his own infirmities. Practical conviction is best, and leaveth a deeper sense upon the heart than a doctrinal discovery.

[3.] They are more versed in the word of God, though not skilful in the word of righteousness, as the fathers; yet not as unskilful as the babes: Heb. v. 13, 'For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.' They are learning and studying the word, how to govern their passions and direct their way: Ps. cxix. 9, 'Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.' They would not have the peace of their souls disturbed: they are taken into God's blessed flock, and are daily furnishing themselves with spiritual knowledge.

Prop. 2. The middle sorts of christians or young men are most exposed to temptations and conflicts.

The devil is an enemy to all mankind, but especially to young men. Noah, Solomon were tempted when in years; but the young age are most assaulted. The devil layeth snares for them, partly because those are most prone to sin, being passionate, rash, self-willed, and headstrong; wrestle with stronger lusts through the abundance of heat and spirit: 2 Tim. ii. 22, 'Fly youthful lusts.' Company, worldly business, pleasures, are a very great snare to them, who are so prone to worldly affections and actions and fleshly lusts as they are; and therefore soon caught in the devil's snares, and taken at his will and pleasure. Partly because young men are most capable of doing God or the devil most service; that being the choice time of their life, and they being in the prime of their days. Children are but entering into the world, and old men are going out of this life; therefore they should be the more cautious and watchful. The faculties of their souls are most vigorous, the members of their bodies most active. Therefore the devil is especially an enemy to young men; none are in greater danger than they to be drawn to wickedness.

1. It is true of christians young in grace; these especially are busied in fighting against the temptations of Satan, and in resisting and subduing their own unruly lusts. This age is a life of conflicts; they have many rebellious desires, vain thoughts and wishes, inordinate affections; and therefore if they be serious in their work, they must expect blows and troubles: Heb. x. 32, 'After ye were enlightened, ye endured a great fight of afflictions,' φωτισθέντες. Baptism by the ancients was called φωτισμός, and to baptize φωτιζειν, and times of baptism, ημέρας τῶν φωτῶν; the newly baptized, νεοφωτιστοὺς; the font, φωτιστήριον. Possibly the word in this use might not be so ancient as the apostles' days, however it was then used for the first taking up of the profession of christianity, Heb. vi. 4. Those were once enlightened, φωτισθέντες. The first creature was light: 2 Cor. iv. 6, 'God commanded the light to shine out of darkness.' Presently after they had received the faith of Christ, and were admitted into the church by baptism, they endured πολλήν ἄθλησιν, rapine, scourges, persecutions, haled before tribunals of men. Many in their first time were put to bitter and sore conflicts. Jesus Christ as soon as he was baptized, which was his consecration or solemn inauguration into the

exercise of his mediatorial office, was then tempted : Mat. iv. 1, ' Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.' As soon as he is installed into his office, he entereth into the lists with Satan. The church of the Jews, as soon as God began to separate them from the Egyptians, at their first setting forth they were pursued : and even after they came into the wilderness, they were set on by the Amalekites, Exod. xvii. 18. The primitive christian church is set forth by the visional emblem of a dragon, ready to devour the man-child as soon as it was born, Rev. xii. 4. So it is with particular persons very often ; Paul when converted, presently the Jews conspire to kill him. God may permit this, partly to abate their carnal confidence. Many a man because newly converted, having had as yet no thorough and full experience of the strength of sin, the danger of temptation and his own weakness, may bear it a little too high upon the confidence of his own resolutions, which, because they are sincere and undissembled, he thinketh they may be easily maintained. Now God, to humble him, and to show that it is not in him that willeth and runneth, Rom. ix. 16, that it is not their own purposes, though sincere, that will secure them, suffereth Satan to tempt, and his instruments to vex us, sin to put forth its strength, that we may have experience of our own weakness and nothingness, and that our strength lieth in Jesus Christ rather than in ourselves. The best are in danger of self-confidence, even those whose resolutions and purposes against sin are most sincere, and therefore Satan is suffered to tempt them ; as the Canaanites were suffered in the land, and many times had the better of Israel, to show that the victory was not gotten by their own bow and strength. And partly to glorify his own grace, for his power is perfected in our weakness, 2 Cor. xii. 10 ; that is, discovered with more advantage. Christians when young are put upon sore trials, to show that they have not this power of themselves, but of the Lord. A young christian is the best instance for this purpose. A man of long experience might seem to stand by his own strength, but when those who are sorely exercised with temptation are maintained against the most violent impression the devil can make upon them, it is more for the glory of God's grace. Take an instance in David and Joseph, an old and a young man, 2 Sam. xi. 2, 3, with Gen. xxxix. 7-10. Joseph a single man, David had a multitude of wives ; Joseph had the advantage of secrecy, David was fain to make way for his lusts by other sins ; Joseph was solicited, David was the solicitor ; Joseph shuns all occasions, David seeketh them out. Yet the one standeth and the other is foiled. The fall of the experienced man brought a great deal of dishonour to God, as the other made much for the praise of his grace. And partly that they may be fitted and prepared to walk with God in their after-course in all holiness and righteousness, when once they are seasoned in Christ's warfare. The old Germans were wont to dip their children newly born in the Rhine, thereby to harden and prepare them for the toil of war and labour : Lam. iii. 27, ' It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.' The yoke of duty, the yoke of afflictions and temptations ; they are thereby seasoned for all their lives after. And partly to try their thankfulness for receiving Christ, and the inestimable benefits of his love. We profess in pangs of conscience to be willing

to receive Christ upon the hardest terms, though reduced to rags and beggary, and the greatest extremities; and this is no more than needeth. Our religion and the apparent light of truth compelleth us to use those terms: Mat. xiii. 45, 46, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls; and when he hath found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.' God will try whether we will stand to our word, or whether this be a compliment extorted from us by the present pang; and that we are resolved to fight as well as work: Rom. vi. 13, 'Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.' Now though God keep back the assault of furious and boisterous temptations for a while, yet at length after some time it is needful to try the sincerity of our covenant vow.

2. The devil tempteth and molesteth the saints, either in hope to recover the prey (newly taken out of his hands) back again; as Pharaoh made hue and cry after Israel as soon as they were escaped. After long experience and many resistances he hath the less hopes. It is in vain to think he will be dispossessed quietly: 2 Peter ii. 18, 'For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who lived in error;' *ἄντως*, clean, or *ἀλίγως*, for a little while, escaped from error; or else to weary them, and to make their pilgrimage uncomfortable. At first, while they are admiring the love of God, and the offers of grace to sinners, and their blessed change is fresh in their memories, and that woful estate wherein they were by nature, while they are but as brands plucked out of the burning, the devil dareth not set upon them; but when these qualms of love are over, he is very busy in hope they will return to their old master, when they find nothing but blows and buffets; or if not, that they shall never serve God cheerfully. The devil is not only an enemy to our grace, but to our peace and comfort. They snarl at the feast God hath provided for us: Ps. xxiii. 5, 'Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.' The devils grieve and envy at the riches of God's bounty to his beloved ones.

3. In regard of themselves and their own flesh, which is not as yet perfectly subdued to Christ's discipline. The bullock at first yoking is most unruly; the fire at the first kindling casts forth much smoke: Rom. vii. 9, 'Sin revived, and I died.' They have much to do with a naughty heart: Mat. vii. 14, 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way;' at least, at the beginning, or upon our first entrance upon christianity; and when christians are young and raw, and of little experience in the ways of God, it is more tedious to them; they are more unprovided, more unresolved, than they thought themselves to be; and they set upon the mortification of sin, and feel the force of corrupt nature more powerful than ever they imagined it would be, and their light and love is increased, and so their sin is more grievous than it was before. When a man is dead in trespasses and sins, he hath no feeling; but when he has a deeper insight into the law, and the nest of unclean birds is more discovered, then a child of God begins to groan: Rom. vii. 24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the

body of this death ?' When first we began to be serious, the guilt of sin troubled us, and engaged us to look after justification by Christ; but when we are more acquainted with God, the power of sin troubleth us, and we are more engaged to look after mortification, and so we are put upon the greater conflicts.

Prop. 3. That which is most eminent in this rank of christians is strength, 'Because ye are strong.' How strong?

There is the strength of the body and there is the strength of the soul.

1. The strength of the body; that is incident to young men naturally considered: Prov. xx. 29, 'The glory of young men is their strength.' But this is no great thing in a spiritual eye and consideration; for a bull or an ox may exceed us in this kind of strength, for they are strong to labour, Ps. cxliv. 14; and a robust temper of body doth more often incline to sin than to virtue and grace. So many show their strength in pouring down strong drink: Isa. v. 22, 'Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink.' Many wicked ones glory in their ability to take in much liquor, and go away with it; or else in prodigious lust; they spend their strength on women, contrary to Prov. xxxi. 3, 'Give not thy strength unto women;' or at best have only strength for bodily conflicts. Now this is not the strength intended, not strength for bodily conflicts, but for wrestling with Satan and spiritual wickedness; not strength of nature, but grace; strength to overcome temptations to sin, to govern our passions and affections in the fear of God, to do the things which God commandeth. This much excelleth the outward bodily strength: Prov. xvi. 32, 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.' These are strong indeed; the others may be feeble and impotent; as Samson had great bodily strength, but was easily overcome by his lusts. That is a weak heart that lieth open to the assault of every temptation, that is at the beck of every foolish and hurtful lust, as pride, sensuality, worldliness, carnal fear, and sorrow; and so an imperious heart is a weak heart: Ezek. xvi. 30, 'How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord! seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman.'

2. The strength of the soul, which is the property of christians, often spoken of in scripture: Ps. cxxxviii. 3, 'And strengthen me with strength in my soul;' Eph. iii. 6, 'To be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.' This is the fruit of grace, for by nature we have it not: Rom. v. 6, 'When we were yet without strength;' without any power to help ourselves out of that misery into which we had plunged ourselves; but by grace there is a power whereby a christian is enabled to all spiritual duties, 2 Tim. i. 7, a spirit of power, of love, and a sound mind.

This spiritual strength serveth for three uses—

[1.] To bear burdens with patience. A heavy burden requireth a sound back: Col. i. 11, 'Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.' If we cannot bear afflictions and troubles with courage and cheerfulness, we are little acquainted with spiritual strength: Prov. xxiv. 10,

‘If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.’ As a weak man sinketh under his burden.

[2.] To perform duties with cheerfulness. That is a part of a christian’s strength to be able to work hard, as well as bear much: Phil. iv. 13, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.’ The grace of Christ disposeth us to every duty to which we are called by him. He enableth those whom he employeth. There is a sluggishness in most christians; they excuse themselves by their weakness: Christ maketh them able for everything that lieth within the compass of their duty. If men did awaken the strength which they have, or improve what God vouchsafeth to them by the sanctifying motions of his Spirit, they would not be so weak as they pretend to be. But as lazy beggars, who personate and act diseases because they would not work, so they idly complain for want of strength. They spare their pains, and then cry out they are impotent, because they are loath to stir up themselves. There are two extremes—pride and sloth: pride is seen in self-confidence; sloth in a neglect of the grace given.

[3.] To resist temptations with success. Our necessities are many, so must our strength be to fight as well as to work and bear. When the apostle was about to treat of the spiritual armour, he prefaceth it thus: Eph. vi. 10, ‘Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.’ When we think with Samson to go forth and shake ourselves as at other times, we feel sad gyves and fetters; we must use the spade as well as the trowel. We are assaulted with all kinds of temptations; by the devil, as a tempter, and vexer, and opposer of the saints; by the world, persecuting and enticing; by the flesh, as rebelling against and shrinking from the discipline of the Spirit. Now the strength of the soul lieth in a firm resolution opposite to fears and snares. It is said of Joseph that his ‘bow abode in its strength,’ Gen. xlix. 44. His was a snaring temptation, but Joseph was kept innocent in all. So it is opposite to a fearful heart: Isa. xxxv. 4, ‘Say to them of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense, he will come and save you.’ Now whether strength be opposite to snares or fears, it is the fruit, not of natural boldness, but of faith. The strength of the soul lies in a sound belief of the truths of the gospel: 1 Peter v. 9, ‘Whom resist, steadfast in the faith.’ It is a lamentable thing to see what a poor cowardly spirit there is in most christians; how soon they are captivated, or discouraged with every slender assault or petty temptation, and their resolutions are shaken with the appearance of every difficulty. This is not so much want of strength as sluggishness and cowardice, and neglect of the grace given. Well, then, this is common to all christians that are strong, but more especially to the middle sort, whose strength is most exercised and tried. They have need to be strong who are assaulted by the evil one; their lusts are more boiling hot, and sooner set a-work; they had need get faith, sobriety, humility, temperance, and suchlike, for in these things lieth the strength of the soul. This is the armour of God, and in these things should they excel.

Prop. 4. This strength they have because the word of God abideth in them.

This middle clause looketh both ways : 'Ye are strong, because the word of God abideth in you ; and ye have overcome the wicked one, because the word abideth in you ;' 1 Peter ii. 2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby.' The word of God is the food of the soul, and so increaseth strength against temptations. The strength of the mind lieth in reason, and the word of God is our storehouse of reasons. It is the great weapon of the spiritual warfare : Eph. vi. 17, 'Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' Jesus Christ made use of this argument to foil Satan with, *Sic scriptum est*, 'It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God,' Mat. iv. 7. The word of God laid up in the heart, and made use of pertinently by the christian soldier, hath somewhat in it to ward off the blow of any temptation. The seasonable calling to mind such a scripture, forbidding or threatening for such an evil, or pressing the practice of such a duty, or speaking comfort or encouragement to a soul exercised with such a cross, it is a great relief. In temptations to have the word ready at hand, whether precepts, threatenings, or promises, to lay up all kind of spiritual knowledge, is to take a notable antidote and preservative against sin : Ps. cxix. 11, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.' Hid, not for concealment, but for custody. When the young man's soul is well stocked and furnished with the word of God, he hath his spiritual weapon ready, and is prepared for all assaults.

1. The precepts and doctrines of the word abide in them : Ps. xxxvii. 31, 'The law of God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide.' A lively active sense of his duty is kept fresh upon his heart ; and then, when they are tempted, they answer as the Rechabites, We dare not ; our father commanded us otherwise, Jer. xxxv. 6. Take, for instance, Joseph : Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God ?' When we are stored with good principles, it will be a great help to us in all businesses and affairs : Prov. vi. 22, 'Bind them upon thine heart ; and when thou goest, it shall lead thee ; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee ; when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.' Wicked men's sin engrosseth all their thoughts, employeth them all the day, and it stayeth in the fancy all the night ; it saluteth them first in the morning. But now a christian, that is a law to himself, a bible to himself, the word of God urgeth him to his duty, directeth him in his work, seasoneth his business, restraineth him from sin. His heart thus furnished casteth in seasonable thoughts and directions upon all occasions, when he is in company, when he is alone. In company : 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things,' Mat. xii. 34, 35, full of gracious discourse. The tap runneth according to the liquor wherewith the vessel is filled. When alone, his reins instruct him in the night season, Ps. xvi. 7. When without all outward helps, his heart furnisheth him with matter of comfort, counsel, and reproof. The frothiness of our spirits, the barrenness and leanness of our souls, come from the want of transcribing the truths of the bible or God's blessed book upon our hearts. A man that hath his pocket full of brass farthings, and some few pieces of gold and silver, will more readily draw out farthings than pieces of gold or silver or valuable money. Vain thoughts are so ready with us because we have stored our minds with trash.

2. The promise. These must abide in us for comfort against temptations, desertions, and afflictions: Job xxii. 22, 'Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart;' as you would do choice things, that they may not be lost or embezzled. In a time of trial, one promise of God will give you more true comfort and support than all the arguings of men. In a time of wants and straits, how sweet is it to remember how amply we are provided for in the covenant! Ps. cxix. 111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken for an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.' And in doubts and discouragements by reason of pressures and troubles: Ps. cxix. 5, 'This is my comfort in afflictions, thy word hath quickened me;' Heb. xii. 5, 'Have you forgotten the consolation which speaketh to you as children?' It is good to have the promises familiar with us, that we may not have them to seek in a time of distress; happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them. So for temptations, what promises God hath made to the thirsty, what encouragements are given to those that strive after grace; so to seek after God in holiness and righteousness: Mat. v. 8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' What assistance is secured to them that watch and pray, 1 Peter v. 9, 10; how God giveth more grace to the humble, to overpower the natural spirit, James iv. 5, 6; how willing God is to receive us upon our penitence after we are foiled. This maketh the young christian take courage, though his spiritual course be often interrupted.

3. The threatenings. Many lusts are strange and boisterous, and are deaf to all milder motives. By the threatenings, God standeth as with a drawn sword in their way to stop them, if tempted to a sensual fleshly life: Rom. viii. 13, 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.' Many are strongly inclined and wedded to sensual satisfactions, a sporting life. Consider, what am I a-doing? if tempted to any inordinate complacency in creature comforts: Ps. lxxiii. 27, 'Thou hast destroyed all them that go a-whoring from thee;' and they that only mind earthly things, their 'end is destruction,' Phil. iii. 19.

But what is this abiding?

There must be receiving before there can be abiding. There are some will not take the word in: John viii. 37, 'My word hath no place in you.' They have no room for Christ, his directions, and comforts. The soul must be emptied before the word can have place in you. This reception is opposed by inward corruption: 1 Cor. ii. 14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things which are of God.' They cannot digest it, being so contrary to the dictates of flesh and blood. It cannot sink down into their hearts to take root there, but floateth in their imaginations, there is such unanswerableness to things spiritual. So the devil opposeth it: Mat. xiii. 19, 'Then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in the heart.' When he seeth men begin to be serious, he seeketh to divert these thoughts.

Prop. 5. Those that have the word of God abiding in them overcome the wicked one. Where—(1.) The adversary, 'the wicked one;' (2.) The victory, 'have overcome,' as a thing past.

1. The adversary, 'The wicked one.' As God is the holy One, so the devil here and elsewhere is called 'the wicked one;' 1 John v. 18, 'The wicked one toucheth him not;' Eph. vi. 16, 'That you may be able to

quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.' Satan is so called, partly because he is wicked in himself; the eldest sinner and the greatest sinner: 1 John iii. 8, 'The devil sinneth from the beginning.' And partly because his great work and business is to draw and drive others to sin and wickedness; therefore called the father of sinners: John viii. 44, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do;' as Jubal is the father of such as handle the harp and the organ, Gen. iv. 21. All the sins in the world, both actual and original, are by his furtherance. Some sins are singularly diabolical, and such as could not be acted by man in an ordinary course of sinning; as Judas's treason: John xiii. 2, 'The devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him.' Blasphemous thoughts against God, unnatural sins, self-murder, these he may inject into the hearts of the godly, as the envious man may throw weeds into the garden that do not grow there: but in common sins Satan hath a great hand and strong; as in David's numbering the people: 1 Chron. xxi. 1, 'And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.' In our wrath and passion we give place to Satan, Eph. iv. 27; he omitteth no opportunity of gaining his further interest in the heart: 1 Cor. vii. 5, 'Lest Satan tempt you for your incontinency;' 1 Tim. iii. 6, 'Not a novice, lest he be lifted up with pride, and fall into the condemnation of the devil.' And partly because all his temptations tend to sin, and are solicitations to sin. God tempts, and Satan tempteth. God tempteth to discover some notable effect of grace in his servants: Gen. xxii. 1, 'God did tempt Abraham,' not to infuse evil, or solicit to evil, for so 'God tempteth no man;' James i. 13, 'Let no man say when he is tempted, he is tempted of God, for God tempteth no man.' God's tempting is always good, and for good; as a general without any injustice may put the valiantest of his army in the greatest dangers. In the temptation we must distinguish the mere trial and solicitation to sin. Satan's temptings are evil, and for evil, therefore he is called 'the wicked one.'

2. What is the victory? for the apostle speaketh of it as a thing past, 'Ye have overcome.'

Ans. In these considerations—

1. The devil is an enemy, with whom we cannot make peace, but must fight against him till we overcome. So that here it cometh to a point, either we must perish or conquer. On the devil's part there is great enmity, unwearied activity, and unsatiable cruelty; and on our part there must be constant resistance and watchfulness. He is still in action, and nothing less will satisfy him but the destruction of souls. None of Christ's soldiers must think of flying or yielding; not flying. It is very notable that among the pieces of the spiritual armour there is no piece for the back parts, because there is no flight in this warfare, but we must stand it out to the last. No yielding; for the more way we give to Satan, he tyranniseth the more; and the more stoutly he is opposed, the more he loseth ground: Mat. xii. 44, 45, when the house is empty, swept, and garnished, and prepared for Satan, then he bringeth worse devils.

2. There is hope of this victory. Whilst we keep up the fight, our striving is a degree of conquest: James iv. 8, 'Resist the devil, and

he shall flee from you.' Though God suspendeth the victory, yet if he giveth strength and courage to fight, you have overcome. A christian hath offensive and defensive weapons, but Satan only offensive weapons, darts and wiles. A christian hath a sword and shield; the conquest is begun as long as you stand out against his wiles, Eph. vi. 11, and quench his fiery darts, ver. 16. If he doth not overcome us, and unsettle our love to God, we overcome him.

3. There are great preparations for a victory. The devil is a conquered adversary: Col. ii. 15, 'And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.' A disarmed enemy: Heb. ii. 14, 'That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.' We do but set upon the relics of a battle already fought with success.

4. The devil hath been conquered, and is conquered in part by these spiritual young men. The apostle speaketh of such as are strong, and had the word of God abiding in their hearts. They are not such weak young men as Rehoboam, whom every company and every temptation doth carry away; but strong christians, who are victorious and overcome; as Joseph: Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' There are some the word of God doth only flash in their minds, but doth not abide in them; over them the devil prevailleth: 'The evil one catcheth away the good seed sown in their heart,' Mat. xiii. 19. But in those on whom the word hath made so deep an impression that it cannot be rooted out, these overcome the evil one: 1 John v. 18, 'He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not.' These use all care and diligence that the devil gets no hold on them, that he doth not touch them with a deadly wound; these young men in Christ have gotten a victory over Satan, which is the greatest fortitude.

5. Though the final conquest be hereafter, yet it is sure and near: Rom. xvi. 20, 'The God of peace shall tread Satan under your feet shortly.' There will a time of triumph come, when he that is a soldier now shall then be a conqueror. Tread him under your feet, set your feet upon the necks of these kings, as Joshua. He will not only tread Satan to pieces, but under your feet.

Use. If this be the age of conquests, let us not count it strange. There are many wise reasons why God permits it, for his own glory, and to discover the riches of his grace.

SERMON VI.

I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father, &c.—1 JOHN ii. 13, 14.

WE come now to the lowest rank of christians, and they are 'little children,' or the babes in Christ: their property is that they 'have known the Father.' It is spoken with allusion to little children in a

natural consideration, who know their parents if they know nothing else, and cry after them, and frame themselves to call them by their names, though imperfectly, and with a stammering tongue; so these spiritual little children hang upon their Father, whatever they are ignorant of. These babes are driven by their necessity to seek a father in heaven, and show their owning of God in that relation, more by their desires and childlike impressions than by any actual and full-grown confidence. But the other, the aged, own God as their Father by a more abundant persuasion of his love, and not only by choice, but by sense.

We must distinguish these christians from others, and first from the two former sorts mentioned, then from the carnal.

1. They differ from the fathers in two things—(1.) The object known; (2.) The degree of knowledge.

[1.] The object is diversified, 'Him that was from the beginning,' and 'the Father.' It is one thing to know God as a creator, another thing to know him as a father. The more old or grown christian takes him up under another notion than the babes do. Nothing more needful for children than to have a father, to whom they may repair in all their wants, and who may take care for them; accordingly they own God as a father.

[2.] The act, 'You have known the Father.' This knowledge is an initial knowledge; the act of knowledge is attributed to the fathers and the little children, but yet there is a difference in the degree.

(1.) Little children have but a taste of God's fatherly love: 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' The fathers had a deeper draught and longer experience, by which they are more confirmed in the sense of their adoption: 1 John iii. 1, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!' But these babes have but some general and obvious apprehensions of God's being a merciful father in Christ; the one are skilled in the first principles of christianity, the other are versed in the deeper mysteries of godliness.

(2.) These little children know God as a father, because they have never yet been put upon exercise and occasions to question his love; but when they are tried with afflictions, or conflict with temptations, they are filled with doubts and fears. It is one of the weaknesses incident to this age, that they must be set on the lap, and dandled with comforts; for young children are not as yet acquainted with the rod and the frown of a father: Heb. xii. 5, 'And ye have forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto you as children.' As soon as they meet with any trouble inward or outward, they fall into heavy damps and discouragements, fearing that all their commerce with God was but a shadow and a dream; whereas the fathers or aged christians have tried him in all conditions, and can look upon him as a father when he smileth and when he frowns, and know that he is the God of the valleys as well as the hills and mountains, and that his love doth not alter with their condition; as Christ said, 'My God,' when he was upon the cross and forsaken.

2. They differ from the young men in Christ. Before I tell you how they differ from them, I must acquaint you that there are two sorts

of babes or little children. First, Some are as it were in the birth, *inter regenerandum*: Gal. iv. 19, 'My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, till Christ be formed in you.' They are such as have good motions and inclinations to spiritual and heavenly things, but they are so often interrupted by the discovery and breaking out of the carnal nature, that we cannot yet say that Christ is formed in them; yet there are hopeful intimations that the work is a-doing, though the doctrine and practice of the gospel is not so purely and perfectly received. Secondly, The other are such as hang upon the breast, as infants new born: 1 Peter ii. 2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby;' who have much ado to maintain life between one duty and another. These differ from the young men, partly because they are raw and inexperienced, and so are guilty of many oversights, are more easily deceived by Satan and his instruments: Eph. iv. 14, 'That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.' And partly because they are ignorant of the power of corruption, and the many inordinate lusts and passions which lurk in them, and often break out to their dishonour and discouragement. Therefore the apostle mindeth such, 1 Peter i. 14, 'Not to fashion themselves according to the former lusts of their ignorance.' Weaknesses and infirmities are most rife then. And partly because they do not understand their duty in their first entrance upon their christian course so well as they do afterwards, and therefore either cleave to things out of blind zeal, or else condemn them out of rashness and indiscretion: Rom. xiv. 1, 'Him that is weak in the faith receive, but not to doubtful disputations.' They are easily carried away with a vain show, and either allow or condemn things without due warrant. And partly because they are not so strong as the young men, nor so full of spiritual confidence, but are full of fears, as little children are easily frightened with anything. Their faith being little, doubts arise and fears prevail: Mat. vi. 30, 'O ye of little faith!' Mat. viii. 26, 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?' Mat. xvi. 8, 'Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith!' Weak christians are timorous, not being used to conflicts and difficulties, perplexed with doubtful thoughts. Christ saith, John xvi. 12, 'I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.' Through their incapacity they cannot take in many truths; they who have the Spirit in some measure may yet remain incapable of some divine truths, and do continue under many weaknesses and errors of mind, and are apt to stumble and quarrel at many truths. As weak shoulders shrink under heavy burdens, so do weak understandings and light and pre-occupied affections under spiritual and heavenly truths; or as weak stomachs cast up the strong meat which they cannot digest. So the apostle: 1 Cor. iii. 2, 3, 'I could not speak to you as spiritual, but as to babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet are ye able.' By 'milk,' he meaneth the plain doctrines of the christian religion; by 'meat,' the more exact discussion of these points.

3. We must distinguish these from the carnal or the temporary; for though they be not so heavenly, so prudent, so strong as the more grown christians, yet there is a clear distinction between them and the unconverted.

[1.] They have the common spirit of all christians. God's favour is all in all to them, insomuch as they cannot be satisfied without it: Ps. iv. 6, 7, 'Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time when their corn and wine increased.' This is that they long after, and labour after, and wait for, that they may understand how God is affected towards them. About this their thoughts are chiefly occupied, and upon this they lay out their time and care: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.' Now the temporary have never this high esteem of the favour of God as to prefer it simply and comparatively above all other contentments whatsoever.

[2.] Though their main care be about getting off the guilt of sin for the present, yet there is an unfeigned purpose that they may not in the smallest matters offend and displease God, but to the uttermost of their knowledge they are careful to perform their duty. There is in them that good and honest heart: Luke viii. 15, 'But that on the good ground are they who in an honest and good heart have heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience;' though there be many weaknesses and inadvertencies, because they know not the corruptions of their own hearts, nor the force of temptations, and it may be do not so fully understand their duty.

[3.] These weak christians do or should remember that God will not always bear with their weaknesses, and from time to time dispense with their follies, and wink at them. They must grow more solid and prudent, more settled into an heavenly frame and temper: 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more;' 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day;' Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'They go from strength to strength, till they appear before God in Zion.' They must come out of their childish state in time; as the grain of mustard-seed when it is once rooted must grow up into a tree. We must go on from one degree of grace to another.

[4.] Their knowledge of God as a father differeth from that knowledge which temporaries have, because it is an active and operative knowledge. God's being a father implieth both duty and privilege, and none know him aright but those that perform the duties of children, and depend upon him for the privileges of children.

(1.) This knowledge implieth the performance of the duties of children, which are to love, please, and honour their father: Mal. i. 6, 'A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master. If I be a father, where is mine honour? if a master, where is my fear?' 1 Peter i. 14, 'As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.' In the 17th verse, 'And

if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' There must be a tenderness and a fear to offend their heavenly Father; for God will not be flattered with empty titles. That is a dishonour and a mockage, as it was for them to call Christ 'King of the Jews,' and to spit upon him, and buffet him. Therefore there is no true owning and knowing of him as a father unless we be thereby strongly moved to a care of obedience.

(2.) There are the privileges of children, and this knowing of the Father implieth trust and dependence: Ps. ix. 10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.' And therefore little children do so know the Father as to depend upon him for protection in all dangers, and provision of all necessaries, and finally for the heavenly inheritance and their everlasting portion; for they are begotten to a lively hope, 1 Peter i. 3; and therefore, as soon as they are born again, they begin to look for a child's portion, and to apply their minds to heavenly things; and so, because of their weakness, put themselves under the conduct and government of God as their everlasting father. From this the character of these little children or babes in Christ may be sufficiently understood.

Doct. That even the lowest sort of christians do know God as a father.

I shall illustrate this point by three considerations—

1. That God standeth in the relation of a father to his people.
2. That the lowest sort of christians do know him under this relation.
3. How this is the point which constituteth the difference between them and others.

I. For the first consideration, that God standeth in the relation of a father to his people. God is a father either in a general respect by creation, or in a more special regard by adoption.

1. By creation. He gave being to all things, but to man and angels reason. To establish the relation of a father, there must be communication of life and likeness. A painter that maketh a picture like himself is not the father of it, for though there be likeness, yet no life. The sun in propriety of speech is not the father of the frogs and putrid creatures which are quickened by its heat. This relation is applied only to univocal generations and rational creatures. A bull that produceth a calf like himself is not called the father of it; in ordinary speaking we call it the sire, and the heifer the dam. Now God is the Father of angels, and angels are the sons of God: Job xxxviii. 7, 'When the morning-stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy.' So men. Adam was the son of God, Luke iii. 38. Once more, though we have deformed ourselves, and are not the same that we were when we were first created, yet still in regard of some sorry remains of God's image, and the light of reason yet kept, we are called the sons of God, and God is called 'our Father;' yea, more a father than our natural parents are. Our parents concur to our being but instrumentally, but God originally. Now, as the writing is the work of the penman rather than of the pen, so are we the workmanship of God rather than of our parents. He forms us in the womb;

our parents know not whether the child will be male or female, beautiful or deformed, cannot tell the number of the bones, muscles, veins, arteries; this God appointeth. The soul, which was the better part of man, is of his immediate creation; therefore he is called 'the Father of spirits,' Heb. xii. 9, 'Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits?' they do not run in the channel of carnal generation or fleshly descent. In this general sense, by virtue of creation, God is the Father of all men, good and bad.

2. More especially, there is a particular sort of men to whom God is a father in Christ, and they are his children. This title is not by nature, but by grace: John i. 12, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name.' As many as believe in his name have this privilege, to be called 'the sons of God.' Although the best that ever lived have reason to judge themselves to be unworthy to be in the rank of servants to the Lord, yet it pleaseth him to advance the meanest that receive Christ by faith to the dignity and privilege of being his children. All such, even the meanest believer not excluded, may call God father. The thing itself, nakedly considered, is a greater dignity than the world can afford us; as a thing to be wondered at rather than told: 1 John iii. 1, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!' Admire it we may, express it to the full we cannot. It was said, 1 Sam. xviii. 22, 'Seemeth it a light thing to you to be a king's son-in-law?' We may with better reason say, Is it a small matter to become sons and daughters to the most high God? But if we consider how it was brought about, it doth more heighten it in our thoughts. The foundation of it was laid in the election of God; for 'we were predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,' Eph. i. 5. But before his decree could be executed and take place, the redemption of Christ was necessary. For we read, Gal. iv. 4, 5, 'But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.' Sin needed to be expiated by the Son of God in our nature before God would bestow this honour upon us. Christ was to be our brother before God would be our father; and to take a mother upon earth, that we might have a father in heaven; yea, to be made 'under the law,' to endure the law's curse, before we could be instated in this blessing. What need had God to be at such expense for poor worthless creatures? He had a Son of his own, in whom his soul found full complacency and delight. Men adopt *in orbitalis solatium*; it is a remedy found out for the comfort of them who have no children. It was never heard of that a father who had a son should adopt a son. Now that the Lord should adopt and take us into his family, who are the children of the devil by nature, this dignity, as it imports great privilege to us, so it calleth for great duty at our hands.

[1.] It importeth great privilege to us. There are great benefits accrue to us thereby.

(1.) The gift of the Holy Ghost. God, as a father by creation, gave us our natural endowments; but as a father by adoption, he giveth us the supernatural grace of the Spirit. It was given to Christ without measure, that all God's children and the members of Christ's mystical body might receive it from him as the head and fountain of their life: 'Because we are sons, he hath sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father,' Gal. iv. 6. Whosoever hath this high privilege of adoption conferred upon them, they have the Spirit of God given to them, to reside and dwell in their hearts, as their sanctifier, guide, and comforter, to sanctify and to transform them into the likeness of Christ: 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'But 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.' To guide them in all their ways: Rom. viii. 14, 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.' To comfort them with a sense of their gracious estate for the present: Rom. viii. 16, 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God;' and to assure them of a blessed estate for the future: 2 Cor. i. 22, 'Who hath sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.' The residence and dwelling of the Holy Ghost in our hearts is most felt in prayer: Rom. viii. 26, 'Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered;' Jude 20, 'Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost;' teaching the saints to address themselves to God as a father, with a familiar and childlike confidence, and yet with a holy reverence; with a humble submission, and yet with a holy vehemency and earnestness, opposite to that careless formality and deadness which is in other men's prayers.

(2.) We have a blessed and excellent inheritance to look for here; all the children are heirs and 'joint-heirs with Christ,' Rom. viii. 17, as soon as we are adopted and taken into God's family, though little of this dignity appeareth or maketh any fair show in the world: 1 John iii. 1, 2, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Behold, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' We only know who are the sons of God, but not what it is to be the sons of God; yet that right and hope that we have may allay all our cares, and fears, and sorrows, during the time of our abasement and humiliation: Luke xii. 32, 'Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'

(3.) In all his dealings for the present, God retaineth a fatherly affection to us, pitying our miseries, and pardoning our failings: Ps. ciii. 13, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' We need not much ado, or much entreat, or hire a father to pity a child in misery. So he pardoneth our failings: Mal. iii. 27, 'I will spare them, as a man spareth his only son that serveth him.' A parent will not be inexorable, nor severe upon every failing of a dutiful child and an only son. We often forget the duty of children, but God will not

forget the mercies of a father. As a parent saith, He is my child, though a faulty child or stubborn child, so will he spare us notwithstanding infirmities, supplying all our necessities: Mat. vi. 25, 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on: is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?' ver. 30, 'Wherefore if God clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?' ver. 32, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of all these things.' God is not ignorant of our condition, nor mindless of it. Carking taketh his work out of his hands; but the remembrance of a father dasheth all our distrustful thoughts. So protection in dangers, both for the inward and outward man. The soul is guarded by the Spirit: 2 Peter i. 3, 4, 'According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.' The body by the angels; their charge is not *cura animarum*, but *custodia corporis*, not the care of their souls, but the safety of their bodies. God's children are well guarded and guided till they come to their final estate. Heaven is kept for them, and they for it.

[2.] It calleth for great duty at our hands. I must mention that, because we are very apt to challenge the privileges when we neglect the duties which belong to God's children. It calleth for conformity and likeness to him in all divine perfections.

(1.) In holiness and purity: 1 Peter i. 15, 'But as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.' Compassion, mercy, and goodness: Eph. v. 1, 'Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children.' Compassion and mercy: Mat. v. 44, 45, 'But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and unjust;' Luke vi. 35, 36, 'But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.' So for truth: Isa. lxiii. 8, 'Surely they are my people, children that will not lie.' There is no divine virtue but there should be some representation and shadow of it at least found in us. God's dear children should be like him. All graces should be made lovely and amiable to us by his pattern and example.

(2.) In ready obedience to his laws. In one place we read, 'dear children,' Eph. v. 1, in another, 'obedient children,' 1 Peter i. 14. God taxeth his people for their unsuitable walking to this relation: Jer. iii. 4, 5, 'Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father? Will he reserve his anger for ever? will he keep it to the end? Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst.' Can we call him father whom we care not continually to displease?

(3.) Subjection and humble submission to his correction: Heb. xii. 5-10, 'And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? for they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' God hath castigations for all his children. It is consistent with the love of good-will and with the love of complacency. After that he hath made us amiable, the rod of correction will not wholly be laid aside while God's children are in the flesh. In heaven, where there is no danger, there is no use of it any more, because then they are fully and perfectly sanctified. Those whom God suffereth to go on in their sins to their own eternal undoing, they have not the privilege of sons, and therefore not the discipline of God's family; they are bastards. *Nόθοι* there doth not bear the notion of an illegitimate, but a degenerate son. Many profess themselves the children of God, but they are not owned as such. It is a sad and woful thing for a child to be left to himself, and to be suffered to go on in untoward courses; but far more sad it is for a man to be suffered to go on in sin without any chastisement and correction. God seemeth to cast them off, and to leave them to their own lusts, that they may perish for ever. Children, though they take it ill at the hands of others, yet take it patiently when beaten for their faults by their own parents, who under God are the cause of their being, and maintain and love them, and even in correcting seek their good, much more their souls' good hereafter. Earthly parents may err by wanting wisdom, and out of passion and rashness their chastisements may be arbitrary and irregular, but God never minglenth passion with his rod; there is more of compassion than passion in it; it is but only medicinal. His chastisements flow from the purest love, and are regulated by perfect wisdom, and tend to and end in holiness and happiness. Therefore, John xviii. 11, 'The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink of it?' I speak the more in this case, because the comfort of adoption is for such a time; and because the great error of these children is, that they had known the Father, yet would be dandled and never feel the rod.

II. For the second consideration, that the lowest sort of christians do know God in the relation of a father.

1. Christ hath taught all his disciples to say, 'Our Father,' Mat. vi. 9. There is none that cometh to pray with any confidence but taketh him up under this relation. We must all own him as a father, either by sense or by choice; either by a sense of his fatherly love in Christ, or else we must choose and esteem him as a father, resolve to have no father but God, and depend upon him, and obey him as such: Jer. iii. 19, 'Thou shalt call me, My father, and not turn away from me;'

that is, take him and acknowledge him as a father, and promise to continue loyal to him.

2. Adoption is one of the first privileges. As soon as a man owneth Christ, he is adopted and taken into God's family: John i. 12, 'To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God;' John xx. 17, 'I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.' The state of the person is altered; past sins are forgiven, and ground is laid for a future pardon. It is one of the first privileges we have as soon as we belong to Christ. What Christ is, he maketh his people to be in their proportion and measure.

3. It is God's covenant. He hath promised that all his 'shall know him, from the least to the greatest,' Heb. viii. 11. God hath no child so little but he knoweth his Father, though he be of little experience in the world. God hath showed himself to be a father in Christ. God hath elsewhere promised to give his people 'a heart to know him,' Jer. xxiv. 7. They cannot else belong to him, nor he be their God, nor they his children.

III. For the third consideration, how this is the constitutive difference. This was spoken to before.

Use 1. To inform us what care ought to be taken for the institution of little children; for though spiritual growth be mainly intended, yet natural age is not excluded or exempted. Some little ones may have a strange knowledge of God, and a sense of religion: Prov. xxii. 6, 'Train up a child in the way that he shall go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' The tender twig is soonest bowed. We tame a lion when he is young, and a horse when a colt. What we learn young is most easily received, and firmly retained, before the mind be forestalled. Seneca took notice of it, *Omnes præoccupati sumus*—our minds are wedded to evil, before set right toward God; thence cometh the difficulty. Consider they are children of the covenant, and should be entered betimes, Deut. xxix. from ver. 10 to 14. Christ hath great respect for little children, and he blameth those that kept them from him. God commandeth us to teach our children: Deut. vi. 7, 'And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up;' and we are commanded to 'bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' Eph. vi. 4. He that gave the precept will find the blessing. He expecteth it, and reckoneth upon it: Gen. xviii. 19, 'For I know that he will command his children, and his household after him; and they shall know the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.' Men promise this when they bring their children to baptism. They dedicate their children to the Lord, and educate them for the world and the flesh. Call upon your children as David doth upon Solomon: 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 'And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy Father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind.'

Use 2. If the lowest sort of christians do know God as a father, do we know God as a father? have we a Father in heaven? are we reconciled to him by Jesus Christ? You will know it mainly by this,

the state of adoption ; there is a spirit of adoption that doth accompany it. There is a state of adoption, and a spirit of adoption : ' Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father,' Gal. iv. 6. It discovereth itself in prayer, because it maketh us come in a familiar and childlike manner to God. A spirit of grace breaketh out into a spirit of supplication : Zech. xii. 10, ' I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications.' But as to your constant frame, have you the spirit of a son, the spirit of an heir ? The spirit of a son, that will discover itself in prayer. And it is a spirit of obedience ; there is a childlike reverence and dread of God ; they dare not offend him ; as the Rechabites, Jer. xxxv. 5, 6.