

SERMONS UPON ACTS II. 37, 38.

SERMON I.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?—ACTS ii. 37.

THIS scripture telleth us what was the fruit and effect of the first sermon that was preached after the pouring out of the Spirit. Peter preached that sermon, and brought in thousands of souls to Christ: Acts ii. 41, 'Then they that gladly received the word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.' Never did Peter show himself such a fisher of men as now. Three thousand souls were gained at that one draught, or one casting of the net of the gospel; and those not very pliable ductile men neither, and easy to be caught, but sturdy sinners, such as had imbrued their hands in the blood of their Saviour, and were now in a mocking, scoffing humour. But thus it is to venture in the confidence of the power of Christ's Spirit. It was a mighty thing that an angel should slay a hundred and eighty-five thousand in one night in Sennacherib's host; but it is easier to kill so many men than to convert and save one soul. One angel, by his mere natural strength, could kill so many armed men, but all the angels in heaven, if they should join all their forces together, could not convert one soul to God. Here was more done. Well, then, this being the first instance of the power of the word accompanied with the Spirit, we ought to regard it the more. When we hear of some physic that hath notably wrought on others, and cured them of their diseases, every sick man would try that physic, or inquire after it. Here we see how the word worketh for the cure of sick souls; therefore let us consider a little the way of its operation. There is some account of that in the text, how it began to work, 'Now when they heard this, they were pricked at their hearts,' &c.

In which words observe three things—

1. The means and instrumental cause by which their trouble and perplexity was wrought, 'When they heard this.'
2. The commotion or affection wrought in them, *compuncti sunt corde*, 'They were pricked at the heart.'
3. The course they took for ease and relief, or the carriage of these converts after this piercing and brokenness of heart, 'And they said

unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do ?'

First, The means, 'When they heard this.' There are these things that offer themselves to our consideration—(1.) It was the word of God produced this effect; (2.) The word judiciously and powerfully managed; (3.) Closely applied; (4.) In this close application they were charged with a grievous sin; (5.) This grievous sin was wrong done to Christ. All these things conduced to the piercing of their hearts.

First, It was the word of God, which is of great power and force. Its piercing property discovereth its author: Heb. iv. 12, 13, 'For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart: neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' He speaketh not of the hypostatical and substantial word; for he had before spoken of the word heard, and to be mingled with faith in the hearing. *Λογος*, for Christ, is peculiar to John; only it is observable that the same things may be applied to Christ, the great prophet of the church, and the word by which he governeth the church, as if he resolved to discover all his power and glory by this instrument. Now of this word it is said that it is *ζῶν καὶ ἐνεργής*, 'quick and powerful.' It is not a dead letter, neither to them that believe, nor the wicked; it quickeneth the one, and maketh the conscience of the other feel its force. Either it openeth the heart, or hardeneth it. And again, 'That it is sharper than any two-edged sword.' No weapon like this to wound the souls of men, 'piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow.' It can search every bone, muscle, and vein; 'and all things are naked and open,' cut down by the chine-bone before God. So doth the word rip up the conscience of the sinner, and make him throw aside all his disguises and pretences; so that he hath no reasons to allege, no excuses to make, no arguments to plead, but wholly lieth under the convictions of it: Isa. lv. 10, 11, 'As the rain cometh down from heaven and watereth the earth, and returneth not again, so shall my word be.' The word is not preached in vain; it worketh whereto it is sent, to convert or harden. When we have rain and snow in their season, we expect a fruitful year; so God's word shall have its effect. It is very notable here in the text that the virtue of the Holy Ghost did not show itself in the gift of tongues, as it did in and by the word. When they spake with divers tongues, as the Spirit gave utterance, though it were a wonderful effect, yet the Jews were still hardened, and thought that this unusual jabbering was nothing, but that it came from the fumes of wine; that the apostles had taken a cup too much, rather than the effect of the operation of the Holy Ghost. But 'when they heard this,' when the word came, and was urged, and applied to their consciences, then they were pricked at the heart, and relented.

Uses. Now this is—

1. An argument to confirm us in the divine authority of the word, because it worketh such terrors and agonies in men's hearts. What

but the word of God can cite men's consciences before his tribunal, who alone giveth laws to the conscience, and appalleth the stoutest sinners? Paul, a prisoner at the bar, maketh the judge tremble. It is true, natural conscience can accuse and terrify, but it is for sins evident by natural light: Rom. ii. 15, 'Which show the work of the law written upon their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or excusing one another;' Heb. ii. 15, 'Who through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage.' But not for gospel sins, and not believing in Christ; that is the property of the word, accompanied by the Spirit: John xvi. 9, 'He shall convince the world of sin, because they believe not in me.' And to convince them in such a heart-breaking manner as that nothing will satisfy them but the favour of God in Christ, that is divine. They that have not felt this power of the word fear it: John iii. 20, 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.' They see the majesty of God in his word ransacking the conscience.

2. It encourageth us to preach the word with power and authority, as knowing whose ministers we are, and whose word it is. Yea, though we have a refractory people, who are ready to deride and mock at what we say to them in the name of the Lord, yet we ought not to be daunted, but set our faces as an adamant stone. The prophet Jeremiah was discouraged, and ready to give over, when he heard 'the defaming of many, and the word of the Lord was made a reproach to him,' Jer. xx. 8-11, 'But the Lord is with me, as a mighty and terrible one.' That fetched up his spirits, and got up his courage again. We distrust the power of our Master, and his mighty Spirit, that hath ever gone along with his word, and made it able to break the stoutest and stiffest hearts. Two things may encourage us—

[1.] The blood of Christ, which is of virtue sufficient to work off men from their inveterate customs: 1 Peter i. 18, 'For ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversations received by tradition from your fathers.' There is merit enough on his part to make the word effectual, and the power of his Spirit, which can bear down all prejudices. As here, where it was first poured out, when some of the persecutors of Christ were in a scoffing, mocking frame, they were indicted and arraigned by Peter, and condemned in their own consciences, yea, were changed and converted by it. And such a power doth still accompany the word: 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25, 'But if they all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, and judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' An infidel coming in by chance, God taketh him by the heart; therefore why should we be dismayed and discouraged in the Lord's work? 2 Cor. x. 4, 'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds.'

[2.] Encouragement to those that are sensible of hardness to wait on the word of God. It is a powerful instrument in the hand of God when used as his ordinance, and his blessing is waited for, to melt and soften us, and make us pliable to every holy purpose. God appealeth to our

experience: Jer. xxiii. 29, 'Is not my word like fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' A fire to melt, and a hammer to break! Oh, what can stand before the power of it? Use it in good conscience, as one of the means of grace, and you shall find it will awaken you; nay, wound and heal you, and prove the power of God to your salvation. Some consideration or other will be given out to set your hearts a-work in heavenly things with greater life and power. All the miracles which God showed, either before or at the death of Christ, did not work so as this one sermon of Peter's. Certainly either the word will do it, or nothing will do it.

Secondly, It was the word of God, soundly taught, and handled with wisdom, and in a convincing way; for Peter taketh the scriptures, and solidly proveth to them that Jesus, whom they crucified, was the Christ. That is his conclusion in the 36th verse, 'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.' He maketh it evident in a powerful way of conviction: 'Now when they heard this they were pricked in their heart.' Note, a powerful searching ministry, that bringeth men to a sight and sense of their sins, is best to fit men for conversion to God. There is a playing with scripture in oratorian flourishes, and a sound inculcation of it. When men strive to make those that hear them the better for what they say, that is the ministry that will prick the heart; the others scarce tear the skin. It was said of Pericles, that his speech was piercing, *in animis auditorum aculeos reliquit*: he left a sting in the minds of his hearers, not by the charms of rhetoric, but by a serious, pungent discourse. That is the best preaching which woundeth the heart; it is most for the glory of God, and for the good of souls. Speaking pleasing things to tickle the ear better becometh the stage than the pulpit. It is said, Ecces. xii. 11, 'That the words of the wise are as goads and nails, fastened by the master of the assemblies;' words that have a notable acumen in them; some spiritual sharpness to affect the heart and quicken our dull affections. He meaneth sound and spiritual doctrine, such as doth not flatter men in their sins, but awaken and rouse them up. *Si prædicatoris non pungit sermo, sed oblectat, sapiens non est*—He is not a wise preacher who doth not mind his end, whose speech is fuller of flashes of wit than of savoury wholesome truths, that rather thinketh to please the ear than to awaken the conscience. He doth not act like a master of the assemblies. *Ilius doctoris vocem libenter audio, non qui sibi plausum, sed qui mihi planctum movet*, saith Bernard. They are the best preachers, and most affectionate to you, that wound your souls; though they rub an old sore till it ache, it is the better. The work of a minister is not to gain applause to himself, but souls to God. That maketh you go away, and say, not, How well hath he preached! but, How ill have I lived!—that ends with self-loathing rather than commendation of his parts. He must not *lenocinia quærere, sed remedia*, saith Salvian: seek out, not jingling words, but choice remedies for your souls.

Use. All this is spoken that you may not grow weary of a sound and searching ministry. Many think they trouble the world, and drive men to despair. Indeed God's witnesses do torment the dwellers upon

earth, Rev. xi. 10; they trouble their carnal rest, and will not let men sleep in their sins; but is it not better you should be troubled in your sleep of sin than awake in flames? Is it not a good despair that driveth you to God, and maketh way for a hope that will never leave you ashamed? And if we go to heaven by the gates of hell, can you be angry for leading you aright? I speak the rather, because the world cannot endure masculine, sound preaching. Ahab hated Micaiah: 1 Kings xxii. 8, 'He doth not prophesy good of me, but evil.' Men are displeased with them that deal faithfully with their souls: Isa. xxx. 10, 'They say unto the seers, See not; and the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things; speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits.' They would have the prophets sleek their tongues, and come with loose, garish strains; a sound practical sermon is loathed. They are cut at heart when they hear it, Acts vii. 54; they were unwilling to be searched at the bottom. It is one of the great sins of the age. Men preach in jest, and the people love to have it so; and speak of heaven and hell as things made to play withal, rather than propound them to their serious belief.

Thirdly, It was closely applied. The apostle doth not hover in generals, shoot at rovers; he holdeth the point of the sword at their breasts, and dischargeth in their faces: 'This Jesus, whom ye have crucified, is both Lord and Christ. When they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts.' Applicative and close preaching is the best way to wound the heart, or to bring men to a sight and sense of their miserable condition. 'Thou art the man,' saith Nathan to David, 2 Sam. xii. 6, 7; Acts vii. 51, 52, 'Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ear, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before the coming of the just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.' A clap of thunder at a distance doth not startle me so much as when it is in my zenith: 'The man is convinced of all, and judged of all, when the secrets of his own heart are discovered,' 1 Cor. xiv. 25. We make little account of those things we have not a real interest in; therefore this is a warrant to fly in the face of sinners, and charge them home, You are the men. Souls that are rocked asleep in a sinful course will else throw off all. An indictment without a name signifieth nothing. It prevents that captious cavil, The minister meant me, will they say, when their corruptions are met with; not by an humble application of the word to their consciences, but by way of cavil and calumny, judging it some sinister intention or reproachful reflection upon them: Jer. vi. 10, 'The word of the Lord is to them a reproach, they have no delight in it.' They make reproof railing. If thy heart misgive thee that thou art guilty, he did mean thee, and should mean thee. The minister did no more than he ought, no more than he ought in point of conscience; and it is just that every man should bear his own blame. But that he intended to shame thee before men, that is the false surmise of a galled conscience, when it beginneth to be stricken in its comforts. Apply it so as to humble thee, not to hate thy reprover.

Fourthly, It was a close application of a grievous sin. That was it

touched them so nearly, that they had crucified the Messiah, whom they had so long expected, and whom by their profession they were bound to receive: 'Now when they heard this.' Usually in awakening a sinner there is some remarkable and special sin that God sets home upon the conscience; as here, that they had crucified him who was appointed to be Christ and Lord. Christ convinceth the woman of Samaria of adultery: John iv. 18, 'He whom thou now hast is not thy husband.' Nothing that Christ had said before could work upon her conscience till he took this course with her. There is some special sin we are guilty of, which, when it is touched in the word, maketh guilt fly in the face of a sinner most insensible; as a blunt iron, that toucheth many points at once, maketh a bruise, but a needle, that toucheth but one point, entereth to the quick. Loose discourses about sin in general do not affect the heart so much as the sound discovery of sin; and when that one sin is discovered, it bringeth others into the view of conscience. As a man that is asleep is not awakened but by some great sound, but when once he is awake, he easily heareth lesser sounds; so there is some gross or secret sin God sets home upon the conscience, some special sin that bringeth all the rest to remembrance; usually the most shameful sin that ever we committed. Now it is our duty to lay these convictions to heart, and to consider our estate before God, when we find the word falling with light and power on any one sin of ours.

Fifthly, This grievous sin was wrong done to Christ Jesus, 'Whom ye have crucified.' Now they find the nails pricking in their hearts as so many sharp daggers; and having formerly pierced Christ, are now pierced themselves: 'Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts.' Note from hence, that sin will then affect the heart most when the wrong done to Christ thereby is seriously thought of. It was prophesied of these Jews, Zech. xii. 10, 'They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born;' John viii. 28, 'When ye have lift up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he.' Christ had foretold this conviction; after it was done they should be convinced of it, and their consciences let loose upon them, that they might see what a woful sin they had committed. And did the Jews only wrong Christ? All of us have wronged him in his laws and servants; and it is not only Jews, but christians may look upon him whom they have pierced. Some are said, Heb. vi. 6, 'To crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame.' The blood of Christ may not only be upon them that shed it, but on those that slight it. We do him the greatest contumely; the Jews knew him not. Christ prayeth, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' We know him, or else do ill in professing his name, and rejecting his benefits.

Secondly, I come to the trouble and anxiety of heart caused by the word, *κατενύγησαν τῇ καρδίᾳ*, 'They were pricked in their hearts.' Mark, it was not a slight stroke, the razing of the skin, but a compunction or pricking, a deep remorse and trouble. This was not of the eye, as Esau sought the blessing with tears when he had lost it,

Heb. xii. 17, but in the heart. Not a lighter touch or sudden pang, but a deep wound. The words are passive, not pricked themselves, but 'were pricked.' Could they have told how to prevent it, it had never been; but God breaketh in upon their consciences by his word, and then they are sore troubled. We read of some that, when they were charged with the same crime, they were 'cut at heart;' Acts vii. 54, 'Ye have been betrayors and murderers of the just One. And when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and gnashed on him with their teeth.' This is the more kindly work of the two. The word, when it is used as a means of conversion, then men are pricked at heart; but when they misuse it, as a means of embittering their spirits, then they are cut at heart. This perplexity and trouble we may consider as the fruit and issue of sin, or as the beginning of grace.

1. If you consider it as a fruit of sin, that sin will be bitterness and terror to the soul in the issue, however it seem to content us, and please the flesh for a while. It carrieth a sting with it in the tail, that will show itself one time or other: Jer. ii. 19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee; know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.' Thou shalt know it by the gripes of thine own heart. Though conscience be seared and senseless for a time, yet after a little while it will awake. For the present men do with difficulty smother checks of conscience, and repel the reproofs of the word, but after a while your trouble will come upon you like an armed man, which you cannot resist: 'The pleasures of sin are but for a season,' Heb. xi. 25. But all this while you are but providing for your own sorrow: Job xx. 12-14, 'Though wickedness be sweet in the mouth, though he hide it under his tongue, though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth, yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him.'

Use 1. Oh, take we heed then how we play with sin, or the occasions that lead thereunto. The contentment is soon over, like a draught of sweet poison, and then men feel the gall of asps within themselves, either in terrors of conscience in this life: Prov. xviii. 14, 'A wounded conscience who can bear?' or in the torments of hell hereafter: Luke xvi. 24, 'Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame:' Rom. ii. 9, 'Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil.' Nay, though a kindly remorse should intervene: Mat. xxvi. 75, 'Peter went out and wept bitterly.' It will cost you heart-grief and sorrow. Therefore be not deceived; do not sow to the flesh; forbidden fruit will cost dear. You think it pleasant to satisfy your lusts: 'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant; but he knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell,' Prov. ix. 17, 18. The sting of conscience and eternal torments will follow this. You are merry now, but this temper will not always last. If God put you into the stocks of conscience, or cast you into the prison of hell, then you will pay dear for all this frolicking.

2. As a preparation and step towards grace.

Doct. That the work of regeneration beginneth in a lively and smart sense of our sin and misery.

Because this is the main point, I shall show you—(1.) What is this pricking of heart; (2.) That this is the way God taketh to bring men to themselves; (3.) Why, or for what reasons.

I. What is this pricking at heart? There is a preparatory trouble that goeth before a saving change. It is *gradus ad rem*, a step to this change, though not *gradus in re*, a part of this change; as drying of the wood is not kindling of the wood. After this pricking at the heart, Peter biddeth them repent. This trouble lieth most in the passions and affections; yet it presupposeth some work upon the understanding. Among the passions it lieth most in the fear of being damned for ever; but it doth not exclude the work of other affections, as shame and sorrow; for nature hath a quick and more tender sense of danger than any other thing; as a man overgrown with sores is sensible of the filthiness and nastiness of his condition, but first and most of the pain. Well, then, let us consider it more distinctly.

1. There is in our understanding an apprehension of our miserable and undone condition, by reason of our many and great sins. A sight of sin is necessary, or a sound conviction of our sinful estate: Jer. xxxi. 19, 'Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth;' 1 Cor. xiv. 25, 'He is convinced of all, and judged of all, and falleth on his face, and worshippeth God.' Not a slight confused knowledge that we are all sinners in the general, nor empty notions by which sin may be made loathsome to us in a speculative way, but a setting it home upon the heart: 1 Kings viii. 47, 'Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captives, and repent, and make supplications unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and done perversely, we have committed wickedness;' Luke xv. 17, 18, 'And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish for hunger? I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee;' Jer. viii. 6, 'No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?' There must be also a sight and sense of the wrath of God that hangeth over our heads, and the danger we are in of being condemned and lost for ever; as a man asleep on a bridge, and ready to fall into the water: Rom. vii. 9, 'I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' Men snort securely over the pit's brink till awakened.

2. After this conviction follows compunction, which is made up of fear, shame, and sorrow. Guilt breeds fears and terrors, and the folly and filthiness of sin, shame, and our misery, by reason of both, sorrows and groans, and sad lamentations. Fear is one great part of it, or sense of the wrath of God due for sins: Ps. xc. 11, 'Who knoweth the power of thine anger? According to thy fear, so is thy wrath.' While others slight the wrath of God, pass their time merrily, not caring what estate they are in, these are deeply affected with the sense of God's dis-

pleasure. There is also shame, or a sense of being found faulty, or their folly in doing what they have done. When the soul is filled with confusion because of its own ways: Rom. vi. 21, 'What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.' Then sorrow and deep lamentations because of their sad condition. That affection is expressed by the prophet, Lam. v. 16, 'Woe unto us, that we have sinned;' Ps. xxxviii. 8, 'I am feeble, and sore broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart.' Now in all these things there lieth compunction or brokenness of heart, which serveth, not as a bridle to keep us from God, but as a spur to drive us to him.

II. That God taketh this course to bring home sinners to himself. God terrified Adam (Gen. iii. 10, 'I was afraid') to make him sensible of his defection, before he comforted him. So the Israelites, when he would enter into covenant with them, he first terrified them by giving the law with thunderings. When he would convert Paul, Acts ix. 6, 'He, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' Acts xvi. 39, 40, the jailor came in trembling before Paul and Silas, and said, 'What must I do to be saved?' In the Old Testament, Ps. li. 17, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise;' and in the New, Rom. viii. 15, 'For we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.' The holiness of God's nature seemeth with a kind of comely necessity to call for such a dispensation, that the sinner should be sensible of his displeasure by reason of sin, before he tasteth of grace; that he should not *per saltum* leap into comfort and the assurance of God's love all of a sudden. And herein God is contrary to the devil, the world, and sin, which make promise of much pleasure, gain, and honour at the first, and men find something that giveth contentment to their sensual desires and corrupt lusts, but it ends in bitterness and sorrow at last. But here a little bitterness at first, that maketh way for endless comforts. Not that all that are pricked in heart and troubled for sin shall be converted and saved; the work may die with some in the very pangs, or their trouble may be slight, and soon worn off; but all that are converted are thus troubled, and filled with perplexity about their eternal estate, though the degrees be different. As there is no birth labour than others, as the Hebrew women; so here.

III. Why?

I. To make us serious. A true sense of sin and misery maketh a soul active and inquisitive about a remedy; as a man sensible of his wounds will not rest till he hath found a plaster. The prodigal when bitten with hunger came to himself, and then thought of returning to his father. We never make it our chief care to save our souls till we come to this. A wounded conscience will inquire after balm in Gilead. As men's trouble is, so do they lay out for help and relief. If sickness be the trouble, they seek for health; if poverty, for riches; if disgrace and contempt, for favour and reputation; if outward affliction, for outward deliverance; if terrors of conscience, for the removal of the guilt of sin; all their thoughts are about that. Here in the text, 'What shall we do?' They now find they have souls to lose,

and souls to save. Till you find yourselves lost in the midst of your greatest earthly happiness and abundance, you will go on in a secure course of voluptuousness, worldliness, and profaneness; but when you are once in straits of conscience, your greatest care will be to save your souls. Many live without all care or fear, doubt or distrust, of their spiritual estate; they pass their time merrily, and hope well, but have no certainty, live at all adventures with God. But when God toucheth the heart of a sinner, then he beginneth to question himself about his estate and course of life. What is it, and what hath he been a-doing all his life hitherto? What provision hath he made for eternity? Whether he hath pleased the flesh, or pleased the Lord? and what will be the end of this when he cometh to die? None but the holy humble soul will seriously ask this question, 'What shall I do to be saved?' Men are not humbled. The wheel of the law never went over them, to the breaking of their hearts; and this is the cause of all idleness and slothfulness in religion. These are the questions an humbled heart is conversant about.

2. To wean us from sin. Corruption is the soul's darling, born and bred with us; and the league between us and it is not easily dissolved. Till we feel the vileness of sin we shall never be brought to hate it. While we taste the sweet of it only, we spare it, and hide it under our tongue: Job xx. 12, 'Though wickedness be sweet in the mouth, and he hide it under his tongue.' But when once we feel, we are cautious of thrusting our hands into the fire of sin again: Josh. xxii. 17, 'Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us?' Children will no more play with snappish dogs when bitten by them. The old compunctions are never forgotten: Prov. i. 31, 'Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.' We are too bold, and too apt to play about the cockatrice's hole; but when these sins have been as swords in your hearts, and you have felt the torment of an accusing conscience, this maketh you more cautious.

3. That Christ may be more heartily welcome to us, and that we may the better entertain his comforts and grace. Christ is sweet to hungry consciences. Our passover must be eaten with sour herbs; so it is the sense of our sin and misery that giveth these comforts a bitter¹ relish: Isa. lvii. 15, 'To revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of contrite ones;' ver. 18, 'And restore comfort unto him and to his mourners.' Unutterable groans make way for unspeakable joys. It was not meet that Christ should be received with contempt or coldness, and made light of, and therefore exercised with piercing and heart-breaking sorrows. The bondage of Egypt maketh us long for Canaan.

4. That we may more readily yield to God's terms: Acts ix. 6, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' Terrified Paul giveth God a blank to write his pleasure concerning him. A soul truly sensible of sin is ready to submit to any terms which God will impose upon him, and not stand hucking with God, as Pharaoh did. In our ease we would never hearken to the crucifying of the flesh, or deny ourselves, taking up our cross. Heaven must fall into our laps, or we will have none of it. Like Naaman the Syrian, we would pass away a troublesome condition; but when our souls are perplexed, we will be glad to

¹ Qu. 'better'?—ED.

accept of mercy upon any terms, take things at God's price : Anything, Lord ; a perfect resignation to the will of God. In pangs of conscience any course will please that shall be prescribed for our comfort and relief.

5. That we may be more chary of grace afterwards. Things that cost dear are the better kept. There need all means to fix the heart. Now this is a good means, to consider how hardly we came by it. It cost us many a bitter groan, and shall we part with it easily? How soon would we forfeit our pardon, and embezzle our stock of grace, and sin away our comforts, did we not remember how hardly we came by them ! As a riotous heir, that never knew what it was to get an estate, spends it freely.

SERMON II.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do ?—ACTS ii. 37.

USE 1. If it be so that this is the method of God in conversion, let us not hinder nor smother so good a work ; for so far as this is cherished, we are in our way home to God. Let us not hinder it by omitting hearing, meditation, application. First, Hearing. It is a sign men have a mind to remain in the hardness of their hearts when they will not come to the means that might soften them : Zech. vii. 11, 12, ' But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear ; yea, they made their hearts as an adamant, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets. Therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.' The way to harden the heart is to refuse the means. The word would keep alive some notions and thoughts of God that would not let us sleep in sin. Secondly, Meditation and consideration, without which all availeth nothing, unless we debate points between God and ourselves in secret. All actions require time and space for their operations. A sudden glance without musing bringeth nothing to perfection ; as a hen that soon leaveth her nest. All arguments must be holden in the view of conscience, applied close to the soul : Ps. cxix. 59, ' I considered my ways, and turned my feet to thy testimonies.' A man may take fire in his hand, and presently throw it away without being burnt or hurt. The greatest matters in the world will not work upon him that will not think of them : Deut. xxxii. 46, ' Set your hearts to all the words which I testify among you this day.' Things will never go to the quick till the heart be set on them : Hosea vii. 2, ' And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness ; now their doings have beset them about, they are before my face.' There the business stops. Men will not take it into their thoughts. There is a time when you shall con-

sider, and not be able to look off: Ps. l. 21, 'These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.' You will not think of it now, but then you cannot choose but think of it; you will have nothing to occupy your thoughts but your sins, and the sad effects of them. If it be so irksome to think of hell, what will it be to feel it? Now we cannot prevail with you to bestow a few sober thoughts upon eternity, but then you shall do it without entreaty. As a man that hath the stone and the gout, he cannot forget the pain, if he would never so fain; though now you cast off all thoughts of your condition, and therefore live peaceably in your sins, the time will come when you shall remember them. Thirdly, Application, and urging our own souls with the truths heard: Jer. viii. 6, 'I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle;' Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we say to these things?' Job v. 27, 'Hear it, and know it for thy good;' Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' We will not let the word come close and home to our own consciences. Rouse up thine own heart, and bring home the stroke of the word, or else it proveth not effectual. Self-love puts by the blow, and thrusts it to others, as if they were unconcerned.

2. Let us not hinder this work of compunction by way of commission. There is something that we cherish in ourselves that hinders this piercing of the heart.

[1.] A misconceit of God's anger against sin; this is one great means to hinder the power of the word. Men think that God doth make no great reckoning of their sins, that it will not be so bad with them as others say; indeed, that we care not for sin, it is no wonder we have not such a lively indignation against it. Oh, but 'God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,' Hab. i. 13. His nature sets him against it. Any man that hath but a spark of the divine nature in him, how doth he hate sin! Lot's righteous soul was vexed from day to day; and if man, how much more God! If God make no great reckoning of sin, why hath he punished it so severely, as in drowning the whole world, burning of Sodom, bringing such calamities upon his people as we cannot read them with dry eyes? Why is 'his wrath revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men'? Rom. i. 18. If God make so little reckoning of sin, why is it that little infants, that are free from all actual sins, die? Rom. v. 14, 'Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression.' And many times with great gripes and pains, such as would make a man's heart grieve to see it. If God make so little account and reckoning of sin, why is it that little sins to appearance are chastised with so great punishments? Adam for eating an apple, Uzzah for touching the ark, the Bethshemites for looking into the ark, 1 Sam. vi. 19, 20; Ananias and Sapphira struck dead in the place for a lie, Zachary for unbelief struck dumb. Why are his people, the dearly beloved of his soul, so dreadfully punished? Prov. xi. 31, 'Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth, much more the wicked and the sinner.' If God make so little reckoning of

sin, why is hell and everlasting woe threatened to his creature, the work of his own hands? We cannot without horror think of the howling of a dog in a fiery furnace for half-an-hour. If God make so little reckoning of sin, why was Jesus Christ so troubled and exceedingly amazed when he stood in the place of sinners? Mark xiv. 33, 'And he began to be amazed, and to be very heavy.' He wanted not wisdom nor courage; he knew the value of things as well as you; had no want of fortitude; he foresaw the sufferings would be short, the event glorious; he knew God was his Father, that he loved him while he suffered; yet when he took the task of sinners upon him, he was sore amazed. Oh, therefore be ashamed of so sottish a conceit, as if sin were nothing.

[2.] Sensuality and inordinate love of pleasures. These take away the heart: Hosea iv. 11, 'Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart,' wasteth all tenderness and feeling. Pleasures bring a brawn and deadness upon us, thrust the soul into a dead sleep: 1 Tim. v. 6, 'She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.' Like Nabal's heart, which died within him, and he became as a stone, 1 Sam. xxv. 37. These things stupify the conscience and dull the spiritual senses, so that men have not an ear for God, or a heart that is likely to be sensible of anything. Oh, therefore take heed of such a frame of heart.

[3.] Worldliness. Men throng their hearts with care and business, and so have no time and leisure to mind the state of their souls: Luke xxi. 34, 'Take heed unto yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life.' As Cain fell a-building to divert his conscience, or as they that offered their children to Moloch did still and drown their cries with drums and tabors; so the din and noise of business will not let conscience speak, they being 'cumbered with much serving.' They that cumber themselves with many things seldom mind the one thing necessary. This keepeth away all heart-qualms.

[4.] Great and heinous sins. These cast the soul into a swoon, and deprive it of all sense. There is some tenderness left with lesser sins, as a prick of a pin will make a man start, but a heavy blow stunneth him. David, for cutting off the lap of Saul's garment, his heart smote him, and so for numbering the people, he was pricked and wounded in conscience, 2 Sam. xxiv. 10; but in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba it was not so; he lay long dead and senseless. We hear of no kindly meltings and workings of heart from him till Nathan came to him: Ps. li, the title, 'A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him after he had gone in to Bathsheba;' and that was when the child was born: 2 Sam. xii. 14, 'Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to thee shall surely die.' Let a man run on in a course of gross sin, and he loseth his feeling: Eph. iv. 19, 'Who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, and to work all uncleanness with greediness.' And that is a sad crisis and state of soul. Oh, take heed of these presumptuous sins: Ps. xix. 13, 'Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins, and let them not have dominion over me; so shall I be upright before thee, and innocent from the great transgression.'

[5.] The customary committing of any lesser sins against conscience;

these lead on to hardness of heart, and senselessness, and stupidity. The heart of young men, especially if well educated, is tender, and startleth at the least sin and thought of God's judgments; the least sin will trouble it, and make it tender; but when once we give way to small sins against knowledge, we every day grow more and more bold and venturous, and then shall swallow greater evils without any great trouble or fear of wrath. Water, when it beginneth to freeze, will not endure anything; the least weight put upon it sinketh it presently; but after a while it will bear the weight of a laden cart. Therefore take heed of giving way to sin. That heart that was easily troubled before, when once it is inured to sin, loseth all its sensibleness and tenderness, and what seemed intolerable at first will grow into a delight; as Alipius, St Austin's friend, first abhorred the bloody spectacles of the gladiators, but giving himself leave, by importunity of friends, to be present, but would wink, and not open his eyes, yet at length, when the people shouted, he gave himself liberty to see, and then not only beheld them with delight, but drew others to behold what himself once loathed. Sin at first seemeth insupportable, then heavy, then light; then the sense gone, then delightful, then desired. Oh, therefore watch over your souls if you would keep any feeling. *Ab assuetis non fit passio.* Things to which we are used do not work upon us; we are not much moved with them. Custom maketh men sleep quietly by the falls of great waters where much noise is; and some parts of the body grow callous, brawny, dry, and dead, as the labourer's hand and the traveller's heel, by much use. So doth the conscience; when often offered violence to, and used to sin, it groweth senseless, and less capable of this work, which is of such use and profit.

3. Do not smother it when God beginneth it. Oh, it is dangerous to stifle convictions or lose the benefit of them; for either afterwards conscience is more stupified or terrified. First, More stupified. No iron is so hard as that which hath been oft heated and oft quenched; so no heart so hard as that which hath outworn these convictions and compunctions. As God saith of outward strokes, 'Why should ye be stricken any more?' Certainly he that will not take such warnings as God sends him is every day than other more unapt to be wrought to repentance. As water that hath been heated over the fire congealeth the soonest after it is taken off, so they that have felt the motions of God's Spirit freeze the soonest in the dregs and lusts of the flesh, and have their hearts extraordinarily hardened if once they forsake him. God ceaseth to renew and continue his former motions, and sin gets more strength; conscience giveth over its office of checking, accusing, and awakening them. A wounded conscience neglected will prove a dead conscience; as an ungracious child, after many corrections, is hardened thereby, and at length quite given over and cast off. Oh, therefore, when God cometh near, then call upon him: Isa. lv. 6, 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.' It is dangerous to slight these rebukes from God, and, when the waters are stirred, not to put in for cure: Prov. i. 23, 'Turn at my reproof.' Secondly, By slighting convictions, conscience is terrified; it maketh way for anguish of soul. They will be terrified when they come to die: Prov. i. 26, 'I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your

fear cometh ;' Prov. v. 11, 12, And thou mourn at last, when thy flesh and body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof?' Oh, with what horrors and amazing thoughts will you be filled when conscience, which lay asleep in sin before, shall be awakened by the approaches of death and the fears of judgment to come, and your repentance shall not be repentance to life, but, like that of Judas, repentance to death, the beginnings of sorrow, or the pledge of the worm that shall never die. Oh, take heed then of smothering the work of God!

But when is this done?

[1.] When you take up with other comforts on this side Christ. Your hearts are set a-work, and your thirst is increased, but you quench it at the next ditch, not at the fountain of living waters. You drown all this work in mirth, and pleasures, and merry company. As Saul sought to cure the fit of the evil spirit by music, so these, when they are haunted with thoughts of sin, and guilt, and the world to come, think to put it off, and do not turn it to a right use, which is to turn to the Lord; or as a man arrested maketh the officer drunk that he may escape for that time; and so, when it might have been a beginning of conversion, it is to them a means of further hardening their hearts. This is quenching the Spirit, 1 Thes. v. 17, by suppressing his motions. Guard the heart then against all comforts but those which God speaketh and alloweth: Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.' This is a work that must end well. Take heed lest the good seed be choked as soon as it is cast into the heart.

[2.] When you easily return to former sins, and after this qualm can lick up your vomit again. You have smarted, and been wounded, and burdened, and will you take up your load again? John v. 14, 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.' This is to run to hell again, when you have felt the smart of it. Pharaoh had his qualms, but as soon as the plague was off, he returneth to what he was: Exod. ix. 27, 'And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.' Who could have thought but Pharaoh would have been another man? But when the qualm is over, Pharaoh is Pharaoh still, and there must be a new judgment to humble him. Ahab oppresseth Naboth, and God threateneth him, and Ahab humbleth himself and walketh softly, but afterward imprisoneth Micaiah, and then God slayeth him. Felix trembled, but still continueth his course. Many have their tears, and sighs, and sorrows, and after all this they relapse. Oh, this is dangerous!

Thirdly, We come now to the course they take for ease and relief: 'They said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Observe here—

1. To whom they go, to 'Peter and the rest of the apostles.'

2. What they say, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Where—

[1.] Their civil compellation and form of address, 'Men and brethren.'

[2.] Their solemn question, 'What shall we do?'

From the whole I shall make these observations—

1. The change that is wrought upon a sinner when God hath him under this preparative trouble; it doth not amount to a full conversion, yet it inferreth a change; a strange change in these men, both as to their thoughts of Christ and his apostles.

[1.] As to Christ, where are those words now, 'Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?' They are now convinced that Jesus is Lord and Christ. Where is now their fury, crying, 'Crucify, crucify him'? They are now pricked in their hearts, and hang the head: 'If thou lettest him go, thou art no friend to Cæsar.' No such thing heard now. No; but, 'What shall we do?'

[2.] Their thoughts are changed towards the apostles. Now it is *viri, fratres*, 'Men and brethren,' whom before they looked upon as deceivers, and men full of new wine; those whom they hated as enemies they now consult with as friends and physicians. They do not in contempt call them Galileans and impostors, but 'Men and brethren.' They have other thoughts of men and things than formerly they had. I observe this—

(1.) To show the necessity of a change in conversion. If conviction and compunction work such a mighty change, what will conversion do? *Ego non sum ego*—I am not myself. A man should not be the same man he was before. There is as palpable a difference as between light and darkness, life and death, the old man and the new. Brokenness of heart varies the price and value of things and persons strangely. He that was judged to have a devil is now found to be Lord and Christ; and those that were mocked as men full of new wine, and had taken a cup too much, are now owned to be the precious servants of the Lord. We are not the same men, have not the same thoughts and notions of things, when the Lord beginneth to work upon us. Men look upon men and things in the glass of their own humours, and passions, and brutish lusts, when they are wild careless creatures; but when they come to themselves, and begin to be serious, they look upon things as they are in themselves. Men look upon men and things at a distance and by a slight view before; now they look upon them nearer at hand, and by a different and more accurate view. Peter Martyr's similitude wrought upon Galicius Caraccialus. Those that afar off see men skipping and dancing would think they were light and vain persons, but when they draw near unto them, they find their motion orderly, and keeping time and pace with the music, and as the laws of the exercise and dance require. There is a great alteration in men's notions of wisdom and folly, misery and happiness, liberty and bondage. The work of a sound conviction bewrayeth itself in nothing so much as in these things. They are wise who mind earthly things, fools and crazy brains who consult not with their profit, but their conscience; no happiness but to flow in ease and plenty; no misery like that to be kept short and bare in temporal conveniences and worldly accommodations; no such bondage as to be held to duty and in the fetters of conscience; no such liberty as to live at large. But afterward they find it to be quite otherwise; no folly like pleasing the flesh; no misery like the loss of God's favour; no bondage like the slavery of sin.

(2.) I observe it to show what difference there is in our thoughts of sin before and after the commission. With what a hurry and madness

of a furious spirit were this people carried to desire the death of Christ ! 'Crucify him, crucify him !' And now it is done, their consciences work, they are pricked in their hearts, and are at an utter loss : 'Men and brethren, what shall we do ?' Christ foretold this : John viii. 28, 'Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lift up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.' Evil men are permitted to run their own course, but when their consciences and God's judgments are let loose upon them, to see what a course they are engaged in, then they are 'pricked in heart.' Our first parents, when they had sinned, then their eyes were opened, and they knew they were naked, Gen. iii. 7, that is, ashamed in their nakedness ; they began to take notice of the miserable and sad condition into which Satan had brought them, that they might be humble, and seek to God for pardon. Many discover not aforehand the evils which their sins lead them into ; but afterwards they see it, and are left shiftless and helpless. When Judas had betrayed his master, the foulness of the act terrified him, and he goeth and hangeth himself. Peter hath no sense of his condition while he is denying Christ ; but afterwards conscience beginneth to work : 'He goeth out, and wept bitterly,' Mat. xxvi. 75. It is well when this is discovered to bring us to repentance for failings past, to make us more watchful for time to come, and to give us a fuller and quicker taste of God's mercy in our reconciliation by Jesus Christ. But when it is only discovered in order to our despair, as it was to Cain, Gen. iv. 14, that is sad. Well, then, they have other thoughts. This is the general observation.

2. I observe again, that they took some course for their comfort and relief : 'They said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do ?' Felix trembled, but it was but a superficial work, and came to nothing, Acts xxiv. 25 ; it was soon over ; he delayeth and adjourneth the consideration of his danger. Cain and Judas being terrified, they despair : Gen. iv. 13, 14, 'And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear ;' Mat. xxvii. 3, 4, 'He brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us ? See thou to that.' But this in the text was a more kindly work. They do not turn the sense of their misery into a slothful despair and despondency, but ask counsel. Many have some qualms and risings of conscience, but they soon die away. Therefore it is good to see what we do with our trouble. It is *opus respectivum* ; it reacheth to some further work, which we should look after, that we smother it not.

3. I observe that they take a good course. They do not go to the scribes and pharisees, whose malice would have prompted them to have defaced this work, but to Peter and the rest of the apostles ; not to merry company and carnal delights, where it might be quenched, but to those that could best direct them how to improve it for good, to the ambassadors of Christ. When we are sick, it concerneth us to think what physician we choose ; some are mere mountebanks, and will prescribe poisons instead of remedies. Many, when they are wounded in spirit, run to their carnal companions, and drink away sorrow, or game

and play away sorrow, or read away sorrow, and seek to put themselves out of the humour. Alas! this is but to put off that which they cannot put away, and to fly from grief, not to cure it: not to settle, but to sear the conscience; vain helps, that will in the issue perplex us the more, and make the cure the more difficult.

4. I observe in the general, that they speedily took a good course. It is not good to neglect the present time, and lose the importunity of the present conviction. While it is warm upon our hearts, let us carry on the work of God as far as it will go. Let us step in as soon as we see the waters troubled, John v. 4. There is much time in a little opportunity. As soon as the wound is given and felt; in bodily diseases delay is dangerous; as soon as we feel the first strivings and grudgings of conscience: Acts xxiv. 25, 'Felix trembled.' He was all in an agony; but he put off his conviction, and we hear no more of him. We read of converts that followed Christ forthwith: Mat. iv. 20, 'Straightway they left their nets, and followed him;' and Gal. i. 16, 'Immediately I consulted not with flesh and blood.' These impulses will be lost, and you will outgrow the feelings of conscience in a little time. These good motions are spent if not prosecuted, and then you will be in a worse condition than before. Your comforts will come the sooner, the sooner you look after a cure. Sorrow will increase to horror and desperation: 2 Chron. xxiv. 19, 20, 'When the king heard the words of the law, he presently rent his clothes, and commands them to go and inquire of the Lord for him.' Green wounds are the soonest cured. When a bone is out of joint, the longer the setting is forborne, the greater will the pain of the patient be; yea, it may be so long neglected that no skill nor art can set it right again. So it is in the cure of a wounded spirit and bleeding conscience. The ground is fitter to receive the seed after it is newly ploughed, and the present impression of grace is a great advantage. Work while you have that advantage. Worldly occasions and distractions will choke the sense we have of our condition; therefore let us betimes strike in, and seek a remedy. To put it off is strangely to neglect the soul and eternal peace. When thy conscience is struck by the word, and thy heart is pierced, withdraw thyself from all other distractions, and drive the work home; seek presently for direction and remedy.

SERMON III.

And they said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?—ACTS ii. 37.

OBSERVE in the words—(1.) To whom they go; (2.) What they say.

1. Their civil compellation.
2. Their solemn question.

First, Their civil compellation and respect to the apostles, 'Men and brethren.' Ministers are in season (and therefore in esteem) when

men lie under distress of conscience. Pharaoh ran not to his magicians in his trouble, but to Moses and Aaron. Those that humour our lusts are ministers only for our carnal prosperity; those that deal conscientiously are ministers for our distress; and though they were contemptible before, and scorned by us, yet then they are in request. Before, they and their pains might be well spared, their persons are hated, their doctrine scorned and despised; but stay a little, till a pang of spiritual trouble comes upon them, and then their sentiments are altered. Those that mocked at them before will now be glad of their advice. The jailor put the apostles into the inner prison, and put their feet in the stocks; but when a trembling fit cometh upon him, then it is, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' Acts xvi. 30. Those that slighted holy things before, yet when chastened with pain upon the body, and their soul draweth near to the grave, and their life to the destroyers, oh, then for a faithful minister, for a 'messenger of God, one of a thousand, to show a man his uprightness,' Job xxxiii. 23. Then they are of great account and esteem. Oh, that we had the same notions of men and things in trouble and out of trouble, living and dying! it would prevent a great deal of mischief.

Reasons—(1.) Because the men are altered; (2.) Because their work is altered.

1. The men are altered, both in their judgments and affections.

[1.] In their judgments. The pride of their carnal reason is subdued; or rather, their reason is set free from the captivity of brutish passions. Now they know what sin is, the nature of it, and the danger of it, and what necessity lieth upon them to part with it. Formerly they lived by sense, and were under the power of brutish lusts, and they thought it more than needs to wind up men to such a pitch of holiness, or to call upon them to be so watchful, serious, and diligent; that this niceness and fond scrupulosity was over-doing. Now they see it is but necessary strictness; that these were their best friends. Smart experience openeth their eyes. They now feel the evil they never feared before; and by experience and sensible proof they see the deceit of them that cried, Peace, peace, that declaimed against strictness, and hated those that taught them the way of salvation: Prov. xxviii. 23, 'He that rebuketh a man, afterward shall find more favour than he that flattereth with his tongue.' Rubbing an itch breedeth soreness and rawness.

[2.] Their affections are altered, the stubbornness of their hearts is subdued: Job xxiii. 16, 'For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me.' Before, Shall they pine and whine, and tremble at the word? No; they are no such babies. Till the arrows of Christ stick fast in the heart, they do not fall down before the truth: Ps. xlv. 5, 'Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, whereby the people fall under thee.'

2. Their work is altered. They mind that which requireth a minister's work, the salvation of their souls. They slight God and their souls, and therefore may well slight God's ministers. There is no work for them to do.

Use 1. To press ministers to evidence themselves to men's consciences rather than their lusts. Make known the truths of God sincerely to

them : 2 Cor. iv. 2, 'But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God ;' 2 Cor. v. 11, 'Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men ; but we are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.' You are accounted enemies for a while ; but if ever God touch their hearts, they will love you, when they are freed from the slavery of their lusts. It is not those that have quaint notions and rhetorical flourishes, that cry, Peace unto them, that will then serve their turn.

Use 2. Is information, that he that hath a secret grudge and distaste against God's faithful servants and messengers was never kindly wrought upon. He might be touched at heart, but was not pricked at heart. They are sensible of a light that troubleth them, not a kindly remorse that maketh them to ask advice and counsel. If they had any true pangs of conscience, it would be otherwise.

Secondly, Their question, 'What shall we do?' that is, do to escape the deserved punishment, do to obtain remission of sins, do to be saved? Acts xvi. 30, as may be gathered by parallel places, and out of the apostle's answer, 'Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins ;' and, 'Save yourselves from this untoward generation.' The point is—

Doct. That men are at a good and hopeful pass when once they come anxiously and fervently to ask, 'What shall we do to be saved?'

This is the usual question of men wounded in spirit and in straits of conscience : Acts ix. 6, 'And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' Luke iii. 10, 'And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?' Acts xvi. 30, 'And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' Job vii. 20, 'What shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?'

1. It is a weighty question.

2. When it is fitly proposed, it argueth a good and hopeful condition and state of soul.

1. It is a weighty question. The case is not for another, but for themselves. We read of an impertinent question put forth by Peter to Christ : John xxi. 21, 'Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, what shall this man do?' But here it is, 'What shall we do?' Many do not look inward, but are busy about the concerns of others. It is not, What shall he do? but, 'What shall we do?' It is not about intricate doubts, and nice debates, or the decision of scholastical questions, but a necessary thing. Curious questions argue too much levity and wantonness in those that propose them. Many that are heart-whole dispute and wrangle about nice things, but these ask advice. Those that wholly give up themselves to nice debates neglect the main profitable matters. A man in straits and pangs of conscience is not in a condition to trouble himself with niceties ; he is in danger of hell, and his care is how he shall do to escape it. It is not about the body, but the soul ; not for necessaries for the outward man. There are questions of that nature which we are apt to put : Mat. vi. 25, 'What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we put on?' 'Take

no thought for the body.' A man's main care is to save the soul. Christ, to divert them, puts them upon that: Mat. vi. 33, 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' These worldly questions perplex men's hearts; as their trouble is, so they inquire. If they distrust God's providence, what more usual than these questions? Once more, it is not about speculations, but practicals; not, What shall we say? but, What shall we do? Not about events: Luke xiii. 23, 'Lord, are there few that are saved?' but about duty. Chrysostom observeth well, They say not, How shall we be saved? but, 'What shall we do to be saved?' It is presumptuous folly to hope for the end without the means. There is somewhat to be done if we mean to be saved. Balaam said, 'Let me die the death of the righteous,' Num. xxiii. 10. *At oportuit sic vivisse*—We should live so. There are means leading to every end. We must not think to go to heaven with hand in bosom, and land at the haven of glory when you turn the boat to the stream. Salvation will not be had without duty. That is worth nothing that is gotten for nothing. You cannot imagine such a worthy thing will cost you no pains. There is a proportion still between the means and the end: 1 Thes. ii. 12, 'That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory; something that will answer the greatness of your hopes. Many will go to heaven as far and as fast as good hopes and good wishes will carry them. They make a gentleman-like life of the profession of godliness; their rents are brought in by their stewards, whether they sleep or wake, work or play. No; these converts propound it, 'What shall we do?' what course shall we take to save our souls?

But is not this a legal question, 'What shall we do?' as if heaven were to be had for doing?

Some think this is spoken with respect to the covenant of works, the sense of which is upon our hearts naturally. It is true such a question may be put in a legal way, as the young man that came to Christ, Mat. xix. 16, 'And behold one came, and said unto him, Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' He was a rich man, but he saw his happiness lay not in riches, but in everlasting salvation; he desireth that, but he would earn it, and seek his justification by works. But to inquire after the necessary means without such a presumption of merit is not legal. Christ answereth him according to his legal apprehensions: ver. 17, 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' That was the best way to humble a proud pharisee, to bid him make good his pretensions to keep the whole law in all points without sin; that was to hold him to his own covenant. But now Peter answereth these according to their meaning; they inquire after the way and means of relief: 'Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins.' Well, then, we have found it a good and weighty question.

II. It is fitly propounded. It argueth a good and hopeful state of soul if anxiously and seriously put. We ask it in jest at other times, but convinced men are in the greatest earnest. Things now begin to be real, and seem other than formerly they did; they think, and speak, and talk like men in another world. Sin is another thing. They were

wont to marvel what made men keep such a stir about sin ; what harm was it to take a little forbidden pleasure ? that it was hard measure to be held so closely to duty ; but now they have other thoughts, are at a loss, ' What shall we do ? ' This question seriously put argueth—

1. Their present helplessness, or a sense of their lost condition. They speak like men at a loss, and at their wit's end, finding Jesus to be the Christ, of whose death they were guilty, and so liable to God's heavy judgment. They had cried out, ' His blood be upon us and our children.' They could not undo what they had done, and now know not what to do. They speak like men wholly void of senses ; as Reuben, ' The child is not, and whither shall I go ? ' Gen. xxxvii. 30. So upon this their perplexity ariseth. Sin will put men to a nonplus, and bring men to be shiftless and helpless ; as Christ spake when he stood in our room, John xii. 37, ' Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say ? ' Job vii. 20, ' I have sinned ; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men ? ' What shall a sinner do ? In earth there is no balm for his wounds. It is as the white of an egg. If he look to heaven, there is a God to condemn him ; if to hell, there are devils to torment him. Their minds are distracted with the sense of the present evil. Now thus it should be before we can be brought home to Christ. He came to save that which was lost. You should be at such a loss that nothing should comfort you on this side Christ. Till the prodigal was brought to penury, and could no longer sustain himself by his shifts, he never thought of returning to his father ; but then he did. There are two remarkable parts in conversion—to bring a man and himself together, to bring Christ and him together. A man cometh to himself by compunction, or a sense of his misery ; but one great means to bring him to Christ is helplessness, when he can no longer shift for himself, and patch up a happiness by his own devices. Till we are at a loss, we go about like Ephraim : Jer. xxxi. 22, ' How long wilt thou go about ? ' Man is a proud creature, loath to be beholden, would be sufficient to his own happiness ; but when all his confidences are broken, then he casts himself into the arms of Christ, to be by him brought to God, when we see our utter inability to help ourselves.

2. This question argueth some kind of hope that there may be relief for them ; for they do not give over the business as desperate, as if nothing could be done, but inquire, ' What shall we do ? ' Is there no remedy for such vile wretches as we are ? They presume there is some course to be taken. There is a kind of twilight in the soul, neither utter despair nor certain hope ; but only some present support, that we may not give over the business in despair : Joel ii. 14, ' Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto the Lord your God ? ' They are in suspense, but incline to look for grace from God : Jonah iii. 9, ' Who can tell if God will return, and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not ? ' It is a venture, but such as encourageth them to wait. There is a possibility or probability, but not a certainty, that hope is the fruit of faith. Sensible sinners have many sad tossings and conflicts of spirit between the expectation of God's mercy and the sense of their own deservings, so that they cannot speak the pure language of faith nor the pure language of unbelief, but

mixed and made up of both ; as those Jews, Neh. xiii. 24, 'They spake half the language of the Jews, and half of Ashdod.' Yet such as it is, it maketh them wait and venture on God ; as Benhadad's servants on the king of Israel : 1 Kings xx. 31, 'And his servant said unto him, Behold, now we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings : let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth upon our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel ; peradventure he will save thy life.' So these doubtful thoughts have a mixture of hope ; yea, some predominancy of it ; so that though they do not certainly determine, yet they will try what will become of it. Now the soul is in a hopeful way. Faith is coming on, and comfort will not be far off, when we make these adventures, and inquire, though we do not know what will come of it : Jer. xviii. 12, 'All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him ; for his righteousness which he hath done, he shall live.'

3. It expresseth their solicitude and anxious care, 'What shall we do?' It is a point of the highest consideration, and therefore they ask counsel. When the Corinthians were made sorry by Paul's letter, 2 Cor. vii. 11, 'This self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you ; yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge ! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.' Carefulness and consultation about the means of grace and salvation is a hopeful beginning, and men are in a fair way of passing from death to life. The generality of the world is stupid and listless : Rom. iii. 11, 'There is no man that understandeth, there is no man that seeketh after God.' Many never saw a need to do anything, nor have a heart to do anything ; therefore when men come to consult, either with themselves or others, there is some hope. With themselves ; as those lepers, 2 Kings vii. 3, 4, 'And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate, and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die ? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there ; and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians ; if they save us alive, we shall live ; and if they kill us, we shall but die ;' Luke xv. 17, 18, 'And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish for hunger ? I will arise, and go to my father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.' And as the wise steward, Luke xvi. 3, 4, 'Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do ? For my lord taketh the stewardship from me : I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of my stewardship they may receive me into their houses.' Or when they consult with others, when a man asketh serious questions, how to frame his heart to the obedience of the gospel, how to establish his heart in the hopes of pardon and glory ; this will come to somewhat. Men begin to be awake : Ps. xxii. 27, 'All the ends of the world shall remember, and turn to the Lord.' For a while they are like men sleeping and distracted ; they do not act like men, having no sense, no heart for heavenly things. But when once they are full of pangs of con-

science then there is hopes of them ; then they are serious, and mind things.

4. It expresseth their resignation. They do not stand hucking and dodging, but with readiness of mind offer themselves to be directed by the apostles : ' Men and brethren, what shall we do ? ' As if they had said, We will do anything that you shall enjoin. This is the fashion and manner of those that are in a hopeful way of conversion. They are wont to resign and offer themselves to be guided by Christ in his own way to heaven, without reservation : Acts ix. 6, ' Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? ' ready to obey him in all things. They do not dispense with some things, and say, Thus far can we go, or, The Lord be merciful to me in this ; but absolutely, ' What shall we do to be saved ? ' There were some that would follow Christ upon conditions : Luke ix. 59-62, ' And he said, Follow me ; but he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. And Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury the dead ; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. Another said, Lord, I will follow thee ; but let me first go and bid them farewell which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looketh back, is fit for the kingdom of God.' Herod did many things ; and the young man had a forwardness, and a longing desire. Now what is the reason they are so pliable to God's will, so ready to obey him in all things, without reserving any sin or lust ? Partly because they see an absolute necessity of coming out of the condition in which they are. Turn and live, sin and die : Ezek. xviii. 32, ' For I have no pleasure in him that dieth, saith the Lord ; wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.' Therefore they are willing to be and do anything to come out of it. God being peremptory to punish sin, they must be as peremptory in forsaking sin, unless they mean to perish for ever. And partly because they think any condition more tolerable than that under which they are ; for now they feel the evil they never felt before : Ps. xxxviii. 4, ' For mine iniquities are gone over my head ; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.' Therefore, if God will prescribe any terms to them, they will accept them. The evil of sin is so great, that there is no evil equal to it, no good that can countervail it. There is a pressing necessity on the soul. These are the considerations that prevail in this condition, before regeneration, or a real bent of heart towards God, and sound consent be wrought.

Use 1. Is reproof of our carelessness. We busy ourselves about the smallest matters : 1 Cor. vi. 2, speaking of the things of this life, he calls them ' the smallest matters.' We will ask, What shall become of us ? We are anxious about events, but not careful about duties ; and this for the outward man, What we shall eat ? not, ' What shall I do to be saved ? ' this question is very rare. A few poor, humble, broken-hearted christians, and some that are fallen under the chastening of the Lord, and are ready to die, they see the need and worth of salvation ; but go up and down among people everywhere, we have no such questions as this. Now many live twenty or thirty years, and never question with themselves, Where am I ? whither am I going ? what shall become of me to all eternity ? Oh, that we could more frequently, more seriously, put this question, and were more diligent and

earnest to get it resolved. There is another question to make way for this : Jer. viii. 6, 'What have I done?' And then there is another question after this : Hosea xiv. 8, 'What have I any more to do with idols?' These are the questions to be put to conscience. Certainly if you were troubled for sin, this would be your main inquiry ; but in most people this is not in all their thoughts. Oh, how do we forget ourselves and our main errand in the world ! How little do we mind that which most concerneth us ! One drudgeth for riches, and another giveth up himself to pleasures. Hardly have we a thought wherefore we were born, and what will be the end of things ; and therefore this is the least part of our care, how we shall do to be saved. Some that seem a little affected yet are not soundly awakened, have not such a care as so weighty a business doth require ; like those that are heavy to sleep, that hear a great noise in the night, of wind, and rain, and thunder, or fire, are a little disturbed, but lie down and sleep again, and trouble themselves no more with it.

Use 2. To direct you how to further, and also how to judge of, your progress in the work of conversion.

1. When you begin to mind necessary things : Mat. vi. 20, 21, 'But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal ; for where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also.' When you put questions to yourselves about heaven and the way thither, your thoughts must be more upon it, and your discourses tend that way ; at least, you will be running to means to hear more of God and heaven.

2. When you have an anxious sense of your lost condition, and God hath showed you your danger, your hearts are troubled because of sin, that you find it a heavy burden, you are in the eye of the promise : Mat. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and ye shall find rest for your souls.'

3. When you find the burden groweth so heavy (as it was with the young man that came to Christ, Mat. xix.) that you are resolved to save your souls whatever it cost you : Mat. xiii. 46, 'And when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all, and bought it.' Many cheapen the comforts of christianity, but do not go through with the bargain. You will not stick with God for anything, but set yourselves to do his will, whatever reluctances from within or disgrace and oppositions from without you meet with.

4. When your heart is so fixed and confirmed in this purpose, that when it cometh to trial and exigence, you do judge it better to deny your lusts, renounce your interests, run all hazards for Christ ; you can thwart your affections, run through straits, disgraces, nicknames, scorns, and can lay down your life at Christ's feet, Mat. xviii. 8, 9 ; part with right hand or right eye. Better go to heaven with the loss of all, than to hell with the greatest crown.
