

changed their joy and content into the greatest terror. Wicked men can neither fly from God's presence, nor yet well endure it.

Use 2. To press christians to keep a good conscience. If you would maintain your liberty and confidence towards God, carry yourselves so that conscience may not condemn you. There are so many blessed fruits accompany it, that we should value it the more. If you have it not, you want liberty in prayer, here mentioned; no hope of glory, no sweetness in the word, no readiness in duty, nor strength to resist sin, nor comfort in distresses and afflictions. But if you have it, you cannot conceive the joy that accompanies it: Rev. ii. 17, 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna; and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a name written, which no man knows but he that receives it.' It makes the thoughts of God sweeter, for he is your Father; his mercy, for it is your portion. His justice is not your terror, but support. His wrath you have escaped; as the Israelites looked back on the Red Sea, and saw their enemies drowned and they escaped. His world of creatures are for your use and service; heaven is your Father's palace; Christ is your Redeemer and Saviour; the word is your charter; ordinances and prayer the porch of heaven; the Lord's supper the table God keepeth for his children.

SERMON XXVIII.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.—
1 JOHN iii. 22.

IN the context the apostle is speaking of the benefit of a good conscience. It is double—

1. Confidence towards God.

2. Acceptance with God; or, if you will, access to God, and success in prayer. Of confidence to make the prayer we spake in the former verse; acceptance of it, when it is once made, of this in the text, 'And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him,' &c.

In the words there are two things—

1. The privilege of a good conscience, 'Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him.'

2. The character and property of a good conscience, 'Because we keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.'

1. For the privilege; and here note—

[1.] The universality and extent of it, 'Whatsoever we ask.'

[2.] The certainty, 'We receive;' not, we shall receive; we are as certain to receive it as if we had it already.

2. The character, evidence, and property of a good conscience, 'Because we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight.' This is fit to be added, because he had only

described conscience by its act of absolving or not condemning. Now he showeth this must be understood of conscience rightly proceeding. It is usually and truly observed that there is a fourfold conscience—

[1.] Quiet and not good: Luke xi. 21, 'When the strong man keepeth the house, all that he possesseth is in peace.' There must needs be a calm when wind and tide goeth together.

[2.] Good and not quiet; as when David thought he was utterly cut off, and cast out of God's sight: Ps. xxii. 31, 'I said in my heart, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications.'

[3.] Such as is neither good nor quiet; such was Judas' conscience: Mat. xxvii. 3, 4, 'Judas repented, saying, I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.'

[4.] A conscience both good and quiet. It is good, for 'we keep his commandments, and do the things which are pleasing in his sight.' As it is good, so it is also quiet; for in the former verse he saith, 'It condemneth not.' This good and quiet conscience is set forth by two expressions, one relating to the matter, the other to the aim of our obedience.

(1.) The matter, 'Because we keep his commandments;' meaning both moral and evangelical; faith in Christ, and love to God and man, as he explaineth himself, ver. 23; and this done evangelically, by the Spirit of Christ and love of God: 1 John ii. 5, 'Whoso keepeth his word, in him is the love of God perfected.'

(2.) For the aim, 'And do those things which are pleasing in his sight.' Those things only please God which he hath commanded; as you please a man when you do what is according to his will. Now this is the aim of the sincere heart, to please God in all things; and if we set ourselves to do so, God will not be a stranger to us: John viii. 29, 'He that sent me is with me; for I do always the things that please him.'

There is nothing of difficulty remaineth, but only the connection between the two clauses, which seemeth to be causal, 'Because we keep his commandments, and do the things which are pleasing in his sight.'

Ans. It is a condition, not of merit, but order. By obeying him we are qualified to have our prayers heard by him; but yet not for our merit, but his merciful promise to hear us: Dan. ix. 18, 'Not for our righteousness, O Lord, but for thy great mercies.'

Doct. Such as make conscience of obedience may obtain of God whatsoever, in reason and righteousness, they ask of him.

I shall handle the point in this method.

1. I shall show you in what large terms God hath invited and encouraged us to prayer.

2. I shall state the case, how we may ask so as to be sure to speed.

3. I shall speak of God's answer, and the success of our prayers.

I. In what large terms God hath invited and encouraged prayer. Here in the text, 'Whatsoever we ask of him we receive.'

1. In some places there are indefinite promises of audience; as Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me, and I will hear thee.' So Job xxii. 27, 'Thou shalt make thy prayer unto God, and he shall hear thee;' Ps. xxxvii. 14, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall grant thee the desire of

thy heart ;' and Isa. xlv. 19, ' I said not unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me in vain ;' Mat. vii. 7, 8, ' Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you : for every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.' Now though these places do not tell us how much God will grant, or how far he will hear the prayers of his people, yet they show us that it is not labour in vain to seek God ; and we have all the encouragements in the world to come and acquaint him with all our desires, griefs, fears, wants, and requests ; for what cannot God do ? and what will not prayer do with a good God, who is able to do what he pleaseth, and hath promised to do what we desire ?

2. There are promises that have universal particles annexed ; as John xiv. 13, 14, ' Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.' So John xv. 7, ' If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.' So John xv. 16, ' Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he shall give it you.' The same is repeated, John xvi. 23, ' Verily, verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.' And many more such expressions there are in the word of God. Not that men have a lawless liberty allowed them, to give vent to all their desires, how unjust and unreasonable soever they be, and that God's power shall lackey upon their vain fancies and appetites. No ; these large and universal offers admit of limitations propounded in scripture, which must be regarded, that we may not make promises to ourselves, and set God a task by our self-conceitedness and vain fancies, and think him engaged beyond what he is pleased to bind himself unto. And the use of these universal particles is to encourage us against the straits and diffidence of our own hearts : though we ask things so great for their worth, difficult to compass, and which we are so unworthy to receive, yet none of these things should discourage us, and straiten our expectations, that when we come to God, if our requests be just and equal, he will grant them for Christ's sake.

II. To state the case ; how must we ask, that we may be sure to speed ?

1. The first thing to be observed is the qualification of the person ; for unless you put yourselves into a receiving posture, according to the terms of the promise, you cannot expect to speed. Now none are in a receiving posture but such as are in grace and favour with God, such as are justified and sanctified, and live in obedience to him : Prov. xv. 8, ' The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord ; but the prayer of the upright is his delight ;' John ix. 31, ' God heareth not sinners ; but if any be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth ;' James v. 16, ' The fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much ;' Ps. lxvi. 18, ' If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me.' These and many other places show that if we would have our prayers heard and accepted with God, we must be righteous, not live in the open practice of any known sin, nor secretly foster it in our hearts. And therefore though prayer should be maed with the greatest earnestness and confidence, yet if the consciences of men reprove them of any looseness and lightness of spirit, that they

have served God by halves, and are off and on with him in their practice, if they be not heard in the evil day, they cannot challenge God for breach of promise, but themselves of neglect of duty; for if they will not hear God, why should God hear them? This reason is given, Prov. xx. 9, 'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.' Not only his vile practices, but his prayers. Therefore, if you would have God's ear, obey him and hearken to his voice; and then for the asking you may obtain anything which a good conscience will permit you to ask of him; and upon other terms you must not deal with God. Keep close to God's will, and he will give you your will. Surely it is a profitable thing to obey God. Do you do that which God requireth of you, and God will do that which you ask of him.

2. The next thing to be regarded is the matter of our prayers and requests, and there we have the limitation: 1 John v. 14, 15, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.' All the business is, what is the meaning of that, 'According to his will?'

[1.] With conformity to his revealed will.

[2.] With due submission and reservation of his secret will.

[1.] Surely with conformity to his revealed and commanding will, that we ask nothing that is sinful or unjust; as if we would seek to entice God to our lure, and to avenge our quarrels; as Balaam built altars and offered sacrifices to draw God to curse his people; or when we would have God to bless us in some unlawful undertaking or purpose, or are biassed by envy, revenge, or any corrupt and carnal affection, and to ask things contrary to charity, or that meek spirit that should be in christians. Unlawful desires put into prayer are a double evil, as contrary to God's law, and as presented in prayer. The wills of God's children are limited by his word and will. The Spirit in them maketh intercession according to the will of God, Rom. viii. 27. When we mingle our lusts with our prayers, we make this pure stream muddy, and would put dross into Christ's golden censer, as if he should mediate that our lusts should be fulfilled, and sins accomplished.

[2.] With a due reservation of and submission to his secret and decreeing will. Many things are lawful, yea, commanded, yet we must ask them with submission to the will of God; that is, we must use the means, and refer the success to God. As, for instance, when parents ask the conversion of their children, and children the lives of their parents; but God disposeth of the event as it pleaseth him. Again, many things may be good in themselves, but are not good for us; as Moses desired to enter into the land of Canaan, which God saw not good for him. So thou art sick, and wouldst fain have thy life prolonged, and therefore in the bitterness of thy heart makest thy moan to God, as Hezekiah did; it may be the Lord will take thee from the evil to come, and translate thee to glory, which is much better for thee; as David fasted and prayed for the life of the child: 2 Sam. xii. 22, 'Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child

may live?' In this reservation of God's will we have two exceptions— if it be for God's glory and our good.

(1.) God's glory: John xiv. 13, 'Whatever ye ask the Father in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.' Whatever belongeth to our duty we must do; but for the event, how he will be glorified, we must submit it to God.

(2.) For our good. Grace layeth this restraint upon the will of a renewed man, but of this good, God will be judge, and not we. It may be good for us to be afflicted, Ps. cxix. 71. Temporal things being but accessory to our happiness, and belonging to our comfortable condition in the world, but not of absolute necessity to our salvation, should not be peremptorily asked, but in submission and limitation of God's will: Mat. xxvi. 39, 'Yet not my will, but thine be done;' so far as God seeth them good for us. The short is, that in things necessary to salvation, we shall not be refused; in other things, we should not ask of God anything that agreeth not with his will, or is against his glory, or may be hurtful to ourselves. Till we learn to acquiesce in the will of God, and seek the most necessary things of God, we do not pray aright.

3. The next limitation is as to the manner.

[1.] Fervently, and with that life and seriousness which such requests call for: Mat. vii. 7, 'Ask, seek, knock.' Prayer is not answered if the spirit of prayer be wanting, or those lively affections which are necessary to constitute a prayer: James v. 16, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' Afterwards he instanceth in Elias, ver. 17. If a cold prayer meets with a denial, we have no cause to complain. The ardency of holy desires is wanting; we are not in earnest, which is the soul of prayer, though the form and fashion of it be kept up: Dan. ix. 3, 'I set myself to seek the Lord;' Jer. xxix. 12, 13, 'And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your hearts.' When God hath a mind to work, he sets the spirit of prayer a-work.

[2.] Christ hath put faith among the conditions required to prayer: Mat. xxi. 22, 'All things that ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive;' or, as it is in Mark xi. 24, 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.' There must be a confidence of that power that we would set a-work, and of God's will and goodness to pity and relieve us. As things are tendered to us in the promise, so are we bound to believe and pray for them, and no otherwise; for the word of promise is the measure, ground, and foundation of prayer. And as to the promise of temporal things, it is either personal or common. Personal; so God absolutely promised to some of his servants to give them temporal blessings, so absolutely to be believed and prayed for. So he promised to Abraham to multiply his seed as the sand on the seashore, Gen. xxii. 17; and this promise Abraham was to believe with an absolute faith, whatever difficulties there were to the contrary, Rom. iv. 18-21. God promised David the kingdom, and anointed him by Samuel, but for a long time he was kept in a private and perplexed condition, yet bound to be confident. So God promised Paul the life of all that were with him in the ship, Acts xxvii. 25, therefore in the greatest difficulties he encouraged his com-

panions: 'Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.' But the common promise of the blessings of this life is not absolute, but shall be dispensed to us as it shall be for God's glory and our good, and therefore are not to be absolutely asked nor absolutely expected from God. So the saints express themselves about these things: 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?' God will hold us in suspense about these things, and try our godliness and submission. But yet though there be uncertainty about particular blessings, we must always pray in faith. It is one thing to believe for certain that God will grant our petition with this condition, if the grant be for his glory and our good, and another thing to believe absolutely that he will not deny the particular thing we ask of him, without such exception and reservation. Of the former, we must be persuaded in all our petitions; of the latter, we cannot be confident; there we can only say, 'Who knoweth but that God may do it for us?' for it is not for us to determine what is most conducing to the glory of God, or profitable for us; all must be left to our heavenly Father, upon whose good pleasure all our happiness dependeth. We must be persuaded of his all-sufficiency, refer it to his goodness, as not to be troubled about it.

[3.] To the manner the end also belongeth, that the prayer be directed to his glory: James iv. 3, 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.'

III. I shall speak of God's answer, and the success of our prayers; and there are several distinctions and considerations.

1. Sometimes God giveth an answer presently, at other times after some competent space of time; as Cornelius at the time of prayer, Acts x. 3, and while the duty is a-doing, an angel was sent to him at the ninth hour to assure him his prayers were heard. The ninth hour was the usual time of prayer: Acts iii. 1, 'Now Peter and John went up to pray at the ninth hour.' So Daniel, chap. ix. 20, 21, 'And while I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin, yea, whilst I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.' The Lord is ready to answer the prayers of his servants in the very instant of praying. So Acts iv. 31, 'While they prayed they were filled with the Holy Ghost.' The cases were singular and extraordinary as to the token and manner of assurance; but as to the substance of the blessing, it is the common practice of God's free grace: Isa. lviii. 10, 'When they call, I will answer; when they pray, I will say, Here am I;' Isa. lxxv. 24, 'While they are speaking, I will hear.' The company that was met to pray while Peter was in prison were heard at the time, Acts xii. 12, 13; God sent Peter to them.

2. Sometimes a good while after. The prayers are upon record in God's book: Mal. iii. 16, 'A book of remembrance was written before him.' This God doth to exercise our faith, to believe what we see not. Nay, God will hear them, though they know not the way how nor time when: Micah vii. 7, 'Therefore I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me.' And to try our

patience; for he saith, 'I will wait for the God of my salvation.' Though he doth not grant as soon as the prayer is made, yet we must believe what we see not, and wait for what we have not. Paul prayed thrice, 2 Cor. xii. 8. God taketh his own time for despatch. Abraham prayed for a child, but many years he goeth childless.

2dly. Consider the several ways how God giveth answer to his people's prayers.

1. Extraordinarily; so in ancient time, as an angel was sent to Cornelius, to Daniel, to Abel by fire, Heb. xi. 4, to Abraham by vision, to Saul by oracle.

2. Ordinarily, and so several ways.

[1.] By granting the mercy prayed for; as to Hannah: 1 Sam. i. 27, 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me the petition that I asked of him.' So to David: Ps. xxi. 2, 'Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withheld the requests of his lips.' So often to his people, when they have humbly sought to him, he giveth them the very blessing they ask.

[2.] By giving in spiritual manifestations of his grace to the soul, though he doth not give the particular mercy prayed for; as when upon prayer he reviveth the soul of him that prayeth: Job xxxiii. 26, 'He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him, and he shall see his face with joy;' Ps. cxxxviii. 3, 'In the day when I cried unto thee, thou answeredst me, and didst strengthen me with strength in my soul.' Comfort is an answer; support is an answer: such an answer had Paul, when God told him his 'grace was sufficient for him,' 2 Cor. xii. 9; when the heart is quieted, though we do not know what God will do with our requests. Hannah, when she had prayed, her heart was no more sad, 1 Sam. i. 18.

[3.] Sometimes by way of commutation and exchange. So God doth answer the prayer though he doth not give the mercy prayed for, when he giveth another thing that is as good or better for the party that prayeth; though not in kind, yet the same in weight and value. This commutation may be three ways—

(1.) In regard of the persons. David fasteth and prayeth, and humbleth his soul for his persecutors, Ps. xxxv. 13, but it returned into his own bosom, that is, it was converted to his own benefit. His fasting had no effect upon them, but his charity did not lose its reward. David prayeth for his first child by Bathsheba, but God giveth him Solomon instead thereof, 2 Sam. xii. 15. In that supposition, 'Noah, Daniel, and Job shall save their own souls,' Ezek. xiv. 18. They that wished peace to a house, 'if the house was not worthy, their peace returned to them,' Luke x. 5, 6. They should have the comfort of discharging their duty.

(2.) In regard of the matter. Carnal things are begged, spiritual given; not a pompous kingdom to Israel, but the promise of the Spirit, Acts i. 6, 7. Moses would fain enter into Canaan, but God saith, Deut. iii. 27, 'Let it suffice thee; speak to me no more of this matter;' would fain have a Pisgah sight, and be eased of the trouble of the wars. We would have a speedy riddance of troubles, but God thinketh it not fit; they go off by degrees. Showers that come by drops soak into the earth better than those that come by a tempest or

¹ Qu. omit 'would fain'?—ED.

hurricane. We ask for deliverance from troubles, and God will give courage in troubles: Lam. iii. 55-57, 'I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice; hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not.' His gracious and powerful presence in trouble was enough. Christ himself 'was heard in that he feared,' Heb. v. 7; not saved from that hour, but supported and strengthened in it. Job prayed, sacrificed for his children when they were feasting, Job i. 5. God gave him patience, that he charged not God foolishly when they were destroyed, ver. 20.

(3.) In regard of means. We pray such means may not miscarry; God will use other; as Abraham would fain have Ishmael the child of promise, but the Lord intended Isaac: 'Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee!' Gen. xvii. 18. God may give us our will in anger, when the thing begged turneth to our hurt. Therefore the way or kind of God's answer must be referred to his own will in all things, for which we are not to pray absolutely. And when we have discharged our duty, and endeavoured to approve our hearts to God, take what answer he will give.

Use 1. To show us with what confidence we must pray. You must be persuaded that God will hear you according to your will or need, when you ask things agreeable to his will, and fit for you to receive in your station, and with a due subordination to his glory and the interest of his kingdom; upon other terms you should not ask anything of God. To support you, that you shall have what you ask, there are three things—(1.) God's nature; (2.) Christ's merits; (3.) The promises of the gospel.

1. God's nature. We conceive of God as wise, and powerful, and good: all encourage prayer. God's wisdom and providence: Mat. vi. 8, 'Your Father knoweth what things you have need of before you ask him.' His almighty power: Eph. iii. 20, 'He is able to do beyond what we can ask or think;' Mark xiv. 36, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee.' With these thoughts should we come into God's presence. And lastly, his goodness and love; that must not be left out: John xvi. 27, 'The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and believed that I came out from God.' Christ's intercession made way for us, but the Father's love prevented that. We have wrong thoughts of God if we do not think of his self-inclination to do good. His readiness to hear and forgive doth encourage poor creatures to come to him. All these things make him a God hearing prayer. And to encourage poor suppliants—

2. There is the merits and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ: Heb. xii. 2, 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despised the shame, and is sat down at the right hand of God;' Rom. viii. 3, 'God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh;' Heb. ix. 24, 'For Christ is not entered into the holy place made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.' We have a friend in court, who will join with us in the requests we make to God, whose intercession answereth to the motions of his Spirit in our hearts.

3. There are the gracious promises of the gospel, by which all necessary things are secured to us. And though the dispensation of particular blessings are reserved to God's good pleasure, yet there are certain general promises which concern us for the present, of which we may be confident; as that God will never utterly fail his people: Heb. xiii. 5, 'He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;' that he will dispose of all things for the best to them that love God, Rom. viii. 28; that he will not leave us to insupportable difficulties, 1 Cor. x. 13. This should satisfy us.

Use 2. It teacheth us that we should look after the answers of prayer. Certainly a man that is serious and sincere in prayer will be earnest for an answer: Ps. lxxxv. 8, 'I will hear what the Lord will speak.' A gracious heart dareth not take God's name in vain, nor make prayer a vain babbling or empty prattle, but will be listening and hearkening after news from heaven: Ps. v. 3, 'I will pray and look up.' Watch to see what cometh. Foolish boys, that knock at a door in wantonness, will not stay till somebody cometh to open to them; but a man that hath business will knock, and knock again, till he gets his answer. To people that consider not what they do, whose prayers are the sacrifices of fools, they throw away their prayers, and never look after them, what cometh of it? but they that are in earnest, and are persuaded God heareth them, will wait for an answer. We should the rather do this—

1. Because answers of prayer are notable confirmations of faith concerning the truth of God's being and promises: Ps. lxxv. 2, 'Oh, thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come;' Ps. xviii. 30, 'The word of the Lord is a tried word; he is a buckler to all that trust in him;' Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' They see this is the God to be prayed unto, these promises to be trusted in; that this God will not fail those that seek him, and depend upon him. Now we should seek confirmation from experience, as a rebuke and check to that atheism that still remaineth in us.

2. Excitements to love and obedience. Nothing increaseth our love to God as to see he is mindful of us upon all occasions, especially in our deep necessities: Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I will love the Lord, for he hath heard the voice of my supplications.' Every answer of prayer is a special instance of God's love to us, and so it begets love to God again; it is as new fuel to increase the fire.

3. Encouragements to pray again: Ps. cxvi. 2, 'Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.' The throne of grace will not be neglected by them that have found good success there; they see there is mercy and help to be found. As one adventure in point of traffic succeeding well encourageth another, so is the success of duty: Ps. xxxii. 6, 'For this shall every-one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found.' From David's ready audience and despatch.

4. God will lose much honour, praise, and thanksgiving, if we do not regard his answers: Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me;' Col. iv. 2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' We are to gather matter of praise to God; as the intercourse between heaven and

earth is maintained by vapours and showers, so is commerce between God and us carried on by donatives and duties, by holy prayers and God's gracious answers.

SERMON XXIX.

Because we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight.—1 JOHN iii. 22.

I COME now to the second thing, the character and property of a good conscience. Here are two expressions, one relating to the matter of our obedience, the other to the end.

1. The matter, 'Because we keep his commandments.'

2. The end and aim, 'And do those things which are pleasing in his sight.'

Doct. That those have a gospel good conscience who keep God's commandments, and do the things which are pleasing in his sight.

Here I shall inquire—

1. What it is to keep God's commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.

2. How this is a gospel conscience; what could the law require more?

3. How this doth constitute a good and quiet conscience, free us from fears of being rejected, and give us hopes of being accepted with God.

I. What it is. The first expression is to keep the commandments of God. Here we must open two things—

(1.) Commandments; (2.) Keep; the object, and the act.

First, The commandments that must be kept; and they are of several sorts.

1. Moral and evangelical; so it is explained in the next verse, 'And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.' Love is our primitive holiness, faith belongeth to our recovery. Not only the moral law is the rule of our duty, but the gospel also; faith is commanded: John vi. 29, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.' Sin is not our work at all; the affairs of the world are our bywork. Particular duties are subordinate to the great duty of the gospel, not our main work, nor must be gone about. So repentance is commanded: Acts xvii. 30, 'He hath commanded all men everywhere to repent.' At your peril will it be if you refuse this grace. Gospel obedience falleth under a command; it is not an indifferent thing, whether we will accept the remedy, yea or no. Moral duties are evident by natural light. Remedial and gospel duties depend upon a positive institution, though highly reconcilable to natural light.

2. First-table and second-table duties; as faith in Jesus Christ, and

love to one another. We must make conscience of all duties we owe to God and men : Acts xxiv. 16, ' Herein do I exercise myself, to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.' There is a first table and a second ; some are very punctual in dealing with men, but neglectful of God. But both tables are owned from heaven, Rom. i. 18. Some will not wrong men of a farthing, but stick not to rob God of all that fear, love, trust, delight, which is due to him. They will not defile their bodies with open uncleanness, but commit it in their hearts ; they condemn the rebellion of Absalom, yet disobey their heavenly Father. No murderers, but strike at the being of God ; are tender of men's good name and reputations, but dishonour and take the name of God in vain. Others are much in worship, but unconscionable in their dealings with men ; will not swear an oath, but are very uncharitable, censuring their brethren without pity and remorse. This is the fashion of the world, to be in with one duty and out with another. The commandments are introduced by this preface, ' God spake all these words,' Exod. xx. 1. He that hath enjoined the one hath enjoined the other ; but as the echo rendereth but part of the speech, so do we in our returns of obedience. God spake all, and we return but a part.

3. Smaller as well as greater duties : Mat. v. 19, ' Whosoever shall break the least of these commandments, and teach men so to do, shall be least in the kingdom of heaven.' God counteth his authority despised, and the commandments and obligatory power of his law to be made void by him that shall either in doctrine or practice count any transgression of his law so light and venial as not to be stood upon, or as if it were a trifle to be so nice and exact as not to make conscience of petty things, such as vain thoughts, light words, or passionate speeches. Deceit of heart is found on both sides. Some are apt to say, ' It is but a little one, and my soul shall live,' as Lot of Zoar. No sin is little that is committed against the great God ; and it argueth the more wickedness to break with God upon every trifling occasion. A little force will make a heavy body move downward, because it is its natural motion. Others are apt to stand much upon lesser things. John xviii. 28, the Jews would not enter into the judgment-hall lest they should be defiled, yet at that very time they sought the life of the Lord of glory. Hypocrites make a great business about small matters, wherein the flesh and self have some special interest, when the weighty common duties are little valued, relished, or insisted on ; by-matters, and the more uncertain points which self hath espoused, are contended for with all zeal and earnestness : Mat. xxiii. 23, ' They reject the weighty things of the law, such as faith and love ; judgment and mercy are omitted, while they tithe mint, anise, and cummin ; like one that cometh into a shop to buy a pennyworth, and stealeth a pound's worth, or pays a small debt, that he may run deeper into the creditor's books, and so deceive him of a greater sum.

4. Commandments that require public and private duties ; to fail in either consists not with sincerity. In times of trouble many content themselves if their hearts be right : 2 Cor. vii. 1, ' Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit.' The libertines in Corinth did so. It is no matter whether they own God publicly, or, if they

will, yet, to gratify their neighbours, go to an idol-feast; as if a wife should prostitute her body, and pretend that she keepeth her heart loyal to her husband. Others make a fair show to the world, but in their family converse are loose and careless. David saith, Ps. ci. 2, 'I will walk in my house with a perfect heart.' If a man be truly holy, he will show it at home as well as abroad, in his family where his constant converse is; yea, in his closet and secret retirements. A christian is alike everywhere, because God is alike everywhere. We strain ourselves to make our best appearance in public, God will be served with our uttermost in private also.

5. There are commands concerning the government both of the inward and outward man. We must make conscience of both, or else our conscience is not a good conscience: Isa. lv. 7, 'Let the sinner forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.' Not only make conscience of our way or our outward actions, but also of our thoughts, and the secret operations of our hearts: James iv. 8, 'Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.' As we should not do evil before men, so not think evil before the holy God; for those things fall under a law as well as the overt acts.

6. There are some commandments we have no great temptation to break, others that lie more cross to our humours and interests; therefore not some or many must be kept, but all. A sanctified judgment must approve all, a sanctified will choose all, as justly good, necessary, and profitable for us; and in our endeavours we must obey all: Rom. vii. 12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good.' The law in general, and that commandment which had wrought such tragical effects in his heart, it is all good, how contrary soever to our natural or perverse inclinations. If we set up a toleration in our hearts, we are not sincere: Ps. lxvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me;' that is, if he did cherish it, and secretly foster it. There is something wherein you would be excused by God, and expect favour from him. A man that would keep out the cold in winter shutteth all his doors and windows, yet the wind will creep in, though he doth not leave any open hole for it. We must reserve no sin; some will remain after the best care and caution. Therefore we must not obey God in some things, and break with him in others, 'Nor trust to our own righteousness and commit iniquity,' Ezek. xxxiii. 13. If the bosom sin be not weakened, your whole righteousness is called in question: Ps. xviii. 23, 'I was upright before him, and kept myself from mine iniquity.' There are some sins most incident to us by temper of body, course of life, or carnal interests. Now we should mainly cross that sin which is most pleasing, and dry up that unclean issue that runneth upon us. Thus for the object.

Secondly, The act, 'Keep;' that noteth two things—(1.) The inward respect which we have to God's laws; (2.) The outward action or course of life which results from this.

1. The inward respect which we have to God's laws in our memories, consciences, and affections: Prov. iii. 1, 'Let thine heart keep my commandments.' The heart keepeth them when we keep them in mind so as to understand them; in memory, so as not to neglect them, but have them ready at every turn; in heart and affection, so as to stand

in awe of them: Prov. xiii. 13, 'Whosoever feareth the commandment, shall be rewarded;' Ps. cxix. 161, 'My heart standeth in awe of thy word.' I dare not do anything against it, yea, do delight in it: Ps. cxix. 14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches;' Ps. xl. 8, 'I delight to do thy will, O God; thy law is in my heart.' The great new covenant blessing is to write the law in the heart and mind: Heb. viii. 10, 'I will put my laws into their mind, and write them upon their hearts.' Not only a simple approbation, but a delight, or a ready inclination to do them. Now if we shall rise up in rebellion against our convictions, and offer violence to inclination and conscience, we grossly break God's law, as in all heinous sins we do: 2 Sam. xii. 9, 'Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?' An inward contempt or disrespect of the commandment maketh the sin more heinous.

2. The outward observance of them: Ps. cxix. 5, 'Oh, that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!' It is the business of our lives to live according to this direction: John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them;' where keeping is distinguished from having. The commands of God were not given us to talk of or think on, but to do them: Deut. xii. 32, 'Whatsoever I command you, observe to do it.' Do not gaze on it, think it an excellent thing to do so, but set about the practice.

Secondly, The next notion whereby the good conscience is expressed is this, 'And do those things which are pleasing in his sight.' This implieth many things.

1. That it be our design and scope to approve ourselves to God: 2 Cor. v. 9, 'Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.' This is the end that we propound to ourselves, what is your mind principally set upon? The end which you design and endeavour, the pleasing and glorifying of God, and the everlasting fruition of him, or the pleasing of your fleshly minds in the fruition of any inferior things? That is your end which you love most, which pleases you best, and would do most for, and can least want. The people of God are described to be those that 'choose the things which please him, and take hold of his covenant,' Isa. lvi. 4. They do not live at random without an aim, nor do good by chance, but by choice. He that is false at first setting out can never hold out with God.

2. This is not only their choice, but the tenor and course of their lives. Enoch, that walked with God, is said to have this testimony, that he pleased God, Heb. xi. 5, with Gen. v. 24. The Septuagint read it, they are sincere and uniform in their obedience to him. Every day you must reckon with yourselves, Have you complied with your great end? What have I done, or what have I been doing? have I pleased or displeased God?

3. It is not in a few things, but in all: Col. i. 10, 'Walk worthy of the Lord to all pleasing;' not in with one duty and out with another, for that is to please ourselves, not to please God; or to please men, not to obey our rule.

4. We must every day be more exact in our walking and care to please God, and that no offence or breach may arise between him

and us : 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'As you have received of us how to walk and to please God, so you would abound therein more and more.' You never please God so much but you may please him better, and he expecteth more from you the more you are acquainted with him. One that is newly put to service is raw at first, but afterwards he groweth more handy and fit for his work ; so you must first outgrow your weaknesses if you think to please God, and grow more exact in the spiritual life.

5. If there be anything more pleasing to God than another, your main care must be about those things ; as, for instance, it is mighty pleasing to God that you should seek grace rather than greatness, and direction in your duty rather than worldly honour : 1 Kings iii. 10, the speech 'pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.' Surely it is more pleasing to God that we should pray from the spirit than from the flesh, not seeking great things for ourselves, but that we may have grace to discharge our duties to God. So that in our duty we should mind the substantial of religion rather than rituals : Rom. xiv. 17, 18, 'For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ; for he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men.' That in the substantial of religion we should not leave out the duties of the second table, as faithfulness in our relations. The scripture instanceth in the duties of parents and children ; of children's duty to parents : Col. iii. 20, 'For this is well-pleasing unto God.' Duties of liberality and mercy to all men : Heb. xiii. 16, 'For to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' Not only careful of justice, but also of mercy. Now it is a shame that, when christians hear these things are so pleasing to God, they should not set about them. Esau took his bow to seek savoury meat for his father when he desired it.

II. But how is this a gospel conscience ? What could the law require more ?

Ans. 1. We consider this with respect to fallen man, who entereth upon this course of new obedience as one delivered and recovered by Christ, and put into a capacity again to obey and please God : Luke i. 74, 75, 'That being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we should serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life ;' and Eph. iv. 24, 'The new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness.' We suppose him as redeemed by Christ, and renewed by his Holy Spirit. Take either expression ; the first, 'because we keep his commandments.' We receive these commandments out of the hand of a mediator, whose power and right to command is not destructive of our former duty, but accumulative ; the debt of duty ceased not by man's sin, but will remain while there is a relation between the Creator and the creature ; but this is a power superadded to the former, and is more comfortable and beneficial to us, that Christ would set us in joint again, and put us into a capacity of obeying God. It is a blessed thing to take a law of duty out of the hand of a mediator ; for he hath not only obliged us by his great love in dying for us, but provided both for our assistance and acceptance, whilst by the Spirit of Christ we have Christ to help us, and work all

our works for us and in us, and give 'Grace to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear,' Heb. xii. 28. And the more we use this grace, the more it is increased upon us; but we have also his righteousness, by virtue of which we are accepted with God: Eph. i. 6, 'Who hath accepted us in the Beloved.' God will help us in our duty, and will accept of it as we can perform it. For the second expression, 'And do the things that please him.' God is first *placandus* then *placendus*, first appeased towards us and then pleased with us; appeased by the satisfaction of Christ, which is imputed to none but those that are converted and justified by faith: Rom. v. 8, 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God.' Till we have an interest in the great sin-offering which was offered for the whole congregation of the elect, God will not accept of a thank-offering at our hands, nor be pleased with anything we do in particular duties, while we neglect the general duty of returning to God by Christ: Heb. xi. 6, 'Without faith it is impossible to please God.' None can please God, then, but those that are regenerated by the Spirit, and reconciled to him by Christ.

2. These duties are done in a gospel-like manner, out of love to God, or a sense of that wonderful grace which is showed us in Christ: 2 Cor. v. 14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' They are done as out of thankfulness and that great love which we owe to God; the cord which binds our duty upon us is not terror but love. It is said, 1 John ii. 5, 'Whoso keepeth his commandments, in him verily is the love of God perfected;' that is, hath produced its proper effect. Faith is the means, love is the end, and obedience is the proper fruit and effect of love. Faith is physic, love is health, and the more perfect it is the sounder christians we are. Now the perfection and strength of love is seen in new obedience; so that here is a gospel spirit, and a gospel good conscience, when we study and endeavour to please God.

3. This keeping the commandments and pleasing of God is accepted where there is a cordial and hearty endeavour to do so, though our success in every point be not answerable. It is not unsinning obedience only which the new covenant accepteth, but sincere obedience; by sin we are disabled from an exact keeping of the commandments, but by grace we are accepted, if there be an upright heart unfeignedly bent and heartily endeavouring to please God in all things. Grace doth not perfectly produce its acts, yet it doth produce them, and that in such a degree as hypocrites cannot attain to. It is their constant care to avoid all known sin, and allow themselves in the neglect of no duty; now such are pardoned and accepted with God: Ps. xxxii. 1, 2, 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.' And have all manner of blessings bestowed upon them: Prov. xi. 20, 'Such as are upright in their way are his delight;' Ps. xviii. 25, 'With an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright.'

III. The reasons why this doth constitute a good and quiet conscience.

1. Because then our hearts will not disprove our confidence grounded on the new covenant, which accepteth the upright. Certainly the upright are within the compass of the blessing of the covenant. That

is so obvious a truth, that it needeth not much confirmation. When God came to covenant with Abraham, Gen. xvii. 1, he saith to him, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk thou before me and be thou perfect;' that is, upright and sincere, as the word also signifieth, and is noted in the margin. That was the condition required of him. An absolute perfection human frailty doth not admit, and an impossible condition maketh the covenant void in the making, and so the transaction would be to no purpose. So elsewhere all the blessings of the covenant are entailed upon the upright: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Once more, eternal happiness shall be their portion: Ps. cxl. 13, 'The upright shall dwell in thy presence.' Besides all the testimonies of God's love granted to the believer, he shall have everlasting fellowship with God in the world to come. David asketh the question, Ps. xv. 1, 2, 'Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart;' that is, if I should take the boldness to interrogate thee, who art the Lord of heaven and earth, who shall be rewarded with eternal bliss hereafter? the answer certainly will be this, He that walketh uprightly, he, and none but he, that goeth on in a course of uniform and steady obedience, that doeth all things sincerely and in the sight of God; he it is that shall be accepted and admitted, not out of any worthiness in himself, but from God's love and promise to dwell everlastingly with him.

2. This walking uprightly comprehendeth true faith, and cheerful obedience to God's commandments; that is to be righteous and upright: 'To walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,' Luke i. 6; for a care to avoid all known sin, and make conscience of all known duty, is certainly uprightness. It doth not imply a total exemption from sin, but an allowance of none; they mourn for it, strive against it, and prevail so far that the contrary principle groweth, and doth mostly and generally command and influence their conversations. Grace getteth the upper hand, not for a fit, but habitually; therefore such may with comfort come to God, and have no reason to question their acceptance with him, for they are conscious to themselves of their faithfulness to God, and sincere desire to walk in his ways; their own hearts do not reproach them, and God will not refuse them: Ps. cxix. 6, 'Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments.' No cause to be afraid or ashamed to come to him; there is enough to humble, but not to discourage them, for their hearts do acquit them of any allowance of sin or breach of God's law.

3. It is the true trial and proof of our sincere love to Christ, and therefore we may have confidence towards God, and this confidence, 'That what we ask we shall receive of him,' under the cautions and restrictions forementioned. I shall prove this argument by these considerations.

[1.] That true faith in Christ breedeth sincere love to God: Gal. iv. 6, 'Faith worketh by love.' The true office of faith is to persuade the soul of the astonishing wonders of God's love shown in the redemp-

tion by Christ: 'We have known and believed the love that God hath to us,' 1 John iv. 16. And why? Not only that we may gaze on it with amazement, but 'that we may love him again who loved us first,' ver. 19. That this love may make a due impression upon us, and melt us into all love and respect to God, who pitied us in our lost estate, and provided so full and costly a remedy for us. The gospel is an art or science to teach us to love God.

[2.] That the true proof of our love to God is our keeping his commandments, and doing the things which are pleasing in his sight. For God's love is a love of bounty, ours a love of duty, a studying to please God according to his will: 1 John v. 3, 'This is love, to keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous;' John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.' That is the love of Christ. It is a lazy love that only talketh of the great things he hath done for us, but doeth nothing for God again, or languisheth in complaints after sensible consolations. No; do your duty; love must be laborious, not idle, and one cannot be better employed than in doing those things which he hath given us in charge.

[3.] Obedience, as it is an evidence of our love to Christ, so it is a means of keeping up the sense and assurance of his love to us: John xv. 10, 'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, as I kept the Father's commandments, and abode in his love.' It is holy walking is a means that will not delude us, but give us a large share in his heart and love. God delighteth to vouchsafe the testimonies of his love and well-pleas'dness with us: John xiv. 15, 'Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.' There is a double-tryed friend, actively, passively. Actively, you show yourselves friends to Christ when to the uttermost of your power you set yourselves to do what he hath commanded. Passively, he will show himself a friend to you; ye shall be dealt with as friends; I will reckon you as friends; all the world shall see I love you; I will bountifully reward and gratify you: John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be beloved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him;' ver. 23, 'If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' God delights to manifest himself to such, to own them, to bestow peculiar marks of favour upon them.

[4.] Among other rewards of love and faithful obedience, this is one, the audience and acceptance of their prayer. In his providential government, internal or external, God doth many ways own them, by his gracious presence, counselling, directing, quickening them: John viii. 29, 'And he that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please him.' By mollifying the hearts of enemies: Prov. viii. 17, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh his enemies to be at peace with him.' By the comforts of his Spirit, and shedding abroad his love in their hearts that love Christ: Prov. xvi. 7, 'I love them that love me.' By peace of conscience; for the fruit of righteousness is peace. By entertainment of them in all their approaches to God: Isa. lxiv. 5, 'Thou meetest

him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways.' God showeth abundance of kindness to them in the course of his providential government, but chiefly in assisting and accepting their prayers; so that 'whatever we ask we receive, because we keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.' All the rest tend to this, and this is often promised in the word, and the contrary threatened to those who pretend love to God, but do not keep his commandments: Ps. xxxvii. 4, 'Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart;' Prov. x. 24, 'The desire of the righteous shall be granted.'

Use 1. Is information, to show us the necessity of obedience, if we would keep a good conscience and be accepted with God. All the prayers of men that continue in their sins are but like bribes; the gifts of enemies are giftless: Prov. xxi. 27, 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he bringeth it with an evil mind?' However he bringeth it, there is some perverse aim in his worship, that God should prosper him in his sins.

2. That in the christian religion there is true genuine holiness, because it is derived from the highest fountain, the Spirit of Christ; and it is carried on in conformity to the highest rule and pattern, the will of God; and designed to the noblest end, the pleasing, glorifying, and enjoying of God; all this must needs breed peace. So is the gospel good conscience described in the text. First, The highest fountain; for we obey as redeemed and renewed: Titus iii. 5, 6, 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.' As changed in our natures, and made like God: John iii. 6, 'That which is born of the Spirit is spirit;' 2 Peter i. 4, 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.' Secondly, The highest rule, the will of God or his commandments. He doth not only do what he commandeth, but because he commandeth, *intuitu voluntatis*: 1 Thes. iv. 3, 'For this is the will of God, even your sanctification;' 1 Peter ii. 15, 'For so is the will of God;' 1 Thes. v. 18, 'For this is the will of God concerning you.' We have the best warrant for peace and assurance, the command and will of the most high God. And, thirdly, the highest end, the pleasing God, glorifying and enjoying God: 1 Cor. x. 31, 'Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.'

Use 2. To persuade you to holiness in keeping the commandments and pleasing of God; we have many arguments.

1. From the authority of God: Ps. cxix. 4, 'Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.' It is a course imposed upon us by the sovereign Lawgiver, upon whom you depend every moment; and he will not be baffled and affronted.

2. The equity of the precepts: Rom. vii. 12, 'The commandments are holy, just, and good.' They carry a great evidence and suitableness to the reasonable nature; so that if man were well in his wits, he would choose obedience to these laws rather than liberty.

3. The possibility of keeping these commandments, and of pleasing

God, by the grace purchased by Christ: Heb. xiii. 21, 'Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight.' The rule is the will of God. This will is observed when we do every good work; this done is pleasing unto God.

4. Consider the profitableness of obedience, and how much it conduceth to our good: Deut. xiii. 10, 'To keep the commandments of God and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good.' Our labour is not lost or misspent. A godly course is refreshed by many sweet experiences for the present, and will bring in a full reward for the future: Ps. cxix. 56, 'This I had because I kept thy precepts.'

SERMON XXX.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.—
1 JOHN iii. 23.

THE apostle instanceth what commandments we should observe if we would keep a good conscience. Two are mentioned—faith in Christ, and an unfeigned love to the brethren; both are introduced by a preface suitable to the occasion. Therefore I shall first explain the preface; secondly, the particular duties mentioned.

First, In the preface take notice—

1. Of the unity, agreement, and fair accord between these duties; though two duties are mentioned, yet but one commandment.

2. The excellency of them, 'His commandment.'

1. The unity and agreement between gospel duties. He had said 'commandments' in the former verse; and here are two duties specified, yet these are not 'his commandments,' but 'his commandment,' a change of numbers often used by the sacred writers. The whole gospel is but one commandment: 1 Tim. i. 5, 'The end of the commandment is charity;' that is, of the gospel institution.

2. The excellency; this is the commandment which is signalised by Christ's authority, and expressly charged on us, and to which other duties are reduced. It is such an expression as you have, John vi. 29, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.' The context there standeth thus; thousands being fed by a miracle, many followed him for the loaves, therefore Christ telleth them of spiritual bread. He came down from heaven, not to supply hungry stomachs, but to comfort hungry consciences: 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for the meat that endureth for ever, which the Son of man shall give you; for him hath the Father sent.' That direction occasioned a question, What shall we do that we may labour or work the works of God? Christ answereth them, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.' There is a *meiosis* in the expression; you talk of works, this is the work. As if a man should come to a charitable physician, Sir, I am grievously tormented