

sprinkling of the priest, the man was to wash himself, Lev. xiv. 6-8, to show that there is some work required on our part.

But what must we do? Certainly we are to make conscience of this work of purifying and cleansing and preparing ourselves for our great hopes; for it is we that repent, believe, strive, watch against sin, though still by the power of his grace.

In short, we must earnestly deal with God about it: 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,' Mat. viii. 2. You must depend upon the all-sufficiency of Christ's merit and satisfaction, for the saints washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb.' You must obey the Spirit's sanctifying motions: Rom. viii. 13, 'If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live; 1 Peter i. 22, 'Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit,' &c. You must lie at the pool. All that conscientiously use his ordinances, have some help for this holy work. It is you must keep the purifying graces, faith, hope, and love, in lively act and exercise; it is you must be careful to keep yourselves from the pollutions of the world, to prevent all sins of infirmity, and be sensible of them, and to mourn for them; and it is you must crucify the flesh more and more, check the pleasures of sin, by balancing them with your great hopes, and lament that the satisfying of the desires of the flesh have so sweet a relish. It is you must remember your baptismal vow. In short, you must get a greater hatred of sin, and a more universal care and study to please God in all things.

SERMON VI.

Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is a transgression of the law.—1 JOHN iii. 4.

IN the words we have a new argument to persuade to holiness. He had reasoned before from the dignity of our adoption; now from the indignity or base nature of sin, which is an act of rebellion and disloyalty against the sovereignty of God; it is in effect to proclaim war, or to break out into open rebellion against his laws: for 'whosoever committeth sin,' &c.

In which words observe—

1. A proposition concerning the danger of committing sin, 'Whosoever committeth sin.'

2. The proof of it from the proper definition of sin, it 'is a transgression of the law.'

The proposition respects the state of the sinner, the proof is taken from the nature of sin; the proposition showeth who is in the state of sin, the proof what is sin.

1. Who is in the state of sin; and so every transgressor of the law, even according to the new-covenant interpretation of it.

Observe here—

[1.] The subject, 'He that committeth sin.' To commit sin differeth from sinning simply taken; we all have sin in the habit: 1 John i. 8, 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;' and 'If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us,' ver. 10. We have sin in us, and we have sinned; but committing sin implieth something more than bare sinning: John viii. 34, 'Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin;' 1 John iii. 8, 'He that committeth sin is of the devil;' they that give up themselves to a trade of sin. It is not meant of those who have sin in them, or are conscious to daily infirmities and failings, and lament and strive against them, and labour to purify themselves yet more and more: *quisquis dat operam peccato*; so Beza rendereth it, one that is addicted to sin, and liveth in sin, against the checks of his own conscience, and doth not purify himself, and apply himself to a course of godliness.

[2.] The predicate, 'He transgresseth the law.' I would render it committeth a transgression of the law, or studiously breaketh it, and so forfeiteth the blessing of the gospel; for wittingly and willingly to break the law of God showeth we are under the curse of it. All are under the rule of the law, but the impenitent are under the curse of the law. It is not meant of those who sin out of infirmity, either through ignorance or incogitancy or general frailty; but of those who delight in sin, of those in whom sin reigneth; of those who deliberately, voluntarily, easily, freely, frequently break God's laws. It is opposed to him that purifieth himself; as sin and purity are contrary, so to purify ourselves and encourage sin, are exactly contrary.

(1.) Their designs are contrary; the one is fitting himself for his everlasting estate, the other satisfieth his present lusts, and liveth according to the inclination of the flesh.

(2.) They are different in their course; the one bendeth all his endeavours to be holy and pure, as Christ is pure, the other giveth up himself to a sinful life; either maketh it his design to sin, or he giveth the boat to the stream, and does not heartily check and resist sin. Some wicked men's hearts are set in them to do evil; but if they go not so far to make it their design and work to sin, yet they are grossly negligent; they do not make it their work not to sin, but let it reign in them. Of one sort of unregenerate men it may be said, *non proponunt peccare*; but of all unregenerate men, *proponunt non peccare*. Some are sons of Belial, who have no regard to the law of God, but live in an utter contempt and defiance thereof; but others do not frame their doings to observe it, nor improve the aids of grace to keep themselves from it, but customarily break it, live under a continual tenor and course of sin. Now if sin reign in them, they are not under grace, but under the law, transgressors in the new covenant sense.

2. The reason, 'For sin is a transgression of the law;' and wilful sin is a contempt of the law in general. It doth not become christians to do anything which doth disagree with the law of their Father; but though God dispenses with infirmities, he will not bear with iniquities; therefore if we remain in a sinful state, or live a sinful life, what manner of persons soever we are by profession, or how little soever

¹ Qu. 'regenerate' ?—ED.

those sins which we live in be esteemed in the world, they will prove baneful to our souls. Many carnal men, under colour of being freed from the curse of the law by Christ, indulge themselves in their sins, and either think they shall not be called to an account for these things, or, if they cry to God for mercy, think all is well, though they frequently, constantly, easily relapse into those sins again and again, and so turn the grace of God into wantonness, Jude 4; christian liberty into licentiousness, 2 Peter ii. 19. Now these are transgressors of the law, and must appear as such, and answer as such before the bar of God. And it is also a caution to good men; they must not flatter themselves in their sins, nor give way even to their infirmities, as if they were no sins. No; they are breaches of the law, and if we give way to them, we are pronounced as transgressors of it: Num. xiv. 41, 'Wherefore should ye transgress the commandment of the Lord your God?' Dan. ix. 11, 'All Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us.'

Doct. He that liveth in a course of sin forfeits the privileges of adoption offered to him, and maketh himself guilty before God as a breaker of the law:

In pursuing this point, I shall do three things—

1. Show that all mankind is under the law of God, which still remaineth in force as an inviolable rule of righteousness.

2. That the nature and heinousness of sin is to be determined by a contrariety or want of conformity to this law.

3. That those that live in sin, or the allowed breach of the law, cannot look upon themselves as God's adopted children, but are still under the curse of it.

I. For the first, that all mankind are under the law of God, it will be evidenced by these considerations—

1. That man is God's creature, and therefore his subject. The subjection of man to God is built upon this ground, his total and absolute dependence upon God, both as to creation and preservation. We have life and breath, and all things from him, from whence there resulteth an obligation to obey him; for dependence inferreth inferiority, obedience, and subjection, such as children owe to their parents, from whom, under God, they had their being. He that made us and kept us may dispose of us at his own pleasure; for God being a creator, he is an owner; and being an owner, he is a ruler. The dominion of jurisdiction is founded in the dominion of propriety: Mat. xx. 15, 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?'

2. Man being God's subject, hath a certain law given to him, which doth require obedience from him, and doth determine his duty, particularly wherein it shall consist: Micah vi. 8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to love mercy, and do justice, and to walk humbly with thy God?' This law is partly made known to us by the light of natural conscience: Rom. ii. 14, 'The gentiles do by nature the things contained in the law;' partly by scripture; so more clearly in Ps. cxlvii. 19, 'He hath showed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and judgments to Israel; he hath not dealt so with every nation.' Now nothing is sin but what is against this law, and all that is a breach of it is a sin.

3. Man being under a law, should be very tender of breaking or disobeying it, for God never dispenseth with it, as it is purely moral, and standeth much upon keeping up his legislative authority; which may appear by these considerations—

[1.] If man could have kept it, he would have gotten life by it; that was God's first intention; and the reason why it succeeded not was through our sin. The law could not make us happy, because it became weak through our flesh, Rom. viii. 3, and Gal. iii. 21, 'If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law;' but a righteousness fully satisfying the demands of the law now in the fallen estate is impossible; the gospel therefore offereth another righteousness, to which the law is not contrary, but subservient.

[2.] In that God would not release the penalty of the law, nor pardon any sin against it, without satisfaction first made by the blood of Christ; the law is both the rule of our duty and God's judgment; it showeth what is due from us to God, and also what is due from God to us in case of disobedience. Now before God would save man, Jesus Christ must be subject to the law, to suffer what is imposed as a punishment, before God would save us from it: 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.'

[3.] Before man can have actual benefit by this satisfaction, he must consent to return to the duty of the law, and live in obedience to God; for God never pardoneth any while they are in their rebellion, and live under the full dominion of sin, but when by covenant they return to their allegiance to their rightful Lord: Acts xxvi. 18, 'To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God;' Isa. lv. 7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon;' Isa. i. 16, 17, 'Wash you, make you clean, and then your sins, though they were as scarlet, shall be as white as snow.' Till a resolution of new obedience, we have no interest in the grace of the new covenant, for the way of entrance into the new covenant is by faith and repentance. Now repentance is nothing else but a sincere purpose of new obedience, or living according to the will or law of God.

[4.] Christ merited regeneration, or the spirit of holiness, that all new creatures might voluntarily keep this law, though not in absolute perfection, yet in new sincere obedience: Titus iii. 5, 6, 'He saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he hath shed on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour.' Christ came to bring us into the favour of God by pardon and adoption; so into a capacity of loving, pleasing, and obeying God by regeneration. Now the new creature is fitted to obey the law: Eph. iv. 24, 'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness;' Heb. viii. 10, 'I will put my laws into their mind, and write them upon their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.' The great blessing of the gospel is grace to keep the law.

[5.] The more we keep this law, the more pleasing we are to God, and the more communion we have with Christ. As renewing grace fits us to enter into the evangelical state, so the more entirely and readily we give up ourselves to do the will of God, our interest is more clear, and our participation of the blessings of the gospel more full, and our comfort more strong: Ps. cxix. 165, 'Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them;' Rom. viii. 1, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ, which walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;' Ps. i. 1, 2, 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of God, and in his law doth he meditate day and night;' Titus ii. 11-13, 'The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ;' and 1 John i. 7, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, then have we fellowship one with another.' And it is said of our Lord Jesus, Luke ii. 52, that 'he increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.' If it be said of Christ, whose increase was only in the exercise, for at his first coming he had the Spirit without measure, much more of us, that, as we increase in holiness, we increase in the favour of God. Surely the more God loveth us, the more we obey his law; for all religion is to love God, which is our work, and to be beloved of him, which is our reward and happiness.

[6.] That we cannot have full communion with God till we are perfectly conformed to his law; for we are not introduced into the heavenly glory till we are perfect and complete in holiness: Eph. v. 27, 'That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish;' Col. i. 22, 'To present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight;' Jude 24, 'To present you faultless before the presence of his glory.' During life our obedience is but imperfectly begun, but when it is completed and finished, we do not stay out of heaven one jot or moment. In heaven and the state of perfect glory, the law as purely moral is always in force; we are bound to love God and one another.

[7.] That the law is the rule of all God's judgments in the world, and his righteous process, whether against nations or persons: Rom. i. 18, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;' Heb. ii. 2, 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward,' &c.

[8.] That he will not spare his own children when they transgress it by heinous and scandalous sins; though they be the dearly beloved of his soul, and fall out but in rare instances and cases, yet they do not go away without remarks of God's displeasure: Prov. xi. 31, 'The righteous shall be recompensed on earth, much more the wicked and the sinner.' To instance in Eli, his sons are slain in battle, the ark

taken, his daughter-in-law dieth, and at length the old man dieth. Witness David, after he had fallen foully; Tamar is defiled, Amnon slain, Absalom, in rebellion against him, rifleth his palace royal, defileth his concubines; he himself driven from his palace, fleeth for his life, and hath much ado to escape. All this is spoken to show that the law is still in force, that Christ came not to dissolve but to fulfil it.

[9.] That Christ came not to dissolve our obligation to God, or ever intended it, but to promote it rather. Not to dissolve it: if he came *de jure* to free us from obedience to the law, it is to make us gods; for no creature is *sui juris*, his own to dispose of; it is impossible any created thing can be without a law, for that were to make it God, to make the creature supreme and independent, that his own will should be his rule, without liableness to another. Nor *de facto*, to set us free while we are creatures; for that were to make us devils, to live in a direct opposition to God. But rather to promote holiness; partly as his design was to restore us to obedience: Luke i. 74, 75, 'That we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.' And partly as Christ was a pattern, and came to do what he hath commanded: Mat. iii. 15, 'For thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness;' Mat v. 17, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil;' Heb. v. 8, 9, 'Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him.'

II. The nature and heinousness of sin is to be determined by a contrariety or want of conformity to this law; for sin presupposeth a law and lawgiver, and a debt of subjection lying upon us. We are subject to God by virtue of our dependence, but the course of this subjection and dependence is determined by the law of God, or the act of his legislative will, in what way we shall express our obedience to him; so that all sin presupposeth a law, and the power of the lawgiver. The apostle telleth us, Rom. iv. 15, 'Where there is no law, there is no transgression;' and Rom. v. 13, 'Sin is not imputed where there is no law.' Well, then, by the law we know what is sin, the nature of it, and how great an evil it is, and the heinousness of it.

But if we would know what sin is, or what is sin, let us see how many ways this law may be transgressed: two ways especially; either by omitting what is commanded as a duty to God, or by committing what is forbidden.

1. By omitting what is commanded as a duty to God or man; as suppose invocation of God: Jer. x. 25, 'Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name;' Ps. xiv. 3, 'There is none that doeth good, no not one;' Mat. xxv. 42, 'I was an hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink;' *non qui rapit aliena, sed qui non dat sua*; Mat. xxv. 30, 'And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Unprofitableness, if there be no more, is a damning sin. When we directly transgress an affirmative precept, that is a sin of omission; or when we do anything

against a negative precept, that is a sin of commission. There is in these sins the general nature of all sin, a transgression of the law, or a disobedience and breach of a precept, and so by consequence a contempt of God's authority. When Saul had not done what God bid him to do, he telleth him, 1 Sam. xv. 23, 'That rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness as iniquity and idolatry;' implying that sins of omission are rebellion and stubbornness, for which God threateneth to rend the kingdom from him. So for a sin of omission he punts by Eli's family from the priesthood: 1 Sam. iii. 13, 'I will judge his house for ever, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.' Now the more necessary the duties omitted are, the greater the sin is: Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?' 1 Cor. xvi. 22, 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha.' Especially if the omission be total: Ps. xiv. 2, 'There is none seeketh after God;' Jer. ii. 32, 'My people have forgotten me days without number.' When duties are seasonable: Prov. xvii. 16, 'Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, and he hath no heart to it?' When the performance of a duty is easy, to stand with God for a trifle: Luke xvi. 24, he that would not give a crumb shall not have a drop. So when fully convinced of our duty: James iv. 17, 'To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' These sins are the ruin of most people in the world. They forget God; they do not seek after him. Yea, the children of God oftener offend in these kind of sins than the other kind; not so much in foul excesses, as in the omission of good duties.

2. By committing what God hath forbidden, or breaking through the restraints God hath laid upon us, in worshipping idols, or satisfying our revenge, or fulfilling our lusts. The first sin was eating the forbidden fruit; and the decalogue consists rather of prohibitions than precepts, to meet with the corrupt nature of man. God doth as it were in his law cry to us, 'Oh, do not this abominable thing which I hate!' Jer. xliv. 4. He hath hedged up our way, and yet we break through. If you ask which is the worst of these two, sins of omission against the affirmative, or commission against the negative commandments? I answer—In some cases the one, in some the other. Sins of commission are usually more foul and scandalous, but sins of omission, especially total neglects of necessary duties, are more dangerous. Sins of commission, when they break out into shameful acts, scourge the conscience with remorse and horror; but sins of omission bring an insensible slightness, carelessness, and hardness of heart. Our mischief cometh by neglecting what should keep religion alive in our souls. But now sins of commission may be acted in thought, word, and deed; for the whole man falleth under the law of God. These three ways of sinning are implied in Prov. viii. 13, 'Pride and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth.'

[1.] Thoughts are not free; the workings of the heart fall under a law: 'The thought of foolishness is sin;' Ps. cxix. 113, 'I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.' Mark, he inferreth his hatred of vain thoughts out of his love to the law. Thoughts and desires are condemned by the law of God, as well as more perfect operations.

[2.] Words also fall under the law, and we are to give an account thereof in the judgment: Mat. xii. 36, 'Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment;' James ii. 12, 'So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.' Then the judgment is carried on according to law.

[3.] Evil actions, that break out into the conversation, are consummate sins: James i. 15, 'Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin.' These being more deliberate, argue greater boldness and contempt of God, bring scandal and dishonour to his name, and convey the taint and contagion of an evil example to others. It is ill to have a fire kindled in our bosoms, but it is worse when the sparks of sin fly abroad. These acts of sin are either secret, done between God and us, without the privity of any others than the sinning parties; these are an affront to God's omnipotency, because they put more respect upon men than God, which is palliated atheism: Jer. ii. 26, 'A thief is ashamed when he is found;' Job xxiv. 15, 'The adulterer waiteth for the twilight; no eye shall see me; and disguiseth his face.' To be unjust in secret, unclean in secret, malicious, sensual, voluptuous; art thou afraid men should know it, and not afraid God should know it? Open sin, when in defiance of all that is good and holy, men will commit, and are not ashamed of it; as Absalom lay with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel: Isa. iii. 9, 'They declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not.' This is to enter into an open war and defiance against God.

III. That those that live in sin, or any allowed breach of this law, are still under the curse of it, and cannot look upon themselves as God's adopted children; for he that breaketh the law is opposed to those whom the Father hath loved with so great love, as to take them into his family, and to acknowledge them for his children.

To clear this to you—

1. It is certain that when we come to take the law out of the hand of a redeemer, we are all sinners and transgressors before God. When we first received the law out of the hand of a creator, we were pure and upright, had no former faults to be pardoned, but were as the creation had left us; but now we have a mountain of guilt upon our backs when we are called upon to submit to the kingdom of the Mediator; therefore we come to him as one that will pay our debts, and discharge us of this heavy load, which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear: Ps. cxxx. 4, 'There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;' Mat. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' Pardon, rest, and ease for your burdened souls, is our first invitation; for alas! we are all sinners and transgressors.

2. Though God findeth us sinners, and we apprehend ourselves to be so, yet when he taketh us into his family, he doth not leave us so; but on God's part regeneration maketh way for adoption: John i. 12, 13, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' And regeneration doth fit us for obedience to the law, as was said before; for it is a writing his law on our minds, and a putting

it into our hearts. And on our part there is repentance, or a bitter dislike of sin, with which is a purpose of new obedience, or of forbearing the evil which the law forbiddeth, and doing the good which the law requireth; a returning to the allegiance we owe our sovereign Lord: Acts xvii. 30, 31, 'He hath commanded all men to repent, because he hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained.' Surely they that enter into the Mediator's kingdom, and do seriously and solemnly engage to be faithful to him, are strongly bound to be exceeding tender of doing anything against the law and will of God; partly because they now owe obedience not only to God as creator, but Christ as redeemer, who is their new lord by a beneficial right and title: Rom. xiv. 9, 'To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord of dead and living.' And their disobedience is a double transgression, and so a double displeasing of God; for bonds are multiplied by benefits. Partly because in their repentance, if it were serious, sin was complained of as the greatest burden that lay upon their consciences, the grievance from whence they sought ease, the wound which pained them at the heart, the disease their souls were sick of; and their purpose seemed firmly set to please God in all things. Now, if men cast off all care of righteousness and holiness, and take occasion from the grace of Christ to live in sin, and to build again what they have destroyed, they cast off their claim, and so make themselves transgressors of the law before God: Gal. ii. 17, 'If I build again the things which I have destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.' It is a kind of outlawing ourselves from the law of grace.

3. None are so exact with God in the obedience of his law, but that still they need the same grace that brought them into the family to keep them in the family, and to pardon their daily failings. Not to sin is the fixed purpose of christians; but who can watch so severely, and keep such a strict guard over his own heart, but that he doth often sin and fall? But God will not deal in anger with us, and cast us out of his favour and family for every sin, through the weakness and frailty of our natures; but though we often forget the duty of children, he doth not forget the mercy of a father: Ps. ciii. 13, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him;' Mal. iii. 17, 'I will spare them as a father spareth his only son that serveth him.' He hath mercy in Christ for all such as do sincerely endeavour to please God, and serve him, and do not indulge themselves in deliberate sin.

4. Though God's adopted children may through infirmity break his law, yet there is a manifest difference between them and others that live in a state of sin, either in enmity to godliness, or in a course of vanity, sensuality, or any kind of rebellion against God, rejecting his counsels, calls, and mercies, which should reclaim them. There are some who sin with fulness of deliberation: Micah ii. 1, 'Woe to them that devise iniquity, that work evil upon their beds: when the morning is light they practise it, because it is in the power of their hands.' With freeness of consent: Prov. vii. 22, 'He goeth after her straightway.' With strength of resolution: Eccles. viii. 11, 'Their heart is fully set in them to do evil;' Jer. xlv. 17, 'But we will certainly do whatsoever

goeth out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the city of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil.' Frequency of action: 2 Peter iii. 3, 'Walking after their own lusts.' Accustomed to do evil: Jer. xiii. 23. Skill and dexterity in sinning: Jer. iv. 22, 'They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.' Now these are not as God's children, who have a few failings.

Use 1. To show the dangerous condition of those who live in a course of sin; the Holy Ghost pronounceth them breakers of the law. But now the children of God, those that are taken into God's family, have sin dwelling in them, but not reigning; remaining, but not reserved; they are often foiled, but it is besides their purpose, which is the difference between them and others, the habitual bent of their hearts being against sin. The prevailing and overpoising heart is for God; their wills are fixed, and set to please him: Heb. xiii. 18, 'We trust we have a good conscience.' But with the carnal it is not so; sin is more loved than hated. A man is not determined good from his conscience, but from the prevalent bent of his will. It is not enough to have a conscience rightly informed from the word of God concerning any duty, but there must be a bent, a fixed purpose to obey God in all things; which doth still put us on to do good and to avoid evil. The will is the imperial power in the soul, and the first mover and principle of all moral actions; and as it standeth disposed and constantly bent, so is the life good or evil; and where the heart is predominantly bent on righteousness, we may take comfort in our condition, though forced to grapple with remaining weaknesses. But if bare conscience calleth for that we have no mind to, though some dislikes, some feeble resistance be made, and soon suppressed, it will not excuse us from being transgressors of the law. The conscience of a convinced man is for God, but the heart and will of a renewed man is for God. A convinced man may have an imperfect will to be better, a velleity, but not a perfect volition; but in a converted man there is a will and a delight in God: 'To will is present with me, and I delight in the law of God in the inner man,' Rom. vii. 22.

2. The tenor of his life is for God; his course is a course of godliness; but in a natural man, his course is a course of sin, and he doth not avoid those failings which he might avoid if he were sincerely willing. Men are determined by their walk, whether it be after the flesh or after the Spirit, Rom. viii. 1. Their sins are not of settled interest and choice, but sudden passion.

3. To the godly sin is a great burden: Rom. vii. 24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' They are unwearied and instant in the use of means whereby they may get rid of it; they do not only dislike sin, but overcome it in some measure; they are always cleansing their minds from vanity and sin, and 'perfecting holiness in the fear of God,' 2 Cor. vii. 1; 'As ye have received of us how ye ought to walk, and to please God, so you would abound therein yet more and more,' 1 Thes. iv. 1.

4. By their falls they are much better strengthened, and cautioned

against sin for time to come: Ps. li. 6, 'In the hidden parts thou hast made me to know wisdom.' The others, if sin be complained of, it is not reformed nor mortified: they are sorry for their sins for a fit, but it is not a sorrow that wounds sin to the heart, that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation 'not to be repented of;' but the others do recover themselves in such a kindly manner that their health is bettered by their disease.

Use 2. Since it is hard to state how far a child of God may go in sinning, or what are mere infirmities consistent with grace, the best way will be to stand at a distance universally from all sin, hating all sin, and keeping a constant care and solicitude to please God in all things, and to pray with David, Ps. cxix. 133, 'Order my steps in thy word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.' It is enough to breed caution in us that a sin of infirmity in its own nature is a transgression of the law, whether it be imputed to us, yea or no; and a man that doth not make conscience of infirmities will in time not make conscience of iniquities; but that man that persists in a sinful course, certainly doth not, cannot walk uprightly with God: 1 John v. 18, 'We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not.' When the rest of the world lieth in wickedness, the grace of God in his heart ordinarily is prevailing in him.

SERMON VII.

Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is a transgression of the law.—1 JOHN iii. 4.

FROM this scripture I have observed this doctrine—

That he that liveth in a course of sin forfeiteth the privileges of adoption offered to him, and maketh himself guilty before God as a breaker of the law.

I have showed you—

1. That all mankind is under the law of God, which still remaineth in force as an inviolable rule of righteousness.

2. That the nature and heinousness of sin is to be determined by a contrariety unto or want of conformity to this law.

3. That those that live in sin or the allowed breach of the law cannot look upon themselves as God's adopted children, but are still under the curse of it.

4. I now come to show you the heinous nature of sin. Here—

I shall first show what heinousness, venom, and malignity there is in sin, to induce the children of God to a horror and hatred of it; Secondly, Give you the practical corollaries thence ensuing, that sin should be an odious thing to christians, because it is a transgression of the law of God.

First, Let me speak of the evil of sin, as it is a transgression of the law. It may be represented—

1. From the consideration of the lawgiver, to whom belongeth goodness, wisdom, and power.

2. From the law itself, which may be considered either as to the precept or the sanction, by penalties and rewards.

3. The adjuncts of the law, which are—(1.) The providences whereby God confirmeth it; (2.) The means whereby he doth enforce it; (3.) The slenderness of the temptations that tempt and provoke us to break it.

If I should exactly follow this method, it would wonderfully show the malignity and evil nature of sin; as if we consider the wisdom, power, and goodness of the lawgiver. His wisdom, as the law is given by a wise God, so sin is extreme folly. His goodness, and that is twofold—either moral or beneficial. His moral goodness is his holiness and purity; so sin is an express contrariety to it. His beneficial goodness, which showeth his readiness to do good to the creature; sin is a plain denial of it: or his actual beneficence, so sin is ingratitude. His power signifieth his authority, or might and strength. To break it, as it signifieth his authority, so sin is disobedience; as his authority is grounded on his propriety, so it is robbery, or converting that which is another's to our own will. Or our covenant or consent by way of consecration, so it is sacrilege. By way of marriage union, so it is not single fornication, but adultery. As it signifieth his might, strength, or omnipotency, so it is a depreciation or contempt of his glorious majesty, or a slighting of his frowns, or a playing with the vengeance of the almighty and great God. I might go on, but because keeping to this method might be too perplexing to a popular auditory, I shall not exactly observe it, nor yet wholly deviate from it. Now I shall show you the heinousness, venom, and malignity there is in sin, the more to induce the children of God to a horror and hatred of it, in fourteen particulars.

1. There is folly in it, as it is a deviation from the best rule which the divine wisdom hath given unto us. If we should only look upon the law as a bare direction or counsel given us by one that is wiser than we, to slight it is a contempt of the wisdom of God, as if he knew not how to govern the world, and what is meet and good for man; and so a poor worm is exalted above God: Micah vi. 8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good.' Now, shall we slight his direction, and in effect say, Our own way is better? Reason requireth that they that are not able to choose for themselves should obey their guides, and content themselves with the wisdom of others, who see farther than they do; as Elymas, when struck blind, sought somebody to lead him by the hand, Acts xiii. 11. Can a blind man feel out his way better than another who hath eyes to choose it for him? God is wiser than we; and all that would not spit in the face of their creator should think so. Now he hath reduced all moral duties to a few heads, and disposed them into an accurate method, speaking to us with particular application, 'Thou shalt not have any other gods;' and, 'Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not commit adultery.' Now for us, after all this, to run of our own heads, and consult with our own foolish lusts, and the suggestions of the devil, who is our worst enemy, is desperate madness and folly; and yet so doth every one that breaketh

the law in thought, word, and deed : Deut. iv. 6, 'Keep these statutes, and do them, for this is your wisdom.' The most holy are the wisest : Jer. viii. 9, 'They have rejected the word of the Lord, and then what wisdom is there in them?' They who reject that which is able to make them wise to salvation, that in which all true wisdom consisteth, that which cometh from the fountain of all wisdom, how can they be wise men, who, though wicked, would not be accounted weak and foolish? yet sin maketh us so while we refuse God's counsel, who knoweth our frame, and what is best for us. Every soul in hell is brought there by sinful folly.

2. Laws are not only rules to direct, but have a binding force from the authority of the lawgiver. God doth not only give us counsel as a friend, but commands as a sovereign. Therefore the second notion whereby the evil of sin is set forth is that of disobedience and rebellion ; and so it is a great injury done to God, because it is a depreciation or a contempt of God's authority. It is *finis operis*, though not *operantis* ; though not in the intention of the man that sinneth, yet in the nature of the action. You count it great pride in Pharaoh to say, Exod. v. 2, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?' or in those rebels, Ps. xii. 4, 'Our tongues are our own ; who is lord over us?' We will think, and speak, and do what we please, and own no law but our lusts. Now though you do not say thus in so many direct and formal words, yet this is the interpretation of your actions. Whenever you sin, you despise the law that forbiddeth that sin, and by consequence the authority of him that made it : 2 Sam. ii. 9, 'Wherefore hast thou sinned in despising the commandment?' Tush ! I will do it ; it is no matter for the law of God which standeth in the way. It may be David had no such actual thought, but yet the action itself speaketh it ; for an act of irreverence and contempt of God's authority is as if it were not to be stood upon when our lusts urge us to the contrary. And certainly no man can endure to be crossed in his will by an inferior ; and will God take it well at your hands ? Oh, that we could make our hearts sensible of this ! It would make us cautious, and more humble when we have sinned. I am about to do that, or have done that which is a contempt of God ; and is it nothing to us to slight God ? Other creatures, that are under a law as well as we, dare not do so. The angels have a deep awe and reverence of God : Jude 9, 'Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil, disputing about the body of Moses, durst not bring a railing accusation, but said, the Lord rebuke thee.' What was the matter ? An archangel durst not venture on a passionate word. Certainly a man is never good, never walketh answerably to his creation, till he hath a great reverence and dread of God's authority impressed upon his heart : Prov. xiii. 13, 'Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed, but whoso feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' Not he that feareth a judgment, but he that feareth a commandment, durst not venture, needeth no more to move him and stop him, but to know what God will have him to do or not do ; these shall be rewarded, not others ; as he that breaketh the law of any king cannot expect a reward from him. Alas ! there is nothing more common than for men to make little reckoning of a commandment. But in good earnest, is it nothing

to cross the will of God? You might reason as the centurion, Mat. viii. 9, 'I am a man under authority, and I have others under me.' Take either part, and consider yourselves in your subjection to men that are above you, or in your carriage to those under you, and you may shame yourselves in the manifold breaches of the law of God. You have an awe of men's laws, why not of God's? His authority is greater, and power to punish greater; you may get out of their sight while you sin, and escape out of their reach after you have offended them; 'but whither will you go from God's presence?' Ps. cxxxix. 7. Set the Rechabites before you when their father was dead: Jer. xxxv. 6, 7, 'We dare not drink wine, because our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine.' But we need not go so far back; poor men and servants dare not displease them that have power over them by whom they live. If a master, or a father, or a landlord, or a magistrate be but displeased with them, how do they tremble and shake? If they know anything against their mind, they dare not do it, and shun it; they shake at the word of a man of power, or one a little above them, but make bold with God, and sin freely without check or remorse. What do we think of God, what do we make of him?

3. It is shameful ingratitude. Man is God's beneficiary, from whom he hath received life and being, and all things, and is therefore bound to love and serve him according to his declared will. We have our being from him: Ps. c. 3, 'He made us, and not we ourselves.' And we continually depend upon him: Acts xvii. 28, 'In him we live, and move, and have our being.' And surely dependence should beget observance. Men are loath to break with, or are careful to reconcile themselves to, those upon whom they depend. As when the men of Tyre had offended Herod, they sought terms of reconciliation: Acts xii. 20, 'Making Blastus their friend, because their country was nourished by the king's country.' Now it is extreme unthankfulness, stupidity, and brutishness for us to carry ourselves undutifully towards God, who gave us our beings. Our parents, who next, under God, gave us our beings, knew not when the child was in the womb whether it would be male or female; they rocked our cradles for us, and provided for us in our frail and infant state. When we were not capable to express one act of thankfulness, God protected us, supplied us with all necessaries, had a tender care of us, as parents are wont to have of their children: all that we have and are, we have from him; he hath preferred, honoured, and advanced us. Now should we break his laws who hath dealt so graciously and bountifully with us? Deut. xxxii. 5, 'Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?' Surely such ungrateful people show themselves much depraved, and more brutish than the beasts themselves, who have no capacity to know God as the first cause of all beings, yet take notice of the next hand from whom they receive their supplies, and in their kind express their gratitude to such as feed them and make much of them: Isa. i. 3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib.' But we take no notice and regard of God, who hath made us, and kept us, and hath been beneficial to us all our days. Surely this should shame us out of sin; for shall we offend our great benefactor? If gratitude for benefits past doth not prevail with us, yet interest should; for all our benefits

plainly must come from God. You have more to do with God than men; you are to ask your comforts daily from him, and therefore should study to please him. You are nothing but what he hath made you, and what he must continue every moment to you. Now you that are to go a begging to him daily, and receive all your comforts from his hands, should you break his laws and cross his will? For if you will not hear God, how should he hear you? Prov. xxviii. 9, 'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, his prayer shall be an abomination.' Men observe those most with whom they have most to do. Love is not to be requited with unkindness and ingratitude. If our lawgiver be also our benefactor, men should shame themselves out of sin. Even our common mercies point to heaven, and tell us whence they come, and for what.

4. It is a disowning of God's propriety in us, as if we were not his own, and God had not power to do with his own as he pleaseth. The creature is absolutely at God's dispose, not only as he hath a jurisdiction over us as his subjects, but a propriety in us as his goods. A prince hath a more absolute power over his lands and his own goods than he hath over his subjects; over his subjects he hath a dominion of jurisdiction, but over his goods a dominion of propriety. God is not only a ruler, but an owner, as he made us out of nothing, and bought us when we were worse than nothing, and still keepeth us from returning into our original nothing again. Now, shall those that are absolutely his own withdraw themselves from him, and live according to their own will, and think and speak and do what they list? Surely it is a plain denial of God's propriety in us and lordship over us: Ps. xii. 4, 'Our tongues are our own, who is lord over us?' Alas! we have no will of our own, nor mind of our own, nor tongue of our own; no wealth nor strength, nor interests of our own; all these are God's, and must be improved for him. If we speak, it must be for God, or as God hath directed; if we think, we should think for God: everything is his, and must be used not negatively only, not against him, but positively for him. It robbeth God of his propriety. If we consider his natural right, so sin is such an injury and wrong to God as theft and robbery. If we consider our own covenant, by which we voluntarily own God's right and property in us, so it is adultery and breach of marriage vows. If we consider this covenant as being made in a way of devoting and consecrating of ourselves from a common to a holy use, so it is sacrilege; all which aggravate sin, and should make it more odious to our thoughts.

5. It is a contempt of God's holiness and purity, as if he were indifferent to good and evil, and stood not upon his law, whether men broke it or kept it, and would not call them to an account, and judge them for it. Whereas God standeth punctually and precisely upon his law; the least point is dearer unto him than all the world in some sense: Mat. v. 18, 'But not one jot or tittle of the law shall pass away.' God maketh great reckoning of it, but we make little reckoning of it when we do so freely break it. He hath given a law to be kept to a tittle, and we break it in every tittle. God hath been peremptory and precise, and showed himself a holy and jealous God when it hath been broken in a small and inconsiderable circumstance, as we would think. Wit-

ness the breach made upon Uzzah, and upon the men of Bethshemesh, 1 Sam. vi. 19 ; a poor man that gathered sticks on the sabbath-day was struck dead ; the turning of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt ; the striking of Zacharias, John's father, dumb ; the hindering Moses from entering into Canaan, for smiting the rock twice. And after all this, we think we may venture, and no harm will come of it. Surely we cannot be too tender of the law. We are bidden to keep it as the apple of the eye, Prov. vii. 2. The eye is a tender place, and is offended with the least dust ; now as we would be chary of the eye, so should we be of the law of God.

6. It is a denial of the goodness of God, as if he were envious of the happiness and welfare of mankind, as if he had planted in us desires which he would not have satisfied, only to vex and torment us, and had fettered us and restrained us unreasonably, and his commands were grievous, and his yoke intolerable ; yea, ensnared us by keeping us from that which is good and comfortable for us. The devil inspired this thought into our first parents, in the first sin that ever was committed. And the first in every kind is the measure of all the rest, Gen. iii. 4, 5. Is God so kind, and yet deals unkindly with man, to put him into a garden, and plant trees on purpose to anger him ; that he might have that continually in his eye which he might not enjoy ; to deny him the use of that fruit which only had the virtue to make him truly happy ? These were the insinuations of Satan, by which he undermineth their obedience. You see his battery is against God's goodness and kindness to man, which he endeavoureth to discredit, and make man doubt of, by all the ways he can ; so still the same thing is implied in every sin, that God is envious, and therefore we are impatient of his restraints. Though but one tree reserved, Satan thinketh this a fit occasion of raising a jealousy, as if that which he had withheld from man had been far better than that which he granted to him. If he prevailed so much upon our first parents in their estate of innocency, no marvel if he prevails so easily upon their posterity in this state of corruption. We are too impatient of his yoke : Ps. ii. 4, ' Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us ; ' ' And the carnal mind is enmity to the law,' Rom. viii. 7. They cannot endure to have their liberty infringed, and to resign up their wills to the will of God, though he requireth nothing but for our good, Deut. vi. 24. And therefore his sovereignty should not be disclaimed by man, nor the exercise of it be grievous to him. Men would fain cast away bonds and cords, as if the crossing of their humours were an infringing of their happiness.

7. It is a depreciation and contempt of God's glorious majesty. What else shall we make of a plain contest with him, and a flat contradiction to his holy will ? for while we make our carnal and depraved will the rule and guide of our actions against God's holy will, we plainly contend with him, whose will shall stand, his or ours, and so cast off God's authority, and seek to jostle him out of his throne ; we pluck the crown off his head, and the sceptre out of his hands, usurping his authority, and so slight the eternal power of this glorious king, as if he were not able to avenge the wrongs done to his majesty, but that we could make our part good against him : 1 Cor. x. 22, ' Do we pro-

voke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?' Isa. xlv. 9, 'Woe unto him that striveth with his maker.' Such a perfect disagreement with the almighty and holy God argueth an entering into the lists with him, as if we could carry our cause, or endure his greatest terrors. And will God be despised by man who is a worm, who is nothing but what God maketh him to be? Shall a silly worm dare enter into a contest with the almighty God, who can chastise him, and do justice upon him in a moment? For still the world is upheld by his providential influence and sustentation. We may escape men, either get out of their reach, or else outlive their wrath; but who can fly from God? Ps. cxxxix., and 'it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,' Heb. x. 31. We should think of these things. We carry it so as if we had courage and strength enough to withstand God's judgments: Ezek. xxii. 14, 'Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with thee?'

8. It is a questioning, if not a flat denial of God's omniscieny and omnipresence, as if he did not see or regard the actions of men, since we dare do that in the presence of God which we would scarce do before a little child. Ahasuerus said, Esther vii. 8, 'Will he force the queen also before me in the house?' Shall we break his laws before his face? Who would void his excrements before his prince? It is a homely similitude, but such as is warranted by the types of the law: Deut. xxiii. 12-14, 'Thou shalt cover that which cometh from thee, that thy camp may be holy, that he see no unclean thing in thee.' It is not natural filthiness which God abhorreth, but moral sin is most loathsome to him; and yet we commit it before his face, and are not ashamed, which showeth that either we have contemptible¹ thoughts of God, or that he doth not see or regard us. The prophet telleth us, Jer. ii. 28, 'The thief is ashamed when he is found;' that is, taken in the fact. Did we believe God's omnipresence and all-seeing eye, we would always be careful of our actions; but we do that before the face of God which he infinitely hateth. Whatever your underlings do behind your backs, you would not bear it if they did it before your face. All the sins thou committest, thou dost them in the very face of God, who beholdest the evil and the good.

9. It is the violation of a law which is holy, just, and good. Hitherto we have brought considerations that concern the lawgiver; now I speak of the very law itself. The matter of it recommendeth itself to our consciences, as tending to the glory of God, and conducing to preserve the rectitude of our natures. Whatever God hath required ought to be done upon God's authority, though the thing itself (setting God's injunction aside) did not deserve our respect and regard; as Naaman's servant told him, 2 Kings v. 13, 'If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?' So whatever God commandeth, the stamp of his authority puts a respect upon it; how much more when his laws are so equal, that, if a man were well in his wits, he would prefer them before liberty itself? Rom. vii. 12, 'Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, just and good;' the law in general, and every command in particular, even that commandment which had wrought such tragical effects in his own heart. Thus men

¹ That is, 'contemptuous.'—ED.

that understand themselves speak well of the law, even when it is contrary to their corrupt natures and humours. It is a law fit for God to give and us to receive. You say we must obey, but you think his commands are grievous; and so you obey him out of necessity, not out of delight. Oh, no; for though God may command what he will, yet he hath commanded nothing but what is good and holy. All his laws suit and agree well with his holiness, wisdom, and goodness, and also with the excellency and rectitude of our nature; and so setting aside God's authority, they commend themselves to us by their own evidence: Phil. iv. 8, 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things.' There are certain things that are immutably good, and by their own proper worth command our love, because of their exact suitableness to the divine nature, which is the eternal rule and reason of all that is good, as also because of their agreeableness to the reasonable nature, so far as there is anything good and divine in it; and such are most, if not all, the laws which God hath required of us. He hath not required us to lance or gash ourselves, to offer our children in sacrifice, nor to observe any of those barbarous customs which any of the gentiles took up and adapted to their wild superstition: 'What hath the Lord required of thee, but to love and fear him, and serve him all your days?' Deut. x. 12. He doth not require that we should run to the ends of the earth, or pierce the clouds, but 'to love mercy, do justice, and to walk humbly with thy God;' to live in purity, chastity, sobriety, temperance. Now first good men, whose eyes are open, who are not grown brutish by indulging their lusts and sensual appetites, they judge these to be holy and good laws: Ps. cxix. 173, 'I esteem thy precepts concerning all things to be right;' and ver. 138, 'Thy testimonies are righteous, and very faithful.' They have such a naturalness to the law, that they are very tender of breaking it. Secondly, I propound it to ordinary men. If conscience be suffered to speak, it would plead the equity of God's laws; even carnal men like this obedience in others, though, being overcome by their own lusts, they cannot bring their hearts to it. They are counted excellent: Prov. xii. 36, 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.' There is a secret sentiment of the holiness of these precepts; a reverence is darted into their consciences. The wicked, that hate the saints, count them excellent. They fear them, and therefore hate them; for all fear in wicked men is slavish, both the fear of God, and the fear of the saints. Many could wish themselves better, though they have not a serious purpose and resolution, as the incontinent and voluptuous. Thirdly, The general sense of mankind, who all consent to the things contained in this law, as holy, pure, true, and just. For the second table there is no doubt. Conscience, without the help of any other teacher, will sufficiently convince any reasonable man that this law is agreeable to the nature of man. And much of the first table will be seen also; so that natural light will incline men to these things: Rom. ii. 14, 'For the gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law.' There are some things in nature which always observe

their course, as that light things should move upwards, and heavy bodies downward; but there are other things that happen for the most part, though not always, as for men to use the right hand and not the left; so there are some things which have such an eminent holiness and righteousness in them, that by the universal consent of mankind they are approved; as that God should be loved above all, that children should honour their parents, that I should do as I would be done by; for these things are agreeable with the divine nature, and also with the reasonable nature, so far as it is a copy of it; other things may be variable, which are not clearly reconcilable with our notions of God. Fourthly, By the sentiments which men have of a holy, sober, godly life when they come to die, and the disallowance of a dissolute carnal life: Job xxvii. 8, 'What hope hath the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God shall take away his soul?' Jer. xvii. 11, 'At his latter end he shall be a fool.' Then men's mistakes do usually appear, and their carnal confidences vanish: 'Whereas the just man's end is peace,' Isa. xxxviii. 3, and Ps. xxxvii. 37. When men are entering upon the confines of eternity, they are wiser; the fumes of lust are then blown over. Now I look upon these as testimonies to God's law. The apostle saith, 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.' It is not from the fancy or melancholy of the dying person, nor from his distemper, but from his reason and the law of God. If it did only proceed from the distemper, or the sharp vapours of a disease, it were another matter. This anguish of spirit which death occasioneth by reason of sin is from a higher cause, the dread of God's justice, who will proceed according to his law, which the guilty person hath so often and so much violated and broken; they are not the ravings of a fever, nor the fruits of natural timorousness and credulity. No; it is a more serious business than so. This trouble is justified by the law of God and the highest reason. Fifthly, By reason; thus: That among beings some are better, others are worse, is out of all doubt; that the best beings should be most prized and esteemed is as clear as the former; therefore if I prize a mean thing equally with the best, or above the best, I unquestionably err against the law of nature. There are two objects propounded to our esteem—God and man, Mat. xxii. 37–40. There is an infinite distance between the things themselves, so should there be in our respect to them. We owe more duty, honour, and service to God than to men. What more rational than to love God above all, and our neighbour as ourselves? Among men, some are superiors, some inferiors, some equals. As to common nature, all are equal, therefore an equal respect is due to them; we must do to them as we would be done by; for as there is a difference of persons, as parents, husbands, masters, so there are different laws. God hath considered not only what may conduce most to his own glory, but what is fit for men: 'These things are good and profitable unto men,' Titus ii. 8. All are content others should be just and merciful, whatever they be themselves: it is for the good of human society, for all the uses and turns of mankind, without which the world would be but a den of thieves, or public stage whereon to act all manner of villany. Sixthly, By supposing the contrary. Do but for argument's sake suppose the contrary of all that God hath said concerning the embracing of virtue and the shunning of vice. If God should free

us from these laws, and leave us to our own choice, that whatever our naughty hearts desire we should follow after it without any let and restraint on our part, you would see the world were not to be lived in; yea, not only free us from it, but command the contrary. Suppose he had forbidden us all respect to himself, commanded us to worship false gods, to transform or misrepresent his glory by images, to fall down before stocks and stones, that we should blaspheme his name continually, and despise all those glorious attributes which clearly shine forth in the creation, if he had commanded us to be impious to our parents, to fill the world with murders, adulteries, robberies, and thefts, to pursue others with slanders and false-witnessings, and that all this would be acceptable to him. Doth not the heart of man abhor such a conceit? Yea, the fiercest beasts would abhor it, if they were capable of having such an idea and speculation represented unto them. Now should we break such a law as this, so reasonable and evident, so conducive to the honouring of God, and the governing of ourselves, and commerce with others? Surely the ways of God are equal.

10. It is a disorder in nature, or a breach in the moral order and harmony of the world, whilst man, the most excellent of all visible creatures, is so perverted and depraved, like the chief string to an instrument broken and out of tune. God hath appointed all creatures their work and service, and the chiefest part of his workmanship is spoiled and disordered. He was certainly the chief wheel in this curious artifice. God hath made all things by number, weight, and measure; no creature so depraved and unfitted for his use as man; the rest of the creatures continue according to his ordinance, Ps. cxix. 91. They are all subject to him according to the rule and law of their creation, the proud waves of the sea not excepted: Jer. v. 22, 'I have placed the sand for a bound to the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it.' That vast collection of waters, which no might or sleight of man is able to master, yet it cannot stir an inch further than the Lord pleaseth. Now what an aggravation is this of man's sin, who will not be ruled by God, who is able to rule and overrule the sea, the most unruly creature of all others! The sea itself observeth God's law; but he complaineth there that his people had revolted from it, ver. 23. Man alone of all creatures transgresseth the law which God hath prescribed, and goeth beyond the assigned bounds. The inanimate creatures, that have no sense and reason and choice, do not pass the line of their decree; so that sin is a greater disorder than for the sea to break its bounds: Ps. cxlvi. 6, 'Which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that therein is; which keepeth truth for ever.' Sun, moon, and stars keep their orb and course, and observe the just points of their compass; man only is eccentric and exorbitant.

11. It is a disbelief of the promises and threatenings wherewith the law is enforced; for in the law, besides the precept, there is a sanction by penalties and rewards. In the two former considerations, we considered sin as it transgresseth the precept of the law; now we come to consider the sanction of the law, as it offereth death or life to the transgressors and observers of it: Deut. xxx. 15, 'I have set before thee life and death, good and evil.' Now this is as little believed as

the precept is obeyed; and thence cometh all our boldness in sinning, and coldness in duty. First, If we believed his promises, by which he doth allure us to obedience, we would be more forward and ready to comply with his precepts. Surely God meaneth as he speaketh; he will make good his word to the obedient; but the sinner thinketh not so, and therefore is loath to undergo the difficulties of obedience, because he hath so little sense and certainty of the fulfilling of the promise. The apostle telleth us, Heb. xi. 6, 'That without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of all that diligently seek him;' implying that if the fundamental truths of God's being and bounty were well rooted in our hearts, we could not be so careless as we are, nor so barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Jesus Christ; our unbelief lieth at the bottom of all our carelessness, 1 Cor. xv. 58. Secondly, Threatenings; if these were more believed, we would not venture as we do; for you cannot drive a dull ass into the fire which is kindled before him: Prov. i. 17, 'In vain is the snare laid in the sight of any bird.' And would a reasonable creature wilfully run into so great a danger if he were sensible of it? and if he did believe these fearful threatenings, would he venture upon them? We think God doth not intend any execution of them, but only frightens us with a deceitful terror and a cry of false fire. Unbelief had a great predominancy in the first sin: 'Ye shall not surely die,' Gen. iii. 4; and still it is a main ingredient. Men embolden themselves to rebellion, because they look upon God's wrath as a vain scarecrow.

12. It is a slighting of all those providences by which he would confirm and back his law. The Lord knoweth how apt we are to be guided by present sense. Things future, and that lie in another world, leave little impression upon our hearts; and therefore the terror of wrath to come cannot prevail against strong and violent affections to things that are present. The pleasures of sin being apprehended by sense, work more strongly upon the affections than things absent can do, which want that help of sense to convey them to our minds which the affections are much moved by; therefore God by some sensible dispensations will wean us from evil, and draw us to good, as by the mercies of this life, by public judgments, by chastenings. Even carnal nature is apt to be pleased with these kind of mercies, protection, provisions, and many worldly comforts: Ps. cxix. 56, 'This I had because I kept thy precepts;' Mat. vi. 33, 'First seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' But alas! a naughty heart slighteth these expressions of God's common goodness: Rom. ii. 4, 'Despisest thou the riches of his goodness?' So all those chastisings by which God will show us the bitter fruit of sin: Jer. ii. 19, 'Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing, and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God;' Jer. iv. 18, 'Thy way and thy doings have procured these things to thee: this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter.' All the hurt that cometh to us in this world is the fruit of sin; this is little taken notice of.

13. It is a contempt of all those means by which God useth to enforce his laws, and quicken the sense of our duty upon our hearts; such are the strivings and pressing motions of his Spirit, Gen. vi. 3. The Spirit warneth us of our danger when we are running into sin, and

when we are slack and negligent mindeth us of our duty ; the good Spirit doth not cease his importunities towards the wicked till they banish him from themselves. Such are also the cheeks of conscience, which taketh God's part in the soul, and beareth witness against our sins when other faculties conspire against him, Rom. ii. 15. So the instructions of our friends and teachers : Prov. iv. 12, 13, 'How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof ! nor have I obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instruct me.' Instructions and warnings to the contrary do much aggravate and represent the evil nature and wilfulness of sinners, that nothing will stop them, and they are angry with those that would hinder them from going to hell. Of the same nature is the holy conversation of the godly : Heb. xi. 7, 'By faith Noah condemned the world by preparing an ark ;' and John vii. 7, 'The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.' Not only by doctrine, but conversation, a living reproof ; the godly are hated as objects reviving guilt.

14. The slenderness of the temptation that irritates us to break the laws of God doth also show the malignity of sin ; for what is it but the pleasing of the carnal faculty ? James i. 14, 'Every man is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.' He is enticed and drawn away by the love of some sensitive pleasure ; this is all the recompense, all that is put in balance against the offending of God and the dreadful consequences of it ; and then you will see what sin is. It is a light esteem of the favour of God, whilst a little base and brutish pleasure is preferred before it. When therefore a little sensitive delight, a little defiling transitory pleasure, is chosen before God, he is despised, and pleasure is loved before him : 2 Tim. iii. 4, 'Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. The fountain of living waters is forsaken for a broken cistern,' Jer. ii. 13 ; the creature for the creator, as if our souls found more delight and content in it than God. All the happiness in heaven is laid by for a little pomp and pleasure here on earth. In short, sense and appetite is preferred before reason and conscience, and so we make the beast to ride the man, things temporal before eternal, 2 Cor. iv. 16, and the present world before the world to come, 2 Tim. iv. 10, a preferring the body before the soul, the frail flesh before the immortal substance, and its pleasure before the concerns of the life to come ; and so a parting with, or selling of all manner of happiness for a thing of nought.

Secondly, I come to give you the corollaries, or practical inferences thence deduced.

1. We see hence the folly of them who make a mock and sport of sin : Prov. xiv. 9, 'Fools make a mock of sin ;' and Prov. xxvi. 18, 19, 'As a madman casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport ?' Many when they have committed sin themselves, or enticed others to sin, laugh at it as if they were in jest. As when they have sworn an oath or told a lie, or cozened or cheated their neighbours, or fallen into adultery or intemperance ; nay, when they see others troubled about sin, they mock and laugh at it. That which I shall say to these men shall be in two things. First, However they make light of sin now, yet when they come to die, it will sting them to the quick : 1 Cor. xv.

56, 'The sting of death is sin.' They will see it is no jesting matter to affront a God of infinite wisdom, majesty, and power, that it is no matter of sport whether a man shall be saved or damned, be eternally happy or eternally miserable. Secondly, The next thing I shall say to them is, that to make a sport of sin showeth great obduracy and hardness of heart, and searedness of conscience. Men do not easily get into this frame of spirit, but it is after long sinning. It is custom brings dedolency, and it is somehow before men get the mastery of conscience, and are past feeling, Eph. iv. 19. The seat of scorers is the highest degree of sin, Ps. i. 1.

2. It showeth the folly of those that do not only make a light reckoning of sin themselves, but think also that God makes little account of it. But if God makes little account of sin, why doth he so strictly forbid it? Why doth he punish it so grievously and terribly? First, In his internal government, with horrors of conscience, which are more grievous than death itself: Prov. xviii. 14, 'A wounded spirit who can bear?' and Job saith, chap. vii. 15, 'My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than life.' This vexation is so grievous, that death is preferred before it. For Judas to speak thus and act thus, being overcome of despair, is no marvel; but for Job thus to express himself is worthy our notice. Secondly, If God makes no reckoning of sin, why do little children die, and that sometimes with racking and grievous pain? Rom. v. 14, 'Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression.' It is not a mere chance. Thirdly, If God makes little account of sin, why did the Lord Jesus endure those grievous agonies, so that his soul was heavy to death, Mat. xxvi. 38, and he sweated drops of blood? Was this a fable, or was this in vain? Or else sin is another thing than we usually take it to be. If God make so little reckoning of sin, then, in the fourth place, what is the reason that small sins have met with so great a judgment; angels made devils for an aspiring thought; Adam for eating an apple; Uzzah for touching the ark; Ananias and Sapphira for one lie both struck dead; Lot's wife for looking back turned into a pillar of salt? No sin is little that is committed against the great God.

3. How just is God in appointing eternal punishment as the fruit and reward of sin! Consider, first, it is an eternal God and an eternal happiness that is despised by the sinner; and for what base things, and for what a vile price do men hazard the favour of God, and forfeit the hopes of the life to come? Heb. xii. 16, 'Not a profane person, as Esau, who sold his birthright for a morsel of meat.' And they that despise eternal blessedness, can you blame God if they suffer eternal misery? Secondly, So great is the force of sensual allurements, that nothing is fit to break our inclination to them but eternal punishment. The flesh is importunate, the satisfaction present and at hand; but the pleasure is but for a season, and the torment is eternal, that is the great check given to the lusts of the flesh. Chrysostom represents the case by the instance of a soldier upon his watch, very inclinable to sleep, but threatened with a lingering and slow torture if he gave way to it. Now be the man never so much inclinable to sleep, yet the fear of the torture keepeth him waking. So doth God deal with us, he counterbalanceth present delights with eternal torments. Thirdly, It is a

man's own choice ; it is offered to us, whether upon this condition we will venture to sin : Prov. viii. 36, 'He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul ; all that hate me love death.' Simply no man loveth death or chooseth evil ; not directly, but interpretatively and consequentially ; but they swallow the hook that will swallow the bait, especially after due warning to the contrary. God sets both before us, life and death, eternal life and eternal death ; and none can blame God for giving us our choice.

4. If all sin be so odious, how much more a life of sin ! Every sin is an act of rebellion against God, but the state of sin is a state of rebellion against God ; therefore they that live in a course of worldliness, or sensuality, or enmity to godliness, and will not be reclaimed, are not only bare sinners, but impenitent sinners ; there is obstinacy and hardness of heart added to their obliquity and defection from the rule of righteousness. Now to wander, and love to wander, and keep out of the way, must needs render us more culpable. Every act of sin hath so much sinfulness in it that it is an amazing thing to consider it ; but when this is our course and trade of life, there are not only many multiplied acts, but the person is involved and entangled in the curse of the law, and all this sin shall at last be charged upon him to his just condemnation.

5. The necessity of entering into the gospel-covenant. Now this is done by repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1.] Repentance towards God. Now repentance is a breaking off from the former course of sin : Isa. i. 16, 'Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes ; cease to do evil, learn to do well.' The law leaveth a man sinful, guilty, disobedient, both by nature and by practice obnoxious to the wrath and curse of God. This course must be broken off if we will be saved. By the law is the knowledge of sin, both *quoad naturam peccati*, and *inherentiam subjecti*, Rom. iii. 20, both what is sin, and who is the sinner. It worketh wrath, Rom. iv. 15 ; since the fall it doth condemn us ; it can never acquit us ; it doth convince of sin, and bind us over to death. Now out of this wretched estate we should come betimes : Dan. iv. 27, 'Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to thee ; break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor.' He was a great oppressor, therefore Daniel preacheth righteousness and mercy to him. The true penitent sets himself against his former reigning sins, and alters the course of his former life. Sins of youth are dangerous, and may stick by us long after they are committed : Job xiii. 7, 'Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me possess the sins of my youth ;' and Ps. xxv. 7, 'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions.' An old bruise may be felt a long time afterwards.

[2.] Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who came to take away sin. We need both his renewing and reconciling grace to procure our pardon and heal our natures. To procure our pardon ; for sin is a greater evil than we can easily imagine, and therefore we should be more affected with the pardon which Christ purchased for us, and in the covenant doth apply to us, Ps. xxxii. 1, 2. The necessity also of his renewing grace, or the gift of the sanctifying Spirit merited by Christ, Titus iii. 5, 6, that we may be prepared to obey God for the future, and to avoid so great an evil as sin is.

6. The necessity of persevering in the gospel-estate by new obedience, and a continual dependence on the grace of the Redeemer. First, New obedience : God's people cannot be too watchful against sin, against the least sin ; for it is a breach of our Father's commandments, which the world maketh little reckoning of ; yet if it be a sin, abhor it as an offence to God, a breach of his law. You must not consider how the world will look upon it, but how God will look upon it. Yet take heed of being scrupulous in small sins while you offend in greater, straining at a gnat when you swallow a camel. You must hate all sins, even the least ; and let it not be a small thing to you to transgress the law of God. Secondly, Dependence upon the grace and mercy of our Redeemer ; for we need it to the very last. The obedience of the best man upon earth is imperfect and defective : Ps. cxliii. 2, ' Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.' So Ps. xix. 12, ' Who can understand his errors ? cleanse thou me from secret offences.' As God for Christ's sake took us at first with all our faults, so this gracious covenant and the mercy of our Redeemer is our best plea at last.

7. What reason we have to submit to the sharpest providences which God in his corrective discipline puts us under : Isa. xxvii. 9, ' By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged.' No evil can be as bad as sin ; the least sin is worse than the greatest suffering. In suffering, the offence is done to us ; in sin, to God. The evil of suffering is but for a moment, the evil of sin for ever. In suffering we lose some worldly comfort and happiness ; but in sinning we lose or hazard the favour of God. Suffering pincheth the flesh, but sin staineth the soul ; therefore the sinful estate is far worse than the afflicted. Now if by the one we can get rid of the other, we should not murmur, but be thankful rather ; though the mortifying of sin cost us dear, yet the cost is well recompensed if sin thereby be subdued.

8. That a renewed heart should be affected, not only with the evil after sin, but with the evil in sin ; for, to persuade God's children to a conformity to their Father, he urgeth this argument, that it is a breach of the law. The law hath penalties annexed, but he speaketh of it rather as a violation and breach. As we love the law because it is pure, so we should hate sin as it is contrary to this pure law. The heart is never thoroughly converted to God till holiness hath our love, and sin as sin our hatred. We are to regard the sanction, but first the precept, and have an awe of God's authority upon our hearts before we fear his vengeance ; to hate it as it is an affront to God, and a contradiction to his holy will.

END OF VOL. XX.