

actual relief, is nothing worth; so doth not thy brother any good: James ii. 15, 16, 'If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed, and be you filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?'

[4.] To dissemble in anything maketh our sincerity in the main questionable; the man that contents himself with words in charity will content himself with a cold dead assent in point of faith, and a cold profession instead of thorough obedience; with the talk of virtue and godliness when he hath it not. A fruitless love and a cold assent that produce no obedience are near akin, and both are little worth. Many would not dissemble with God, but do they love men, not in word or tongue only, but in deed and in truth?

SERMON XXIV.

And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.—1 JOHN iii. 19.

THE words contain a motive to quicken us to love the brethren, not in word or tongue only, but in deed and in truth. The motive is taken from the fruit and benefit, which is—(1.) Propounded; (2.) Amplified.

First, Propounded, 'Hereby we know that we are of the truth.' To be of the truth hath a double notion in scripture.

1. To profess the true religion: John xviii. 37, 'Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice;' that is, owneth the true religion; he rightly understands and believes the truth of the gospel.

2. To be sincere and true in that religion, and to live accordingly. There are some christians that are only so in show and semblance, or count themselves christians, but are not; but these are truly born of God, and such as they profess themselves to be, 'disciples indeed,' John viii. 31; sincere, and not hypocrites.

Secondly, Amplified, 'And shall assure our hearts before him.' Where—

1. The effect and fruit of knowing that we are of the truth; we 'shall assure our hearts.'

2. The strength of this confidence, 'Before him.'

1. For the effect itself, 'persuade our hearts;' so the margin and other translations. By confidence in God we shall quiet and still our consciences; so that the notion here is, we shall have our hearts secure and confident. A soul conscious of sin raiseth doubts and fears, that when our qualification is evident, we are perfect as to the conscience, Heb. ix. 9. The word is so taken elsewhere: Mat. xxviii. 14, 'We will persuade him, and secure you;' that is, pacify the governor, and keep you from punishment. So here it signifieth to render our hearts peaceable and quiet.

2. The strength of this confidence, 'Before him.' We are said to be before him three ways—

[1.] In our ordinary conversation: Gen. xvii. 1, 'Walk before me, and be thou upright.' In this sense it signifieth our walking before him in a holy peace and security, by being good and doing good; for this is the evidence whereby we assure ourselves that we are the true children of God: Mat. v. 45, 'That ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven.'

[2.] When we come before him in prayer and other holy duties: ver. 21, 22, 'We have confidence towards God, and whatsoever we ask in his name shall be given us.' Which signifieth a confidence in our prayer to him.

[3.] We come before him at the day of judgment; when we stand before his tribunal, our hope will not leave us ashamed. We are not afraid of being convinced of any hypocrisy, or not observing or breaking the conditions of the new covenant: 1 John ii. 28, 'That we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him;' 1 John iv. 17, 'That we may have boldness in the day of judgment.' So that hereby appeareth the strength of that confidence which we have by the exercise of a holy charity, or love to God and his people; and though the thoughts of the just and holy God stirreth up all our fears, yet we may walk comfortably with him, and draw nigh to him in holy duties with more cheerfulness, and finally appear before him with boldness in the day of our accounts.

Doct. That graces really and soundly exercised breed in us assurance of our good condition before God.

The point will be made good by these considerations.

1. That none are in a good condition but those who are adopted and taken into God's family, and made heirs of eternal life and happiness. Our minds cannot be quieted by anything but a persuasion that God loveth us as his children; this is the whole business of the context: ver. 1, 2, and 9, 10, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! Beloved, now are we 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. Whosoever is born of God sinneth not, for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that hateth his brother.' Get that persuasion, and all the controversy between God and us is at an end. And the reason is clear; he that taketh God for a judge can never be soundly satisfied and live in peace; but he that taketh God for a Father needeth not fear to come into his presence. There is no safety but in God's family, and no security there but by being God's children. The great business of the Spirit with our consciences is to clear up this to us: Rom. viii. 15, 26, 'For we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 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;' Gal. iv. 6, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father;' Eph. i. 13, 14, 'In whom ye

also trusted, after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.' The great business of our Redeemer was to purchase this privilege for us: Gal. iv. 5, 'To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons;' John viii. 36, 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, then are you free indeed.' The great privilege we have by baptism as a sign, by faith as giving us the reality: Gal. iii. 26, 27, 'For ye are the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.' The church of the new testament, as to her outward estate, is an estate of sonship or adoption, and the truly godly have the real effect of it; they have the dignity, privilege and right which does belong to the children of God: John i. 12, 'To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.'

2. We must cherish no confidence of our adoption but what will hold good before God; for it is said, we must assure our hearts before him. The law which we have broken, and which condemneth us, is the law of God; the wrath and punishment which we fear and have deserved is the wrath of God; that which is the true proper matter of our joy, peace, and comfort is the favour of God; and the family into which we are admitted is the family of God, and the presence into which we come is the presence of God, and the glory which we expect is the glory of God; the punishment which we must undergo, and must determine our final estate, is the judgment of God. He is the supreme judge, at whose sentence we must stand or fall; therefore to him we must approve ourselves, and before him must be able to defend our claim, and maintain our confidence. It is easy to make good our plea before men, but not so before God. Take all the senses before explicated. We are before him in our ordinary conversation. Sincere though imperfect sanctification is a righteousness that will hold out before God, and will be graciously accepted by him: Luke i. 74, 75, 'That we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.' A christian should cheerfully serve God in a faithful discharge of all duties towards God and towards men, as remembering that he is always in his sight, as the witness, judge, and observer of all his actions; therefore we must still 'labour that, whether present or absent, we approve ourselves to him, and be accepted of him,' 2 Cor. v. 9. This will be matter of comfort to us: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'But our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversations in the world.' And partly in your prayers. Our legal fears are revived by the presence of God. Cain had his guilty fears; so shall we unless we be sincere; so the righteous are as bold as a lion: 1 John iii. 21, 'If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.' When our hearts do not condemn us of any insincere walking, then we have confidence; otherwise we are shy of the presence of God, as David when he had sinned hung off from the throne of grace: Ps. xxxii. 3, 'When I kept silence, my bones waxed old.' And Adam

when he had sinned ran to the bushes. They that walk crookedly crack and break their own confidence, and cannot look God in the face with any comfort; whereas others can come to him as children to their father. And partly as it importeth our appearance before him in the day of our accounts. The sincere have a confidence that will hold out then, as appeareth by their constant and steady cheerfulness, when they most mind his judgment: 'The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrite,' Isa. xxxiii. 14. Pinching weather maketh the unsound feel their aches and bruises, so a time of eminent judgments is grievous to them; but it is otherwise with the upright, who are emboldened by a good conscience, and a sense of their own integrity: Ps. cxii. 4, 'Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness.' Not only after, but in darkness; they have great comfort in their greatest perplexities; yea, when God summoneth them into his immediate presence: 2 Kings xx. 3, 'Lord, thou knowest that I have walked before thee with a true and perfect heart.' Hezekiah was then arrested with the sentence of death. A christian can look death in the face with cheerfulness, and comfortably review his past life, when hypocrites vomit up their own shame. Yet the sincere, though conscious to themselves of many infirmities, have made it their business to honour and please God.

3. Before God no confidence will hold good but what is founded in the double righteousness of justification and sanctification; they are inseparable, and go together in the dispensation of the new covenant: 1 Cor. vi. 11, 'And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God;' 1 Cor. i. 30, 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.' Both are necessary, and have an influence upon our comfort and peace, and confidence towards God. The necessity of them appeareth with respect to both covenants. The first covenant, the confidence which we would cherish is checked and choked by this objection, Thou art a sinner, and God will not respect sinners. We answer it from the righteousness of justification; Christ died to reconcile sinners to God. Or thus, Thou art not a sincere disciple of Christ; to this we oppose the testimony of our conscience, 'The Holy Ghost bearing witness therewith concerning our sincerity.' The first is the primary righteousness, and necessary for the appeasing of God's wrath; the other is secondary and subordinate, for the clearing up of our right and claim. The righteousness of Christ or of justification procureth the blessings of the new covenant for us; the other assureth them to us. The first is the ground of our favourable acceptance with God, the second is the secondary condition and evidence of it. The ground and foundation of our favourable acceptance with God is Christ's merit, mediation, and righteousness, apprehended by faith; but the evidence is our sincere walking, otherwise no certainty. In short, there having been a breach between us and God, our atonement must be made. So 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself,' 2 Cor. v. 19. There was the foundation laid for our acceptance with God; as in ver. 21, 'He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of

God in him.' Now it is not enough that the atonement be made, but the atonement must be received; that breedeth solid peace, Rom. v. 11; and it is conveyed and applied by the Spirit on God's part, by faith on ours, Rom. v. 1; then the atonement is received. There need also sure signs to persuade the conscience of the reality of the application, and to make our right more full and certain, and that we are in favour with God, which cannot be otherwise than by the sincerity of our love to God and men, Gal. v. 6. Clear that once, and you may persuade and assure your hearts before him. To conclude, both the righteousness of justification and sanctification is a righteousness before him. Of justification there is no doubt but it is a righteousness before him, there is no appearing before God without it: Phil. iii. 9, 'And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith;' Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.' It is true also in its use and office, of the righteousness of sanctification. If it be sincere, though imperfect, it is a righteousness that will hold out before God, and will be graciously accepted by him: Luke i. 6, 'They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments blameless.' Though our guilty fears are mainly allayed by the application of the blood of Jesus Christ, as the ground and meritorious cause of our acceptance with God, and the only plea that we have against the charge produced from the first covenant, yet the righteousness of sanctification is at least an evidence, and confirmeth our justification by faith, and strengtheneth our plea according to the second covenant.

4. The righteousness of sanctification, which will stand before God, consisteth in our sincerity: 'If we be of the truth, we may assure our hearts before him;' so it is in the text, 'We are of the truth, and assure our hearts before him.' What is it to be of the truth? The truth is the gospel, called 'the word of truth,' Eph. i. 13, John xvii. 17. He is of the truth that understandeth and believeth this doctrine, called knowing the truth and acknowledging the truth, often spoken of in the scripture, 2 John 1, 2, 2 Tim. ii. 25; and feeleth the force and efficacy of it in his own heart: James i. 18, 'Of his own will begat he us, of the word of truth;' John viii. 32, 'And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' And then expresseth the fruits of it in the course of his life, called 'walking in the truth,' 2 John 4, and 3 John 3, 4, 'I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came and testified of the truth which is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth;' namely, as they follow the right way, and are true disciples of Christ. Well, then, sincerity of obedience is our grand evidence and qualification. The first covenant required innocency or unsinning obedience, the second uprightness or sincere obedience: Gen. xvii. 1, 'Walk before me, and be thou perfect;' 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 iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.' The covenant which granteth and alloweth pardon of sins alloweth also sincerity as our qualification. The old covenant bringeth all things to the balance, the new to the touchstone;

there our graces were weighed, here tried. Now if the best of us were put into the balance of the sanctuary, we should be found wanting as to matter or manner and principle or aim, and then who could be saved? But now all the blessings of God's family are entitled to the upright: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'God is a sun and a shield, and grace and glory will he give; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' This scripture containeth an epitome or abridgment of the covenant of grace; the good things there are expressed metaphorically and literally. Metaphorically he is a sun and a shield; blessings privative and positive; a sun, the fountain of all good; a shield to keep off all evil or danger; provision and protection. The one term is more verified in this life, the other in the world to come. Literally all spiritual good things come under the name of grace, eternal good things under the name of glory; no temporal good thing will he withhold: Ps. xxxiv. 9, 'There is no want to them that fear him.' But here who are the qualified parties? The sincere, who are the Lord's delight; the sincere in faith, the sincere in love, the sincere in obedience; those who are what they seem to be, and profess to be; these are the capable subjects of grace and glory, to whom God will be a sun and a shield, and to whom God will deny no good thing.

5. It is no easy matter to make out our sincerity, or to establish a solid peace and comfort in the soul. This I gather from the word 'assure,' or 'shall persuade.' There needeth much arguing and debating the matter in the court of conscience, and we need sure signs to persuade us; the conscience of sin is not easily laid aside. Shyness and stupidity may quiet us for a while, but a solid and durable joy needeth a good evidence and warrant. When we have no sense of sin and danger on our hearts, it is easy to leap into a false peace, but an awakened and sensible sinner is not so easily nor so soon established; for the upright are prone to self-accusings, for their rule is exact, and grace and love would fain do more for God; and grace in the best is but weak and small, and the remainders of sin so great, active, and troublesome, and the operations of man's soul so various, confused, and dark, and they see so many mistakes, and the children of the devil so often entitle themselves to God, John viii. 44. And frequent afflictions do also very often awaken in them a sense of sin, and all the reasonings of their minds will not still and quiet their consciences, so that the Lord is forced to come in by powerful and authoritative acts of grace, and in an imperial and Godlike manner to silence those doubts, and secure and settle a sense of his love upon our hearts: Ps. xlii. 7, 8, 'Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.' Ordinarily we have a good measure of grace before we can discern the truth of it. A working faith, a laborious and fervent love, and a lively hope cannot lie idle.

6. Though it be difficult to make out our sincerity, yet graces really, constantly, and self-denyingly exercised, will or may evidence it to us, or that the heart is sound in God's statutes, Ps. cxix. 80. Surely where grace is deeply rooted, and hath a predominant influence over our actions, so as it can countermand contrary desires and inclinations,

there the heart is sound and upright with God. Now where this is found, which the context speaketh of, it makes us to assure our hearts before him.

[1.] A real exercise of grace. Compare this with the verse before the text, 'Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.' A man may talk well from his convictions, nay, from a mere disciplinary knowledge; but to do well needs a living principle of grace. The scripture still setteth forth graces by their lively operation, for a dead and sleepy habit is worth nothing; it speaketh of the working faith as carrying away the prize of justification, Gal. v. 6. As honouring Christ: 2 Thes. i. 11, 12, 'Wherefore we pray also for you, that God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that the name of the Lord Jesus may be glorified.' The laborious love is that which God will regard and reward: Heb. vi. 10, 'God is not unrighteous, to forget your work of faith and labour of love.' So the lively hope is the fruit of regeneration: 1 Peter i. 3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' That which sets us a-doing: Acts. xxiv. 16, 'And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men;' and Acts xxvi. 7, 8, 'Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come.' Grace otherwise cannot appear in the view of conscience: causes are known by their effects; apples appear when the sap is not seen. It is the operative and active graces that will discover themselves. A man may think well or speak well, but that grace which governeth the conversation showeth itself to have a deep rooting in the heart.

[2.] It must be constantly exercised. A man may force himself into an act or two; Saul in a fit may be among the prophets. A man is judged of by his course and walk. A child of God may be under a strange appearance for one act or two; you can no more judge of them by those acts than you can of a bunch of grapes by two or three rotten ones, or of the glory of a street by the sink or kennels. So, on the other side, men may take on religion at set times, as men in an ague have their well days; the fit of lust and sin is not always upon them. A man is judged *perpetua factorum serie*, but God's works are best seen together, Gen. i. 31. Surely that breedeth peace of conscience and assurance of salvation: Ps. cvi. 3, 'Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.' When a man's conversation is all of a piece, his course is to please God at all times, not by fits and starts, and in good moods only. This is the mark of the context, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; but his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.' An act of sin is as monstrous in him as for a hen to produce the egg of a crow. In an unsound heart there are very uneven and transient motions; their lives speak contradictions. Saul at one time puts all the witches to death, at another time he himself hath recourse to one, namely, the witch of Endor. Jehu was zealous against Ahab's idolatry, against Baal, but not against Jereboam's idolatry, the calves in Dan and Bethel.

[3.] Self-denyingly acted. Good words are not dear, 'Be warmed, be clothed.' The apostle speaketh of laying down our life for the brethren, of opening our hands and bowels for refreshing the hungry and clothing the naked. So proportionably when we take pains to instruct the ignorant, exhort the obstinate, confirm the weak, comfort the afflicted. Love of the brethren is the mark in hand, and produced here as the fruit of a sincere faith; for this showeth a hearty receiving of God's love, when it hath made some impression upon us, when we love the brethren sincerely and heartily, and can deny ourselves for God. Do you think that religion lieth only in hearing a few sermons, in a few drowsy prayers, in singing psalms, or reading a chapter, or some cursory devotions? These are the means, but where is the fruit? No; it lieth in self-denying obedience. These are the acts about which we shall be questioned at the day of judgment, Mat. xxv. Have you visited? have you clothed? do you own the servants of God when the times frown upon them? do you relieve them and comfort them in their distresses? 'Hereby we know we are of the truth.' Lip-labour and tongue-service is a cheap thing; and that religion is worth nothing which costs nothing: 2 Sam. xxiv. 24, 'And the king said unto Araunah, Nay, but I will surely buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.' When we deny ourselves, and apparently value God's interest above our own, then our sincerity is most evidenced. And every one of us is to consider what interest God calleth him to deny upon the hopes of glory, and whatever it costeth us to be faithful to God. A cheap course of serving God bringeth you none or little comfort. And certainly a man cannot be thorough in religion, but he will be put upon many occasions of denying his ease, profit, honour, and acting contrary to his natural inclination or worldly interests. Those that only regard the safe, cheap, and easy part, do not set up Christ's religion, but their own: Mat. xvi. 24, 'Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' Without this it is but a christianity of our own making.

1. That graces thus really, constantly, and self-denyingly exercised leave their notice and impression upon the conscience. The context speaketh of the value of the testimony of conscience. Certainly a man should or may know the acts of grace which he putteth forth. It is hard to think that a soul should be a stranger to its own operations: 1 Cor. ii. 11, 'There is a spirit in man that knoweth the things of a man;' a privy spy in our bosoms, which is conscious to all that we do, and can reflect upon it, and judge whether it be good or evil; it knoweth what we understand, or will, or purpose, or resolve, or do, much more when we do thus uniformly and self-denyingly act for God; and that upon a fourfold reason—

[1.] Because the acts of grace are the more serious and important actions of our lives. Many acts may escape us for want of advertency, they not being of such moment; but when a man is to settle his eternal interest upon a sure bottom and foundation, and to establish his soul in the comfort and hope of the gospel, he would go advisedly to work, and consider upon what grounds and in what manner this work is carried

on. He is serious in his faith: 2 Tim. i. 12, 'For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.' Diligence in his attendance upon this business: Phil. ii. 12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' A man that acteth for eternity should mind what he doth.

[2.] All acts of grace are put forth with difficulty, and with some strife and wrestling. In the work of faith a humble sinner hath much ado to bring his soul to a resolution, and to venture all in Christ's hand, and to settle itself in the belief of God's power, and mercy, and word, and promises made to us in Christ; to live upon the hopes of an unknown and unseen world. For if it were an easy thing, such a power were not needful, as is spoken of, Eph. i. 19, 'And what is the exceeding greatness of his power.' We should not find such a necessity of complaining of unbelief, Mark ix. 24, of calling upon God to increase our faith. It would not so often fail as it doth upon every temptation, Luke xxii. 32. And what is said of faith is true proportionably of all other graces. Self-love and carnal prepossessions hinder the love of God. Like a choice flower among weeds, so is love to the brethren, 'Master, spare thyself.' Now things difficult, and planted with much opposition, must needs leave a notice and an impression of themselves upon the soul.

[3.] There is a special delight that accompanieth acts of grace, because of the excellency of the objects they are conversant about; and the excellency of the power they are assisted withal; and the excellency and nobleness of the faculties they are acted by. Can a man be seriously dealing with God about pardon of sin, and eternal life, and not find sweetness in his work? Heb. vi. 4, 5, 'Who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.' Take a view of the promised hope, and not be affected with it? Heb. iii. 6 'Whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm to the end.' There is a peace and joy in believing, Rom. xv. 13, excited in us by some impression of the comforting Spirit. Three words are used to express that delightful sense which the soul hath in the exercise or review of good actions—comfort, peace, joy. Comfort, the nature of which is, that it doth not altogether remove the evil, but so alleviates it and assuages it that we are able to bear it. The trouble that ariseth from the sense of sin and the fear of God's justice is not altogether removed and taken away; yet so mitigated and allayed, that we are enabled to wait upon God: 2 Cor. i. 4, 'Who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God;' and to go about our duties with some alacrity. Peace implieth comfort, but withal a more full degree of it; for peace doth so calm and settle the consciences of God's children, that they are assaulted either with none, or very little fears. We call that peace in a nation when they are not troubled with foreign war, or intestine tumults, or confusions, for some long space of time: Phil. iv. 7, 'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts

and minds, through Jesus Christ.' The next notion is joy: as peace exceeds consolation, so doth joy exceed peace, and begets a more notable sense of itself in the soul. In peace all things are quiet, but joy addeth a notable pleasure and delight of mind. In peace the soul is in such a condition as the body when nothing paineth it; but in joy the senses are recreated by something pleasing to them: so the soul is feasted with spiritual suavities: 1 Peter i. 8, 'Whom having not seen ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' Now all these make the work of grace more notorious to the soul.

[4.] This serious, constant, uniform, self-denying course of obedience will evidence itself; for though conscience be unobservant of particular actions, yet the course, drift, and tenor of our lives cannot be hidden from it: he that in a journey doth not count his steps, yet observeth his way; when a man mindeth the business of going to heaven, Phil. iii. 20; of approving himself to God: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience;' 2 Cor. v. 9 'Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.'

Object. Why then do so many good people want assurance?

Ans 1. There need two witnesses, because the heart of man is so deceitful, and the operations thereof are so various, dark, and confused: Jer. xvii. 9, 'The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and who can know it?' There needeth a double testimony, as in the mouth of two or three witnesses everything is established. Now, these two witnesses are our consciences and God's Holy Spirit: Rom. viii. 16, 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God;' Rom. ix. 1, 'I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.' The testimony of the Spirit with our own heart, soul, and conscience, they both concur to establish the same conclusion in the same act of witnessing; for it is jointly ascribed to the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. The Spirit of God doth not bear any such witness apart from the spirit of man; or when this doth not witness also, it doth fortify and strengthen the witness of a man's own spirit. The heart, soul, and conscience of a man doth testify to him that he desireth and endeavoureth every day to serve, please, honour, and glorify God. Hereby the Spirit assureth him that he is a child of God. Conscience will not give this witness, unless we do indeed labour to be complete in all the will of God. And the Spirit witnesseth with conscience, to give vigour and certainty to this testimony, 'My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.' As when the waters of a land-flood mingle themselves with a river, they make one and the same stream, but then it is more rapid and violent; so this conjunction of testimonies maketh in effect one testimony, but such as more powerfully beareth down our fears, and doubts, and jealousies. A christian is thoroughly settled as to his gracious estate, and his confidence is made more firm and strong.

2. So few know their spiritual condition through their own default; for otherwise the Spirit is ready to witness, if we be ready to receive his testimony. What is the fault of christians? A fourfold fault—

[1.] Either they do not exercise grace to the life, in the mortifying

of sin, or the perfecting of holiness; and therefore the remainders of sin are active and troublesome, and grace is weak and small, and doth little discover itself in any costly and self-denying acts, that they want the sweetness whereby they should be noted and observed. Surely great things are more liable to sense and feeling than little: a staff is sooner found than a needle. And they that row against the stream of flesh and blood, and cross the inclinations of nature, can sooner discern a divine spirit and a power working in them than others, who have not so perfect a conquest over the carnal nature; as the valour of a soldier that boldly encountereth his enemy in the face of dangers and oppositions, than one that fighteth not indeed, but lieth hid in the throng.

[2.] Or they do not examine their state, and heed their soul affairs as they ought. 'Know thyself' is a lesson worthy to be often practised. The scripture biddeth us examine ourselves, 1 Cor. xi. 28, and 2 Cor. xiii. 5, 'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.' But few return upon their hearts, and look inward. The soul hath its experience, or a thing that may be called sense, as well as the body, but most regard it not. There is light, peace, joy, or trouble and doubtfulness, which we might easily find out if men would reflect upon themselves.

[3.] Or if they examine their state, they do it in a wrong way; as sometimes they make those to be marks to try by, which are only marks to aim at; and so by consequence that is often made matter of doubting, which should only be matter of humiliation; or else they look so much to what they should be, as not to observe what they have already, or may forget what is behind to quicken their diligence, Phil. iii. 13. But we must not forget, in judging our condition, to own the grace we have, for we must not 'despise the day of small things,' Zech. iv. 10. The spouse owneth grace in the midst of infirmities: Cant. v. 2, 'I sleep, but my heart waketh.' We come short of what we should have, but have we anything of God in our souls? We observe our diseases more than our healths; so doth a gracious heart his sins and infirmities, but not the good things found in him.

[4.] In the general, laziness is the cause: 2 Peter i. 10, 'Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure;' Heb. vi. 11, 'And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end;' 2 Peter iii. 14, 'Be diligent, that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.' The comforts of the Spirit never drop into the lazy soul. When you have it, so far as you neglect your duty, so far the sense may abate. God in wisdom withdraweth his comforts to awaken and quicken his children to their duty.

Use 1. To inform us, that the grounds of a well-tempered assurance are clear and positive: 'Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.' Foolish presumption costs nothing; like mushrooms, it groweth up in a night, or as Jonah's gourd; we did not labour for it; it cometh upon them they know not how or why. The less such men exercise themselves to godliness, the more confident; but exercise would discover their unsoundness; a peace that groweth upon us we know not how, and is better kept by negligence than diligence, is not right: 'Hereby we know, and this is my rejoicing, the

testimony of my conscience.' Premature persuasions are very rife; how comest thou by it so soon, my son?

2. That to languish after comforts, and neglect duty, is a foolish course; many bestow their time in foolish complaints, better be hard at work; complaining will not bring it to you so soon as active diligence. Oh, that we were sure of heaven and happiness! Oh, that we knew what shall become of us to all eternity! Lazy wishes will do no good, up and be doing; it will not come by a cold velleity, a slight prayer, a customary sigh, or a faint and lazy pursuit, but by an indefatigable diligence, and unwearied watchfulness.

3. It informeth us that not only trying of grace, but exercising of grace, is necessary to our comfort and peace. Many are taken up in trying and inquiring whether they have saving grace or no, whilst they neglect the exercise of grace in a self-denying way. I would not discourage self-reflection. Oh, that we could gain the world more to this! but this I must say, that doing good to the household of faith, and to all as we find occasion, is a more evident and explicit way; and that in general it is a more excellent spirit to consider what we must be, to lie under the conscience of that, than to consider what we are and what we have been. Working will discover it sooner than bare trying, duty rather than comfort.

4. That the popish doctrine is false, that asserts that it is impossible to have the certainty of salvation: 'Hereby we know we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.'

Use 2. To exhort us, if we would live in a holy security and peace, let us not only be good, but do good; let us not only love God, but his people, not only 'in word and tongue, but in deed and in truth,' &c.

SERMON XXV.

For if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.—1 JOHN iii. 20.

THE apostle had spoken in the former verse of assuring our hearts before him; now we cannot assure our hearts before God, against all fears of his wrath, or persuade ourselves that we are his children, if we be conscious to ourselves of any insincerity, or unworthy dealing in point of love to God or men; much dependeth upon the testimony and verdict of conscience, either as to our condemnation or absolution and acquitment. He beginneth with the condemning conscience in the text, and then showeth the privilege of an absolving conscience, ver. 21. The voice of conscience is the voice of God; if our hearts condemn or acquit, so will God for the most part. We are now upon the condemning act of conscience; if our hearts condemn us, God will much more. By the heart is meant conscience; as 1 Sam. xxiv. 5, 'David's heart smote him;' that is, his conscience; so Job when he would not quit his claim of being an upright man, chap xxvii. 6, saith,