

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,

'My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live.' The heart hath a reproaching, a condemning power, and judgeth against a man when he is not right with God. In short, heart-smittings and heart-reproachings are nothing else but checks of conscience. 'If our hearts condemn us,' &c.

In the words take notice of a comparison between the judgment of God and the judgment of conscience; they agree and disagree in many things.

1. They agree in that both are privy to all our actions: there is a secret spy within us, that observeth all that we speak, or think, or do: 'The spirit of a man within him knoweth the things of a man,' 1 Cor. ii. 11. So doth God know all things: Heb. iv. 12, '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.' And where the matter requireth it, they both condemn; conscience condemneth the sinner, or the partial obedience of hypocrites; so doth God, he ratifieth the sentence.

2. They disagree or differ in two things—(1.) Greatness; (2.) Knowledge.

[1.] Greatness. 'God is greater than our hearts.' The same expression is used, Job xxxiii. 12, 'God is greater than man;' it is a reason of submission to God's providence. God judgeth more exactly of things than we do; his authority is greater. God is the supreme judge, conscience is but his deputy. God's sentence is decisive, whence there is no appeal: 1 Cor. iv. 4, 'For I know nothing by myself, yet I am not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord.' The cause must be reviewed and judged in a higher court. Greater in point of purity and holiness; we have but a drop of indignation against sin, God an ocean. His displacency against sin is greater: Hab. i. 13, 'He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;' Isa. iii. 8, 'Their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory.' Greater in point of power; conscience leaveth an impression suitable to the evidence it giveth: Prov. xviii. 13, 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?' But it is a dreadful thing to be condemned of God, who hath such power to execute his sentence: Heb. x. 31, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'

[2.] In point of knowledge. Conscience in many things is blind, partial, inattentive, insensible, but none of these things can be imagined in God, he knoweth all things. Therefore since the business is to be transacted before him, and not before man, we had need look to it, that we may assure our hearts before him.

(1.) He seeth more clearly; he not only knoweth all things that we can know of ourselves, but knoweth more things against us than our hearts know, and so God cannot be deceived: Ps. xix. 12, 'Who can understand his errors? Lord cleanse thou me from secret sins.' No man knoweth a man so well as his conscience; but the conscience doth not so well know him as God knoweth him; his knowledge is infinite, and pierceth to our very thoughts and the secret motions of the heart.

(2.) He heareth more exactly. There is a partiality in our knowledge,

we overlook the evil, being blinded by self-love, but the Lord weigheth the spirits, Prov. xvi. 2, puts them into the balance of the sanctuary, and considereth all the circumstances.

(3.) He judgeth more impartially; we mistake sins for graces, and so bring in a false verdict: Luke xvi. 15, 'Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed amongst men is an abomination in the sight of God.' We are deceived with a false show; we take a brier for a rose, yea, many times a toad for a lark; but God cannot be thus deceived, but judgeth according to the nature of things.

*Doct.* That a man's unsound estate is much discovered to himself, or determined by the judgment of his own conscience.

If our heart condemn us; that is, our conscience; and every man by his own heart and conscience is generally acquitted or condemned.

Here I shall demonstrate to you—

1. That there is such a faculty as conscience, whose office it is to judge of our estate.

2. The value of this judgment, that it ought to be well weighed, when our hearts condemn us of insincere dealings in point of duty towards God or man.

I. The nature and office of conscience; certainly there is such a faculty as conscience. Science is one thing, and conscience is another: science is a knowledge of other things, conscience is the knowledge of ourselves. Conscience is the knowledge of a man's state and ways; to know what we are to do, and what we have done, that is conscience. It is the judgment of a man concerning himself with respect to reward and punishment. God, that is our Lord, is also our proper judge; but it pleaseth him to erect a tribunal within a man in his own bosom, and to make him his own judge: conscience is a judge, yet but a deputy-judge accountable to God. This much conduceth—(1.) To the glory of God; (2.) To the safety of man.

1. To the glory of God, and that in two regards, as an evidence of his being, and a vindication of the righteousness of his judicial proceedings.

[1.] As an evidence of his being, for his law is the ground of all conscience, and it is before his tribunal that it doth accuse and acquit us, and his sentence that we wait for or dread, and stand in fear of. Why should we scruple this or that, if there be not a God, by whose will good and evil are distinguished? To whom doth it accuse us but to God? Why is conscience sometimes afraid, sometimes comforted, if there were no God to mind things here below? We find conscience appalleth the stoutest sinners, after the commitment of some offences, though they be secret, and beyond the cognisance and vengeance of man: Ps. liii. 5 'They feared where no fear was;' that is, no outward cause of fear, where none sought to hurt them; accusing themselves where none else could accuse them; as Joseph's brethren, Gen. xlii. 21; or where none had power to reach them; as many worldly potentates feel the stings of conscience as well as others. Felix trembled who was the judge, when Paul the prisoner preached to him, Acts xxiv. 25. What is the reason of this, but that they know there is a supreme judge and avenger?

[2.] To vindicate the righteousness of his judicial proceedings. Self-accusers and self-condemners have no reason to quarrel with God, and impeach his justice. Man hath principles and sentiments graven upon his heart, which justify all God's dealings with him: Luke xix. 22, 'Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked and slothful servant;' Ps. li. 4, 'That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest.' Surely self-condemners, Titus iii. 11, are without excuse, Rom. i. 20, and have no reason to murmur at God's proceedings with them. Hence there are frequent appeals to conscience in scripture: Isa. v. 3, 4, 'Judge between me and my vineyard, what could have been done more to my vineyard which I have not done?' So that by conscience man is better induced to give a testimony to God concerning his judicial proceedings, and the righteousness of all his dealings with men.

2. The safety and benefit of man, that he may have an oracle in his own bosom to direct him to his duty, and to warn him of his danger. In scripture we shall find two offices of conscience, to direct and censure, to judge by order of law and right; *de jure*, what we ought to do, and *de facto*, what you have done, or what you are: and if it fail in the one part, it is a blind and erring conscience; and if it fail in the other, it is a dead and sleepy conscience. You shall see conscience is spoken of in scripture both ways. As instructing us in our duty: Ps. xvi. 7, 'My reins instruct me in the night season;' that is, showed him his duty, and how he was concerned in the law of God, or the rule which he had given to his creatures. And as it showeth us what to do, so it reflecteth upon what we have done: if evil, it smiteth us for it, as David's heart smote him for numbering the people, 2 Sam. xxiv. 10. If good, it cheereth us with it: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience.' It smiteth us as it exciteth fear of punishment; it cheereth us as it stirreth up hope of reward: and hereby we do very much understand how God standeth affected towards us. In short, conscience, as to the censuring part, judgeth either of act or state; particular acts whether good or evil; so it doth accuse or excuse by turns, Rom. ii. 15. As to our state, if it be good: Heb. xiii. 18, 'We trust we have a good conscience, willing in all things to live honestly.' The drift and course was for God, and the performance of their duty to him. Bad or evil: Rom. i. 32, 'They that do such things, count themselves worthy of death;' that is, not only as deserving it, but as liable to it. Now it is for our benefit, that we should have such a faculty to direct, and mind us of our duty, which we are too apt to forget. So also to censure our acts, that we may be humbled for them if they be evil, or continue them if they be good. Our estate, that we may enjoy the comfort of it, before we enjoy the full reward of it, if it be good; or may remedy it, and break off our sinful course if it be evil, while we are capable of a remedy.

II. The value of this judgment, and how much it should be regarded by us.

1. In respect of ourselves, because it is so intimate to us. Conscience is God's spy in our bosoms, and man's overseer; it being so well acquainted with us, it can give a better judgment of us than anything else can. The judgment of the world, either by way of applause or

censure, is not so much to be regarded by us. The apostle calleth it the spirit of a man within him, 1 Cor. ii. 11. Though our life be never so fair that no man can condemn us, and our words and deeds do not betray us, yet if our hearts condemn us of secret hypocrisy, and want of love to God, God will much more, who knoweth more of us than we do of ourselves. Besides, this judge cannot be suspected of rigour, partiality, and ill-will; for what is dearer to ourselves than ourselves? and therefore, if our own hearts condemn us, what shall be said for us?

2. Its relation to God; it is God's deputy-judge, and in the place of God to us; called 'the candle of the Lord,' Prov. xx. 27. And therefore if it convince us, and accuse us, and condemn us, especially when we profess and pretend to sincerity; have we not cause to suspect ourselves? for it is God's vicegerent, and sitteth in the throne of God; and we may know much of his mind by the voice and report of conscience. Next to the judgment and sentence of God, a man should reverence the judgment and sentence of his own heart. Doth conscience acquit or condemn? so usually doth God: conscience doth all with respect to God, and in the name of God. The inferior court is not to be slighted, the sentence there is given out in God's name, and by virtue of God's authority. To slight the officer or subordinate magistrate in the duty of his place is to slight the supreme power: Judges iii. 20, 'And Ehud said unto him, I have a message from God unto thee; and he arose off his seat.'

3. The rule it goeth by, which is the revealed will of God, either by the light of nature or the light of scripture; his will revealed in his law, or in the gospel: according to the dispensation men are under, so have they a conscience, this makes us a light to ourselves: Prov. vi. 22, 'When thou goest it shall lead thee, when thou sleepest it shall keep thee, when thou wakest it shall talk with thee;' that is, the law of God will direct thee upon all occasions. Conscience worketh by virtue of that light which God hath put into us. Now to slight conscience, is to rebel against the light of nature, Rom. ii. 14, 15, and the light of scripture, Heb. viii. 10. Conscience will tell you what you are loath to hear, yet hear it; it will be heard once, better hear it now, while you may correct your errors; it doth but repeat over the law of God to you.

But now some objections may arise.

*Object.* 1. May we not be deceived in our judgment concerning ourselves?

*Ans.* 1. Not ordinarily; in condemnation man is over-prone to love himself, and therefore unless compelled by the manifest force and evidence of the truth, he would not condemn himself, especially when affecting the show and reputation of sincerity. Surely, if there were ground for it, he would not let go his integrity (it is true, some melancholy mournful souls may write bitter things against themselves, and mistake in spiritual things), as Prov. xvi. 2, 'All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes;' Rev. iii. 17, 18, 'Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou

mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.' There is a false presumption of our good estate. Now then, when our hearts reproach us, and condemn us for want of love to and neglect of God, and unmindfulness of heavenly things, it concerneth us to weigh the matter. We can better trust it condemning than acquitting: 1 Cor. iv. 4, 'If I know nothing by myself, I am not thereby justified, but every one's judgment is of the Lord.'

2. The apostle speaketh of what is rightly done, and according to rule. Look, as in acquitting we must distinguish between a dead sleepy conscience, and a tender waking conscience, so in condemning, between the judgment when under a heat, and passion, and distemper, and the judgment of conscience in our calm and sedate moods. Surely if it then condemn us, or give us no good assurance before God, we have need to look to ourselves. A stupid conscience, and on the other side a stormy conscience, are not capable of passing a right judgment.

3. It is all one as to our peace, if our hearts judge us wrongfully, either as to acts or state. Acts: Rom. xiv. 22, 23, 'Happy is he that condemneth not himself in the thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.' A man may do an action lawful, and yet his heart may accuse or condemn him in it, as if it were unlawful. It is a damning sin to act against conscience though it err. So as to state; he cannot think God acquitteth him whose heart condemneth him, for he cannot believe against his conscience. There is indeed a self-condemning as to merit, which entitleth to mercy; but a self-condemning as to our actual state must needs breed trouble and grief of heart, though it be upon false grounds.

*Object.* 2. But what relief is there for one whose heart condemneth him? Must he sit down, and despair, and die? I answer—

1. In some cases there is an appeal from court to court. In what court doth conscience condemn you? In the court of the law? You ought to subscribe to the condemnation as just, and to own the desert of sin; and if God should bring it upon you, he is righteous: Neh. iii. 33, 'Thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly.' But there is a liberty of appeal from court to court. You may take sanctuary at the Lord's grace, and humbly claim the benefit of the new covenant: Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, 'If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' Deprecate the first court, and beg the favour of the second.

2. In other cases there is an appeal from judge to judge. Suppose conscience condemn you in the gospel court, that you are not sound believers, the case must not be lightly passed over, but you must examine whether there be a sincere bent of heart in you, yea or no, appeal to the higher judge; as when others question your sincerity: 'My witness is in heaven,' saith Job, chap. xvi. 19. So when your own hearts question it, doth conscience write bitter things against you? See if the judgment of conscience be the judgment of God. It is a judge, but not a supreme judge; it may err in acquitting, as when from a judge it

becometh an advocate, excusing the partialities of our obedience ; so in condemning, when from a judge it becometh an accuser, and exaggerateth incident failings beyond measure. Go to the higher judge, whose act is authoritative and powerful : Job xxxii. 23, ' If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness.' Who can interpret your righteousness to you but his Spirit, when you cannot see it yourselves, and may sometimes speak peace in the sentence of the word, when not in the feeling of conscience, and the lively impressions of his comforting Spirit ?

3. Suppose the worst ; there is a passing from state to state : John v. 24, ' He shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life.' You are in a state of condemnation now, but get out of it as fast as you can : Mat. iii. 7, ' Flee from wrath to come ;' and carry yourselves accordingly, till your condition be altered ; the door of grace is always open : Heb. vi. 18, ' Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.'

4. If the heart do neither condemn nor acquit, make your qualification more explicit, and take the same course a condemned man would do, sue out your pardon more earnestly : Rom. viii. 33, ' Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifieth.' Many times an old litigious title may cost as much in clearing as the purchase of a new ; therefore mind the way of fleeing from wrath to come, and be more serious in it.

*Use 1.* Is information. To show the bad condition of wicked men, who have within themselves an accusing conscience, and above themselves a condemning judge ; so that a man that doeth evil can never have a sound peace and quiet within himself, nor have any quietness. Their disease is the benumbing lethargy of a stupid conscience, they do not always feel the stings of conscience, but are always subject to it. Death reviveth them, it may surprise them in an instant. All their pleasures are but ' stolen waters, and bread eaten in secret,' Prov. ix. 17, poor delights taken by stealth when they get conscience asleep, as servants that feast themselves in a corner when they can get out of their master's sight. They are not open and avowed delights. Why ? Because their hearts condemn them, and God is ready to ratify and execute the sentence ; everything puts them in a fright : Job xv. 21, ' A dreadful sound is in his ears ; in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him.' Surely wicked and impenitent men have no sound peace ; they dare not look inward or upward with any comfort.

2. How far they are from the temper of religion that live even a moment without all conscience or against conscience. A good man looketh to his heart, whether it condemneth or acquitteth ; but some live without all conscience, do all things rashly and inconsiderately, never considering whether they be pleasing or displeasing to God, whether they tend to the honour or dishonour of God ; live at haphazard ; if they do good, it is by accident ; perform the duties of christianity so far as the interest of the flesh will give them leave, yea, so far as the flesh itself will command them to do well, or forbid sin, that it may not disgrace them in the world, or bring some inconveniency upon them. These consult not with conscience in their actions, but are guided by their lusts and sudden passions : others live against conscience, omitting

duties when conscience loudly calleth for it: James iv. 17, 'Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' They will find it with a witness one day; committing evil against the apparent checks of conscience, these kick against the pricks; these do not only break the law of God, but offer violence to their own consciences, and in effect resist the Holy Ghost, who exciteth them to good, Acts vii. 51, and so are under a great crime.

*Use 2.* Carry it so that conscience may not condemn you; the sentence may be, and usually is, ratified by God. To enforce it, consider these things—

1. Conscience is the best friend and the worst enemy; partly for its comfort; it is 'a continual feast,' Prov. xv. 15; 'our rejoicing,' 2 Cor. i. 12. No bird sings so sweetly as the bird in the bosom. Partly for its nearness; it is always with us in health and sickness, in life and death. Husbands and wives, who are most together, yet, because they live by a distinct life, they are often apart, and at length death cometh and looseth the band and knot; but a good conscience is a sweet companion, that always remaineth with us. So it is the worst enemy, partly for its nearness, for a man to be at odds with himself, to fall out with his own heart. It is a domestic tribunal which we cannot suppress or get rid of. Let any be your enemy rather than your own conscience. Job could bear the reproaches of others, but his own 'heart should not reproach him all his days,' Job xxvii. 6. Partly because of the grievousness of the wound: Prov. xviii. 14, 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?' It is no less than the fear of the wrath of the eternal God. Judas found no relief from his new friends when his conscience wakened upon him, Mat. xxvii. 3-5. In short, a man cannot run away from his conscience, no more than he can run away from himself. Therefore what folly is it to please others and offend his own conscience, or to please his lusts and wrong his conscience, and for the satisfaction of a vain appetite to incur such horror and trouble! The satisfying of a lust is a poor vanishing pleasure, but the keeping a good conscience breedeth a solid joy, which will stick by thee to the last. When thou comest to die, it will be a support to thee: Isa. xxxviii. 3, 'Lord, thou knowest that I have walked before thee with a perfect heart.' When thou must leave riches, and honours, and pleasures, which are the baits of thy lust, this will stick by thee: 1 John ii. 17, 'The world passeth away, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

2. It is either the beginning of heaven or hell; a good conscience is the beginning of heaven, and peace and joy in believing is a foretaste of that fulness of joy and pleasure which you shall have when you come into God's immediate presence. The glorified spirits carry a good conscience with them to heaven: 'Their works follow them,' Rev. xiv. 13; and an awakened conscience is a hell upon earth. The damned carry these stings and convictions into hell along with them: Mark ix. 44, 'Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.' Oh, think of this, the joys of the Spirit are the antepast of glory, called often an 'earnest:' 2 Cor. i. 22, 'Who hath sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit.' Horrors of conscience are the suburbs of hell.



Therefore be sure to keep all quiet within, and do not give conscience occasion to condemn you.

3. It is easily offended, but not easily appeased. As the eye is offended with the least dust and mote, which soon gets in, but is hardly to be gotten out again, so you may violate conscience, but to appease it costs a great deal of trouble; therefore there needs much tenderness and watchfulness, that you make it your daily work, Acts xxiv. 16, 'To have always a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards men.' By the commission of deliberate and wilful sins you may raise a tempest that will not be soon laid again. David felt broken bones after his foul fall, Ps. li. Joseph's brethren could not put it out of their minds but that he would avenge the old quarrel, Gen. 1. When the mists of passion are over, guilt maketh your heart sit uneasy within you. Therefore do not go like an ox to the slaughter.

4. If conscience speaketh not, it writeth; for it is not only a witness, but a register, and a book of record: Jer. xvii. 1, 'The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and the point of a diamond.' We know not what conscience writeth, being occupied and taken up with carnal vanities, but we shall know hereafter when the books are open, Rev. xx. 12. Conscience keepeth a diary, and sets down everything. This book, though it be in the sinner's keeping, cannot be razed and blotted out. Well, then, a sleepy conscience will not always sleep; if we suffer it not to awaken here, it will awaken in hell; for the present it sleepeth in many, in regard of motion, check, or smiting, but not in regard of notice and observation.

5. If conscience speak not to you, we must speak to it. Call yourselves to an account for the expense of your time and employment. The course of your life is a sure evidence of your everlasting estate: Ps. lxxvii. 6, 'I communed with my heart, and made a diligent search.' How do matters stand between God and you? take some time to parley with yourselves. *Quotidie apud me causam dico*, could a heathen say—I still implead myself before myself; and if a heathen did so, should not christians much more?

6. If the stings of an evil conscience are not always felt, yet they are soon revived and forced upon us by serious thoughts of death and judgment to come. This fire that smothereth in our bosoms is soon blown up into a flame. By the word sometimes: Acts xxiv. 25, 'Felix trembled.' Belshazzar's edge was taken off in the midst of his carousings, Dan. v. 5, 6. By some great troubles; in a tempest, that which is at bottom cometh at top: Isa. lix. 12, 'For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them.' Or by death: 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin.' In the confines of eternity men are wiser, and near things do most affect us, and the baits of the flesh have lost their allurements. Things overlooked before are then seriously considered, and the deluded sinner forced to see what he would not take notice of before.

7. Sound peace will never be had by smothering checks of conscience, but making a holy use of them. To smother them breedeth hardness of heart, but to improve them is the way to a holy peace. What is the way to improve them? I shall instance in two ways—

[1.] When the particular conscience condemneth, we must look to it that the general conscience may acquit us. The particular conscience referreth to acts, the general to conversation. As to particular acts, he whose heart doth not condemn him of sin. But how is it as to the drift and course of our lives? 2 Cor. i. 12, 'But our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversations in the world.'

[2.] When the legal conscience condemneth us, we must seek our peace in the evangelical conscience. Now the evangelical conscience reflecteth on what Christ hath done for us, and wrought in us. Christ hath shed his blood for sinners: Heb. ix. 14, 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works, to serve the living God?' and Heb. xii. 24, 'And to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.' But that is not all, there is something also wrought in us, and is 'the answer of a good conscience towards God,' 1 Peter iii. 21.

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## SERMON XXVI.

*And knoweth all things.*—1 JOHN iii. 20.

DOCT. That God exactly and perfectly knoweth all things that are in the world, and is more especially privy to the hearts and ways of men.

Of this the context speaketh. God hath a greater and more certain knowledge of what we do than our own consciences.

Let me inquire here into—(1.) The properties of God's knowledge; (2.) The reasons; (3.) How this doctrine is entertained by men; (4.) What use we should make of it ourselves.

First, What God's knowledge is. Exactly to state it is above the reach of man; this knowledge is too wonderful for us, Ps. cxxxix. 6, far above our capacity to understand the nature of it. But for our profit, somewhat of it is revealed to us in the scripture; therefore I shall give you the properties of it.

1. For the object to which it is extended, it is universal; the text saith 'all things' are known by him. But especially it relateth to man, all things in man.

Let us a little consider the modifications of this object.

[1.] Things good and evil: Prov. xv. 3, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' For good things there is no doubt, for he is the author of them; for evil things, God is not the author of them, but the judge and punisher, and therefore knoweth them also. Take another distinction of the object; things great and small. It was the corrupt theology of the gentiles, *Diī magna curant, parva negligunt*. One of the wisest heathens compareth him to the

Persian monarchs, who minded the great affairs of the provinces, but left other things to the satraps or vicegerents. But we are taught better divinity in the scriptures, that small things are put under the providence of God as well as great; that a sparrow (though two of them are sold for a farthing) falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father, Mat. x. 30. It was no dishonour to God to make them, nor is it so to preserve them and look after them. Again, God knoweth not only things necessary, but contingent; things necessary, or such as depend upon the stated courses of nature, as the succession of winter and summer, day and night, the revolutions of the heavens; he hath appointed to them a law and a decree beyond which they cannot pass, Ps. cxlviii. 7. But also things contingent, as depend upon the will of man, or the casual fortuitous motion of the creature. Christ could foretell they should meet a man in the city, and bids them to follow him, and keep the passover in his house, Luke xxii. 10. And he told Nathanael what he said, and where, John i. 48. And often told the Jews and his disciples what they thought: Mat. ix. 4, 'Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Why think ye evil in your hearts?' He knew what Paul did in such a city, such a street, such a house, at such a time, Acts ix. 11. In short, nothing more casual than a lot: Prov. xvi. 33, 'The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing of it is of the Lord;' he knows how the lot will fall. Once more, he knows things past, present, and to come. Past; no oblivion can fall upon God; a thousand years are to him as one day, Ps. xc. 4. We forget many of our actions, but God forgets them not. All things present are known to him, for he sustaineth and guideth them in their motions, and they subsist no longer than he pleaseth: 2 Chron. xvi. 9, 'The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth.' The sun is an emblem and representation of his knowledge: Ps. xix. 6, 'There is nothing hid from the heat thereof.' If the sun were an eye, it would see all things it shineth upon; only the sun cannot pierce through dark and thick bodies. But God is over all, and through all, and in all, the great eye of the world. Man's knowledge is limited and confined to a few things, that fall within the cognisance of the time and place wherein he liveth; but God seeth and knoweth all things. Things to come, which are wholly out of the reach of man's discovery: Jer. i. 5, 'Before thou wert framed in the womb, I knew thee.' God's foresight is more clear than our sight, and the substance of things does not give us a better knowledge of them than God's prescience doth to him: Isa. xli. 23, 'Show the things to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods.' He challengeth all the world to be able to foretell future contingencies. Once more, God knoweth all things that shall be, and might have been. All things that shall be: Acts xv. 18, 'All his works are known to God from the beginning of the world.' Past, present, and to come, make no difference in the understanding of God; for from the mount of eternity he hath a prospect of all things, as if they were now in being. That place is brought to prove that God did not begin then to take to himself a people from among the gentiles, but had from all eternity determined to do so. God, that doth all things in time, knew all these things before all time, otherwise his knowledge were neither eternal nor infinite. Things are because

he willeth them, and he willeth them from all eternity. God also knoweth all things that might have been. He knew that Abimelech would have defiled himself and Sarah, if he had not withheld him, Gen. xx. 6; that the men of Keilah would have betrayed David into the hands of Saul, if he had stayed among them, 1 Sam. xxiii. 12. There is many a man kept bare and low, God knoweth what he would do if he had power in his hands. Many die young; God knoweth, if they had lived forty or fifty years, it would have been worse for them, they might have dishonoured God more, grieved their relations more, or been exposed to temptations, which he saw not fit to let loose upon them. Thus for the universality of God's knowledge, he knoweth all all things.

[2.] The particularity of God's knowledge. His knowledge is not only universal, but particular; he knoweth every individual thing and person. Our persons are known to him by head and poll: 2 Tim. ii. 18, 'The Lord knoweth those that are his;' and 'the good shepherd calleth his own sheep by name,' John x. 3. There is not a single man liveth in the world, but God taketh notice of him; he doth certainly know that there is such a creature as thou art, such a man or woman in the world. His decree passed on thee; he knew thee in the mass and lump of mankind, and took notice of thee by name when his creating power passed on thee; for he knoweth all that he hath made; and he is to judge thee, and will set thy life in order before thee, Ps. l. 21. And therefore certainly knoweth thee, or else he were not an omniscient judge. There could be no process against thee if the Lord were ignorant of thy person; and his actual providence about thee implieth it. Thou canst not uphold thyself one moment without him, and therefore he is as verily with thee as thou art with thyself. Suppose that God had never a creature to look to in all the world but thee, wouldst thou not believe then that he doth know thee and regard thee? Why not now? Is there any weakness in God? is his mind distracted with variety of objects, that he would not regard thy person, heart, word, and ways? is he not sufficient for thee, and as really present with thee as if he had no other creature else?

(2.) As our persons, so our ways: Ps. i. 6, 'The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.' Doth not God distinguish between his obedient and rebellious subjects, and know who they are, and how many are of the one sort and the other? To deny this were to strike at the root of all piety and obedience. If he hath not a particular inspection of human affairs, and did not know the good and evil, what need we take care whether we be good or evil?

(3.) As of our way and scope in general, so of every step; he knoweth all the particularities of our lives: Job xxxi. 4, 'Doth not he see all my ways, and count all my steps?' By our way is meant our general conversation, and by our steps our particular actions. God seeth us in all postures, when we laugh, and when we weep, when we are proud, and when we are angry, toying and praying, when in company or alone, when buying or selling, and when worshipping and hearing: Ps. cxxxix. 2, 'Thou knowest my up-rising and down-lying;' how ye go to bed at night, and rise in the morning. And he knoweth not only

thy actions, but thy heart. It is a mighty awe upon us that he knoweth our words and actions: Ps. cxxxix. 4, 'Lo, there is not a word in my mouth, but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether.' God knoweth it, whether it be savoury and gracious or vain and idle. But this is not all; he knoweth our hearts and our very thoughts: Prov. xv. 11, 'Hell and destruction are before the Lord; how much more the hearts of the children of men?' He setteth forth the knowledge of God by those things which are most unknown to us, the state of the dead and the hearts of men. He knoweth all those that are in the state of the dead, though unknown or forgotten by the most of men; what is become of the bodies and souls of men; the damned spirits in hell, he keepeth an exact account of all the prisoners; the bodies in the grave, he knoweth what is become of their dust, and how to restore to every one his own flesh and his own body; and what are the thoughts and hearts of men now alive. The thoughts of the heart are most hidden from man till they be revealed by word or action. Who can know our thoughts? what more swift and sudden, what more various and more hidden than a thought? and this he knoweth not by guess and interpretation, by running up our actions into their proper thought and principle wherein they are founded, but by immediate inspection, and knoweth them before they are manifested by the event, or any overt act of word or deed; what consultations and deliberations we are about before we conclude anything; with what hopes, and aims, and consciences we are carried on; in whose name we act, and with what principles and ends: which is of double use to us, partly to breed a holy fear, and partly a hope in us. An awe, how should we compose our minds and passions, and the very thoughts of our hearts! God seeth all, how should we use our words and order our behaviour! We do all in his sight, and speak all in his hearing: he finds out<sup>1</sup> the thought, word, and deed that is not done in his presence or conceived in his presence, and then allow yourselves to be vain and frivolous if you can. And partly to breed a hope in us. God knoweth what is hatched in hell, or Rome, or elsewhere against us; and therefore let us do our duty, and rest in the wisdom of God for protection.

3. God's knowledge is most exact and accurate; it is good to see how it is expressed to us in scripture: Heb. iv. 13, 'All things are naked and open before him;' cut down by the chine-bone. When a beast is dissected and opened, every part is seen, the soundness or unsoundness of it presently appears. Heathen soothsayers were wont to look to the inwards of the beasts, and to observe the colour, shape, and all the defects or perfections of the sacrifice: the prophet alludeth to it when he saith, Ezek xxi. 21, 'He looked into the liver.' Thus are all things said to be laid open before God. Sometimes by searching: 1 Chron. xxix. 11, 'He searcheth the heart, and trieth the imaginations of the sons of men.' Sometimes it is searcht as with candles, Zeph. i. 12, as one for what is hid or lost. Luke xv. 8, when the woman had lost her groat, 'She lighteth the candle, sweepeth the house, seeketh diligently till she findeth it.' We think our sins will never be heard of more, but he findeth them out, and they find us out: Num. xxxii. 23, 'Your iniquities shall find you out.' Sometimes by keeping reckoning: Job xxxi. 4, 'Doth not he count all my steps?'

God hath a book where all is put to account: Mal. iii. 18, 'A book of remembrance was written before him; and Ps. xvi. 3, 'Thou tellest all my wanderings; put thou my tears in thy bottle, are they not in thy book?' Words, thoughts, actions, all upon record. What neglects of grace, omission of duties, violating principles of conscience, God counteth them all: Jer. xiv. 16, 'Thou numberest my steps, and watchest over my sin.' Sometimes by weighing and pondering: Prov. xvi. 2, 'But the Lord weigheth the spirits;' Prov. xv. 21, 'All my ways are before him, and he pondereth my goings.' Whether full weight or too light, he knoweth the number, the proportion, the weight of every one of thy sins; the person who, the place where, the time when committed; what means, warnings, methods of grace, helps to the contrary, these are brought into the reckoning. Thus by many metaphors does the scripture set out the exact and certain knowledge that God hath of persons, and circumstances, and all their actions; nothing can escape God, and he cannot be deceived, because he goeth on sound evidence.

4. It is an infinite, perfect, distinct manner of knowing things: Ps. cxlvii. 5, 'His understanding is infinite: Of his understanding there is no search;' Isa. xl. 28; it is beyond the reach of man's shallow capacity to conceive of it. I add this, because it is hard for us to understand how God should at once know all things that are done by so many several men, in so many several parts of the world, and hearken to all their prayers. Lucian scoffed at the heathen gods, as if they were forced to run hither and thither, to hear the prayers made in the eastern and western parts of the world, and the disorders that fell out in Greece while the gods were banqueting in Ethiopia. An infinite understanding can see all things at once, for he understandeth all things in a way different from man; not successively, and by discourse one after another. A man cannot read a book in a moment, but must go from line to line, and page to page; but God knoweth all things in an instant, and that by one act of understanding, as if a man could read a book through by once looking on it. His knowledge is not confounded with multiplicity of objects; as God had a prospect of the whole creation at once, Gen. i. 31, 'He saw all that he had made.' It is all one to him to know all things, and know but one thing. When two or three speak together, we are not able to take in their sense and meaning, our senses and understandings are finite. Now when many speak to God at the same time, it is but as if one spake; an infinite eye seeth all, and an infinite ear heareth all, and that clearly and distinctly, without confusion.

II. The reasons which the scripture giveth for the belief of this knowledge.

1. The immensity and greatness of God; God is in all, and above all, and beyond all, nowhere included, and nowhere excluded. And so his omnipresence doth establish the belief of his omniscience: Jer. xxiii. 23, 24, 'Am I a God at hand, and not afar off? Do not I fill heaven and earth? can any hide himself in secret places, that I should not see him?' God is everywhere, not only with respect to his powerful and efficacious providence, but with respect to his essential presence. God is there wherever you are. Now if he be with us, surely he knoweth us. He is present with all the world, and therefore he doth regard and

observe all the world: you may take liberty to sin when God is gone or absent from you, and you can get behind his back; but that can never be, and therefore we must do all things as in his presence.

2. From creation. God hath made our hearts, given us the power to affect, think, purpose, and do, and therefore knoweth what is in us: Ps. xciv. 9, 10, 'He that planted the ear, shall not he hear? he that formed the eye, shall not he see?' God knoweth how the creature will act, for he gave it power to act. Surely he that made man knoweth what is in man; his knowledge is answerable to his power. He that made the heart of man observeth what they do, what counsels they have in hand. This argument is again used, Ps. cxxxix. 13, 'Thou hast possessed my reins; for thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.' He that made our heart, knoweth our words, works, thoughts, and all. Once more: Ps. xxxiii. 13-15, 'The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike, he considereth all their works.' He that formed their souls as well as their bodies is able to judge particularly the operations of their hearts. Every wise agent knoweth what he doeth, and to what end he maketh anything, and how it may be used or employed. The same argument is urged by the prophet Isaiah, chap. xxix. 16, 'Shall the thing formed say of him that formed it, He hath no understanding?' This is brought to confute them that say, Who seeth us, who knoweth us? or thought they could hide their counsels, so as God should not see them. Alas! all lieth open to God's eye, as the fashion of the pot of clay doth to the potter: God cannot be ignorant of anything that is in his own work. You cannot imagine he knoweth not what you think and do; when he made you, if he had so much wisdom to give you the power, he knoweth the act.

3. From God's government. There is a twofold government of God, and both infer the truth in hand—

[1.] Powerful, and by his effectual providence, as he governeth all creatures.

[2.] Moral, by his laws, as he governeth the reasonable creature.

[1.] The government of his effectual providence, which is necessary to all our actions: 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being,' Acts xvii. 28. All things move as he moveth them in their natural agency. The creature can do nothing without him, and actually doth nothing but by him: his wisdom guideth, his will intendeth and commandeth, his power moveth and disposeth all. He is more intimately present with us than we are with ourselves, governing and sustaining all things: 'His hand leadeth us, and his right hand doth still uphold us,' Ps. cxxxix. 10. We cannot do anything, go anywhere, without his gracious supportation. Now doth God support a creature whom he knoweth not, and in any action which he understandeth not? Christ knew that virtue passed from him when the multitude thronged him, Luke viii. 45, 46. In the great throng of creatures God knoweth who is sustained by him, and to whom the influence of his providence reacheth. Now then, since he is as verily with thee in every place as thou art there thyself, is he present with thee, and regardless of thee, of thy thoughts and words and ways? It cannot be.

[2.] His moral government. All persons and causes of men are to be judged by him, and therefore are most eminently and fully discovered to him. Surely he that is to be judged of God must be clearly known to him, both as to his actions and thoughts; how else can he judge righteously either now or hereafter? Job xxxiv. 21, 23, 'His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. Therefore he will not lay upon man more than is right, that he should enter into judgment with God;' that is, will not excessively and unjustly afflict man: Ps. xciv. 10, 'He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?'

III. How this truth is entertained by men.

1. Some atheistically deny it: Job xxii. 13, 14, 'And thou sayest, How doth God know? can he judge through the thick cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not, and he walketh in the circuit of heaven.' Atheists have carnal and gross thoughts of God, as if he were confined within the heavens, and had no sense and care of what was done below, or had other business to mind than to look after the sons of men: Ps. lxxiii. 11, 'How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?' Many that dare not simply deny a deity, yet deny a providence: they measure God by themselves, their own shallow conceptions; whereas God is infinitely exalted above what we can comprehend.

2. Some question it, if they do not deny it: Isa. xxix. 15, 'Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?' Ezek. viii. 12, 'They say, Who seeth us? the Lord hath forsaken the earth.'

3. Some forget it: he is not far from us, but we are often far from him; they acknowledge this truth in the general, but they forget it in particular, in the course of their conversations: Ps. xxxvi. 4, 'The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before their eyes.' What could he do worse, if no God to take notice of him? Profaneness is practical atheism; they do not deny, but forget; or they deny not in words, but in works. We should often revive this thought, God knoweth, and taketh notice of what we do: Ps. cxix. 168, 'I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies; for all my ways are before thee.'

4. Some slight it through impudence and obduration in sin: Zeph. i. 12, 'The Lord will do neither good nor evil.' They acknowledge there is a God, and that he is omniscient, holy, and just, yet dare sin against him: Ps. x. 17, 'He hath said in his heart, The Lord will not require it.'

5. Most carry themselves as too unmindful of it, as appeareth by these evidences.

[1.] In the general; men would be other manner of persons, in all holy conversation and godliness, if they did always set God before them. The all-seeing eye of a holy God would make them more circumspect and watchful. But because men live without God in the world, therefore are their conversations so full of vanity and sin: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect.'

[2.] More particularly; men would make more conscience of their



thoughts, if they did remember that God knoweth their thoughts afar off, Ps. cxxxix. 2. Would they indulge themselves in such a liberty of lustful, covetous, envious, malicious, and unbelieving thoughts, and feed their minds with these things, if they did well consider that God knoweth all things ?

[3.] The disproportion of our respects to God's eye and man's : they can fancy a matter in the dark, and not be troubled about it. We are usually more awed with the presence of a man than with the presence of God. You will do that which God knoweth, which you would not do when man knoweth it. He knoweth your fraud, your uncleanness, your licentiousness : Jer. ii. 26, 'The thief is ashamed when he is found.' Job xxiv. 17, 'If a man know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death.' If a man know anything amiss by them, they are full of anguish and shame. Why should not conscience be awakened more by thoughts of God's knowledge ? It would trouble us to have a window into our hearts ; is not all open and naked to God's eye ? In short, how watchful are we not to incur the penalty of man's law ! but offences against God are lightly passed over.

[4.] The best have not such a sound and serious belief of this truth, nor do not improve it as they ought to do, as appears partly because we are more troubled with this or that branch of corruption which breaks out to our disgrace, than about the body of death, or indwelling sin, which is the cause of all ; the root should be more grievous to us than the branches. Partly by this ; in company, what lofty expressions and flowing eloquence will men enlarge themselves in prayer ! but how slight and overly in closet duties, if not too commonly neglectful of them ! What is this but in effect to say that our Father doth not see in secret ? Partly, also, what will you say if we are troubled more with brokenness of expression than unbrokenness of heart ? the one layeth us open to shame and disgrace with men, the other is more offensive and displeasing to God.

IV. What use shall we make of it ?

1. Terror to the wicked. God seeth them here and hereafter, and will call them to an account ; there is no escaping his sight here, nor shifting his tribunal hereafter. Adam, by running to the bushes, did not hide himself from the Lord, neither did he hide the Lord from himself. God seeth, and God seeth as a judge : Jer. xxxii. 19, 'Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to his doings.' God is not a bare spectator of what is done in the world, but a judge, an avenger of what is evil : and his solemn judgment at the last day will most discover his omniscency, 'When the hidden things of darkness are made manifest, and the counsels of the heart are brought to light,' 1 Cor. iv. 5. In that, as you cannot evade his knowledge, you cannot escape his power.

2. Comfort to the godly.

[1.] God knoweth their persons : Exod. xxxiii. 12, 'I know thee by name :' he taketh special notice of them. All things are under a providence, but they are under a special providence ; a father cannot forget how many children he hath, though in a large and numerous family he cannot presently reckon up all his servants.

[2.] God knoweth their conditions, wants, and necessities: Mat. vi. 32, 'Your heavenly Father knoweth that you need these things;' Exod. iii. 7, 'I have seen the afflictions of my people, and known their sorrows.' God is so well acquainted with our wants, that he cannot forget us nor neglect us.

[3.] Our prayers are heard, not lost in the darkness of secrecy: Mat. vi. 6, 'Thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.' He that knoweth thy heart, will give thee the desire of thy heart.

[4.] Thy duties are rewarded, and rightly understood. First, Certainly rewarded: 2 Chron. xvi. 9, 'For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose hearts are perfect with him;' Heb. vi. 10, 'God is not unrighteous to forget your labour of love.' Secondly, Rightly understood. Men may be ignorant of what we do, but God is not; as Potiphar was ignorant of Joseph's faithfulness; he put him in prison for his integrity, Gen. xxxiv. 19, 20; the butler forgot him, Gen. xl. 43. Some will not own it, but God knoweth: 1 Cor. iv. 3, 'But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.'

*Use.* Is to awaken all to a greater mindfulness of this truth.

First, Let it be believed, and the faith of it more settled in your hearts. Besides creation and providence, and God's immensity or omnipresence and government, the arguments mentioned before, there are evidences of it—

1. In the human nature of Christ; he discovered himself God while he was in the flesh, and this perfection of his Godhead did shine forth through the human nature, that he knew men's hearts, and their inward thoughts. He turneth out the very inside of their minds in the story of his life often: John ii. 25, 'He knew what was in man.'

2. By the light of the prophetic spirit: 2 Kings v. 26, 'Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?' As if he had said, I saw him light out of his chariot, and what he gave thee, and where thou laidst it. God had bestowed upon him an extraordinary spirit, whereby he could discern things done in his absence. So another prophet, Ahijah, when Jeroboam's wife thought to have put a cheat upon him, his eyes being dim by reason of age: 1 Kings xiv. 6, 'Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam, why feignest thou thyself to be another?'

3. The gift of discerning spirits bestowed on the apostles, 1 Cor. xii. 10, whether church-gifts, or sincerity of men's hearts, in order to discipline: Acts v. 9, 'How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?' that is, the prophetic spirit.

4. Another instance is God's finding us out in our secret sins by his word, searching the heart: Heb. iv. 12, 'The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart;' 1 Cor. xiv. 25, 'And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest.' By his Spirit enforcing the sense of our secret sins upon us: Job xiii. 26, 'Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.' Old sins, long since forgotten, come into fresh

remembrance, and we know not how to get rid of the horrors of them. By his providence: Num. xxxii. 23, 'Behold, ye have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out;' Gen. xlii. 21, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear him: therefore is this distress come upon us.' The man was rough and untractable to them, as they had been to their brother: afflictions open the eyes, they are God's rack.

Secondly, Remember it often in your whole conversation; you are always before God, therefore serve him 'in holiness and righteousness all the days of thy life,' Luke i. 75; Prov. xv. 21, 'The ways of a man are before the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.' He weigheth every circumstance of thy life. If this were better thought of, there would be less disorder in the world. Heathens gave this advice, that in the presence of a Cato, or severe reprover, there needs no fiction or supposition in the case; and a greater than Cato is here. God is really present everywhere, but we do not think of it. He seeth, and 'is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.' We should inure ourselves to these thoughts.

Thirdly, We must actually revive this thought in solemn duties, when we come to act the part of angels, and to behold the face of our heavenly Father. In every duty God knoweth the frame of our hearts and affections; and wilt thou be cold and careless in the sight of God? There God immediately is the party with whom we have to do, in hearing and praying: Heb. iv. 13, 'Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are open and naked unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do;' Acts x. 33, 'Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.' He knoweth what thoughts and affections are stirring in your hearts; God is everywhere with us, but we are not always and everywhere with God.

Fourthly, In a time of temptation. When sin assaults with the advantage of secrecy, and other inviting circumstances to commit it, Gen. xxxix. 9, say, 'How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God?' We must check it by this consideration, God seeth, God knoweth: Esther vii. 8, 'Will he force the queen before me in the house?' Shall we break God's laws before his face?

Fifthly, To make you faithful in your stations. God invests us with them, that we may improve them for his glory. Magistrates: 2 Chron. xix. 1, 'The Lord is with you in the judgment;' Ps. xcii. 1, 'God standeth in the congregation of the mighty.' Diodorus Siculus telleth us of some heathens who had some empty chairs of state advanced above their tribunals as for their gods, to show they were present, and had an inspection over all acts of judicature: Ezek. v. 8, 'If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter; for he that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they.' Ministers: 2 Cor. ii. 17, 'But as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ;' 1 Thes. ii. 4, 'Even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God,' who trieth our hearts. Masters of families are to walk in their houses with a perfect heart: Ps. ci. 2, 'I will behave myself

wisely in a perfect way ; I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.' Though shut up in their families from the observation of others, yet God seeth them ; therefore behave yourselves wisely and prudently there. Servants : Col. iii. 22, 23, 'Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God ; and whatever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.'

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## SERMON XXVII.

*Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.*—1 JOHN iii. 21.

HERE is the effect of a good conscience. In the words we have—(1.) A condition supposed, 'If our hearts condemn us not ;' (2.) A privilege asserted, 'Then have we confidence towards God.'

First, The condition supposed. There are three functions and offices of conscience : there is, first, a knowledge, remembrance, or keeping up of principles, according to which our state and actions must be interpreted ; secondly, a sense of our actions, or what is done, or left undone, in conformity or contrariety to those principles ; thirdly, a judging or applying to ourselves those rules which concern our fact or state. As to the first act and office, conscience hath the force of a law and rule, informing us of good or evil. With respect to the second act, it is a witness, testifying what we have been or done. With respect to the last act, it is a judge, to condemn or acquit as the matter shall require. As, for instance, in that copulate axiom which you have, Rom. viii. 13, 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die ; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' Take the first part ; he that 'liveth after the flesh shall die,' meaning the second death ; there conscience interposeth as a law or rule. But I 'live after the flesh ;' there conscience interposeth as a witness : therefore I shall die the second death ; there it condemneth as a judge. Take the second clause, and you will have an instance of conscience not condemning or acquitting : 'They that by the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body shall live ;' but I mortify the deeds of the body, therefore I shall live. Now if conscience goeth upon a right principle, and beareth true evidence, the sentence and judgment remaineth firm, or in full force, be it by way of condemnation or absolution. As in the first reasoning, the conclusion must needs breed sorrow, trouble, and dejection of heart, which must not be put off till God put it away ; that is, till we break off our fleshly course of living, and obtain our pardon and peace by Jesus Christ. In the second reasoning the sentence of absolution is a ground of comfort, and giveth boldness in our approaches to God. Once more, conscience may condemn us two ways—in part or in whole ; according to the strictness of the first covenant, requiring unerring obedience ; on the equitable terms of the second, accepting