

SERMON XIV.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him ; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.—1 JOHN iii. 9.

THIS verse is a perfect antithesis, or standeth in direct opposition to the former. There he reasoneth against a sinful life, because the committing of sin argueth conformity to the devil, who is the great architect of all wickedness, and sinners are of his confederacy and party. Now he reasoneth, on the contrary part, that non-committing of sin argueth conformity with God : ' He that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning ; ' that was his argument there ; but here he argueth from the principle of all grace and goodness, ' Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, ' &c.

In the words there is an assertion, with its reasons annexed—

1. The assertion attributeth two things to the regenerate person—(1.) That he doth not sin ; (2.) That he cannot sin.

2. The reasons are annexed to both—(1.) Because his seed remaineth in him ; (2.) Because he is born of God.

The words need a clear discussion, that they may not be abused by erroneous persons on the one side, to establish the impeccability and perfection of the saints ; on the other side, by persons of a weak and tender conscience, who are apt to conclude against their own regeneration because of their daily failings ; nor by a third party, who, because of these infirmities, and on the presumption of grace received, are apt to intermit their care and diligence, as if the new nature would preserve them, and bear them out against all possibility of declining from God and the ways of holiness.

Therefore I shall—(1.) Acquaint you with, or lay down, some preliminary considerations ; (2.) Acquaint you with the different thoughts of sundry interpreters ; (3.) Assert the true sense of the words ; (4.) Vindicate them from abuses.

First, The preliminary propositions.

1. That there is not a man upon earth that sinneth not, believers and persons regenerate as well as others : Eccles. vii. 20, ' There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not ; ' and James iii. 2, ' In many things we offend all. ' Of us, even the holiest and most regenerate commit many acts of sin.

2. That notwithstanding this, there is a difference between the carnal and the regenerate : ver. 10, ' In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil. ' Otherwise the godly and ungodly would be confounded, and there would be no difference between the wicked and the sincere. Certain there is a people that do not sin as others, and, in a good and commodious sense, cannot sin : Deut. xxxii. 9, ' Their spot is not the spot of his children. '

Secondly, I shall show the different thoughts of men about this place. Ambrose interpreteth it of the state of glory, where there is no more sin ; but it agreeth not with this place ; for the apostle speaketh of the state of the regenerate in this life, and would lay down a sign by which the children of God may be distinguished from the children of the

devil, ver. 10. It is true our perfect state in heaven is spoken of, ver. 2; but the apostle is off from that argument, and inferreth thence our holiness: ver. 3, 'He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself as Christ is pure.' Others, as Austin in his book of nature and grace, chap. xiv., supposeth the apostle speaketh *de jure*, what should be of right, and not *de facto*; not what is, but what should be, viz., that he that is born of God should not sin. But this will not suit with the apostle's scope, which is to lay down a mark of difference, and the unregenerate are under an obligation not to sin. Neither will it consist with the reason here alleged, 'His seed remaineth in him.' If the *jus* were considered, this argument would do better, because sin is forbidden by the law, from whence right and wrong is determined; but the apostle argueth from the remaining principle of grace, which is proper to the regenerate. Some understand it, as Bernard, of God's non-imputation of sin; he sinneth, but it is not reckoned for sin. But though this would agree with the former part, 'committeth not sin,' yet it would not with the latter, 'cannot sin;' for God may impute sin, though he will not. And it establisheth evil doctrine; for the evil acts of the regenerate are sins in God's account, and damnable in themselves, *merito operis*, and so should be reckoned by us. Others say that it is very absurd, very unbecoming; so 'cannot' is taken for a moral cannot, not a natural cannot, which noteth a monstrous incongruity, not an utter impossibility: Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' So Acts i. 20, 'We cannot but speak the things which we have heard and seen.' The heart, as thus constituted, cannot be brought to it: 1 Cor. x. 21, 'We cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; we cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and the table of devils.' That it is very absurd and unbecoming: Gen. xxix. 8, 'We cannot roll away the stone till all the flocks be gathered together.' It is not the law and custom and fashion among us.

Thirdly, To state the true sense of these words—(1.) I must open the assertion; (2.) Give the reasons; (3.) Show the cogency of them.

1. The assertion.

[1.] 'He doth not commit sin.' It is not to be understood, committeth no act of sin at all, but he walketh not ordinarily and customarily in any course of known sin; he doth not sin as wicked men or as the unregenerate are wont to sin. So Job appealeth to God, chap. x. 7, 'Thou knowest that I am not wicked.' He durst not avouch it to God that he was not a sinner, but that he was not a wicked sinner: Ps. xviii. 21, 'I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God,' saith David; and we read of ungodly deeds ungodlily committed, Jude 15. Where lieth the difference? The habitual inclination is to please God, yea, that is the drift, scope, and business of their lives; and therefore they do not cherish any evil habit and disposition of soul, nor easily fall into acts of wilful sin.

(1.) Certainly he doth not fall into any course of inordinate living in the world. There is a way of sinning which the scripture speaketh of, when men walk after the flesh, or after their own lusts: Rom. viii. 1, 'Who walk not after the flesh;' 2 Peter iii. 3, 'Walking after their own lusts;' and 'living after the flesh,' Rom. viii. 13.

(2). As to particular sinful acts there is a difference; there are three sorts of sins—

(1st.) Some that are bare simple infirmities, which a man cannot avoid, though he would; as the first motions and risings of corruption, imperfections of duty, want of some degrees of love, reverence, and delight in God when we are employed in his immediate service, vain thoughts. These are sins; though not to be avoided by the ordinary aids of grace vouchsafed to God's people, yet they are forbidden in the law of God. God's law is not imperfect, though our natures be so. These came in by the fall. Adam in innocency knew no such things; therefore they are to be bewailed by us; but these are pardoned on a general repentance, as we address ourselves to God every day, and renew the exercise of faith and repentance: John xiii. 10, 'He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all.' They do not change our state, nor vacate our right to the promises.

(2dly.) There are comparative sins of infirmity, which are infirmities of a middle sort; not bare weaknesses and frailties incident to our imperfect state, but such as we might forbear if we kept a strict watch over our own hearts, and improved the grace and strength offered and received; as vain, idle, passionate speeches, censurings, whisperings, discontent, rash anger, and the like. Now a child of God, through suddenness and unadvisedness, may break out into some lesser escapes in this kind, but to allow ourselves in them would not stand with sincerity. It is treason to coin a penny as well as a pound-piece; therefore these comparative infirmities should be prevented by our utmost diligence, though they do not amount to gross enormities (such as drunkenness, gluttony, adultery, hatred of the brethren, false-witnessings). Though a christian cannot wholly subdue them, yet we must not suffer these to be unresisted and unrepented of, and in some measure we must overcome them. Anger will stir when we are provoked, but by the ordinary assistance of God's grace we should keep it from running out into furious words and actions, or cursing and swearing or reviling. An envious thought may arise against our brother because he is preferred before us; but we should hate it, and labour to keep it under, chide ourselves for it; do not let our envy break out into malignant detraction from their worth, blemishing their gifts and graces. A child of God will feel the ticklings of pride, but he will not suffer it to break out into boasting language. So for distrust and discontent; it is some conquest to dash Babylon's brats against the stones. We read of Achan, Joshua vii. 21, 'That he saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels; then he coveted them, and then he took them.' A child of God doth ordinarily stop at the first and second pass. There may be an inordinate desire of what we see; our senses may betray our souls; but though they covet, they do not steal; they are not drawn to lying, or deceit, or unjust dealing to get it. Some motions of revenge they may have, but they do not break out into mischievous and vindictive acts. So for sensuality; there may be inordinate motions, and fleshly desires, or urging inclinations; but they are checked, and stopped from breaking out into drunkenness, gluttony, uncleanness, lasciviousness, in

speeches or actions, or making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. In short, there may be sluggishness; we may be affected with the ease of the flesh, but we will not suffer it to withdraw us from God, or grossly to neglect the duties of our general and particular calling.

(3dly.) There are great enormities, or gross and scandalous sins; now in this a christian doth not ordinarily sin. In some rare case, by the suddenness or violence of some great temptation, they may be overtaken or overborne, but they therein act quite contrary to their habitual resolutions and ordinary practice; and when they commit them, they do not lie dead in sin, though shrewdly bruised, diseased, and dis-tempered: these do not commit them with an habitual hatred and contempt of God, though they proceed from a less love. They have an habitual love and fear of God; as Peter, that denied Christ out of fear, yet telleth him, 'Lord, thou knowest I love thee,' John xxi. 18. But this love is obstructed for the time, and by this violent shock grace is so hindered that it cannot obtain its effect; they do not consider what unkindness it is to commit such sins. So their faith, though it faileth not, as it did in Peter, is obstructed, so that they cannot for the present counterbalance the pleasures of sin with the danger of it; or if they do consider these things, it is but coldly and carelessly. In short, they may fail in the degree of affection to God, but they do not change God for sin; there are dislikes and checks which arise from the new nature, yet they are not strong enough for the present to defeat the temptation, and though they be for a time foiled, yet they cannot rest or persist in sin: Jer. viii. 4, 'Shall they fall, and not arise?' A fountain muddied soon worketh itself clean again; the needle in the compass may be jogged and discomposed, but it turneth to the pole again. There is a sudden recovery; as a candle sucketh light as soon as it is blown out more easily than a dead wick. Their hearts may smite them, as David's did for numbering the people, 2 Sam. xxiv. 10. They bewail their sins: Mat. xxvi. 75, 'Peter went out, and wept bitterly.' They run to their advocate: 1 John ii. 1, 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' Sue out their pardon: 2 Sam. xxiv. 10, 'I have sinned greatly in that I have done; now I beseech thee take away the iniquity of thy servant.' They relapse not, unless it be before the wound be well closed and healed. Thus they do not sin.

[2.] They cannot sin. In a regenerate man there is an aversion of heart and mind from it. He doth not simply abstain from sinning, but he cannot commit sin; he hath a strong, potent inclination and disposition, which carrieth him another way; his soul is averse from it. A child of God is never in a right posture till he doth look upon sin not only as contrary to his duty, but his nature; it is an unnatural production, as if a sheep, instead of a lamb, should bring forth a serpent: 'A thorn cannot bring forth grapes, nor will a thistle produce figs.' And on the contrary, hips and haws do not grow upon vines, but every tree bringeth forth fruit suitable to its own nature; so one that hath a new nature showeth itself by eschewing of sin and by pursuing the death of sin. It is as natural to the new nature to hate sin, as to love God: Ps. xcvi. 10, 'Ye that love the Lord hate evil.' There is in it an

irreconcilable hatred and enmity against sin. There is a twofold hatred—*odium abominationis et odium inimicitiae*, the hatred of offence, whereby we turn away from what we apprehend to be repugnant and prejudicial to us; so is sin repugnant and contrary to the renewed will. It is agreeable and suitable to the unregenerate as druff to the appetite of a swine, and grass and hay to a bullock and horse; but to a renewed man, as meat that we loathe and have an antipathy against. Now there is in all these that are born of God this kind of hatred and antipathy against sin; it is an offence to them. Then there is *odium inimicitiae*, a hatred of enmity and hostility, which is a seeking the destruction of what we hate; we pursue it to the death. Thus the regenerate hate sin; they mortify and subdue it, and have no satisfaction in themselves till it be destroyed: *non cessat in lesione peccati, sed in exterminio*: Rom. vii. 24, ‘O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’ Now the heart of a renewed man being thus constituted, they cannot sin as others do; they are settled in such a love to God and hatred of sin, they cannot be at the beck and command of every lust, as they were before. Velleius Patereulus saith of Cato Minor, that he had gotten such a just frame and constitution of soul, that he could not but do justly. So the renewed are so set and framed, there is such a new life and a holy nature planted in them by God, that they cannot sin, that is, live and lie in sin, whatever out of infirmity they may fall into.

2. For the reasons, they are two, ‘Because they are born of God;’ and ‘The seed of God remaineth in them.’

[1.] The general reason, from their change of state.

(1.) What is it to be born of God? It is to have a new life and nature wrought in us. To be made by God is one thing, to be born of God is another. All things are made by God, but all things are not said to be born of him; that is a term proper to the new creature. In every perfect generation, that which is born receiveth from him that begets it life and likeness. Likeness is not enough to constitute a birth. An exquisite limner may draw an exact picture of himself, yet the picture is not said to be begotten or born of him, for there is no life. And life alone is not enough; for putrid creatures, as frogs, toads, worms, animated and quickened by the heat of the sun, are not said to be born of it, because there is no likeness. When a man begets a man in his own image and likeness, then he is said to be born. To apply it to the case in hand: When we who were dead in trespasses and sins are framed anew to the life and likeness of God, we are said to be born of him. Life there is: Eph. ii. 1, ‘And you who were dead in trespasses and sins hath he quickened.’ Likeness, or a nature in some sort resembling God: 2 Peter i. 4, ‘Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature;’ Eph. iv. 24, ‘And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness, and true holiness.’ Now surely such a nature inclineth us to obey God and love him.

(2.) How this hindereth that we do not and cannot sin.

(1st.) Because this change wrought in us by the wonderful operation of God’s Spirit puts a new bent and bias upon us: John iii. 6,

‘That which is born of flesh is flesh; and that which is born of Spirit is spirit.’ We are changed from evil to good, from obeying the flesh to obeying the Spirit, and inclined to live and walk after the Spirit. Therefore, this being the scope of the new nature, to live in a strict obedience to God, the reign of sin is broken, and the acts of it will be much prevented. Surely the dominion is taken away by the grace of regeneration, and the acts of it cannot be as frequent as before.

(2*d.*) He is interested in the care and protection of God. Who-soever is born of God is in covenant with him: Rom. vi. 14, ‘For sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the law, but under grace;’ and adopted into his family, under his fatherly care, and God is concerned in his preservation: 1 Peter i. 5, ‘Who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation;’ and John x. 28, ‘And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.’ Christ therefore will not desert them so far as that they should be brought back again into the power and bondage of the wicked one, or that they should so fall into sin as to persist in it. Therefore consider a regenerate person in himself, and he may sin himself out of the favour of God, and all the hopes he hath by Christ; but as he is in the hands of God, and under his care, his heart is so governed and inclined by him, that he cannot totally and finally fall from the grace and life of the Spirit, nor easily fall into heinous acts of sin, though some infirmities remain still.

[2.] The second reason, ‘Because the seed of God remaineth in him.’

(1.) What is meant by this seed of God? Some say the word: 1 Peter i. 23, ‘Born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible;’ Mat. xiii. 19, ‘The good seed is the word of God.’ Not improperly, because the word sown in our hearts and rooted by faith is the great let and check to sin: Ps. cxix. 9, ‘Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word;’ and ver. 11, ‘Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee;’ ver. 104, ‘Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way;’ 1 John ii. 24, ‘Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning: if that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, you shall continue in the Son and in the Father.’ Others say this seed is the Spirit: John iii. 5, 6, ‘Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh, is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit, is spirit.’ Certainly the word of God, if it be this seed, is to be considered not in the letter, but in the Spirit; for the word separated from the Spirit can do nothing to the regenerating of a sinner. The Spirit is the principal efficient, the word is the instrument. But I think by this seed of God is understood the effect of both, the principle of grace infused, or that vital grace which is communicated to us in regeneration, called living in the Spirit, Gal. v. 25.

(2.) How doth it keep us from sinning, so that he who is born of God doth not sin, and cannot sin?

I answer—This seed of God may be considered either as to its

tendency and efficacy, or permanency and predominancy ; all which infer the thing in hand.

(1st.) Its tendency. This impression left upon the heart doth cause it to bend and tend towards God, that we may serve, please, glorify, and enjoy him. As it came from God, so it doth incline us to God ; for the tendency is according to the principle, therefore called a living to God, Gal. ii. 19. It doth continually draw back from sin, and urgeth and inclineth to holiness ; and therefore, when a man is about to sin, he cannot carry it on so freely, because of the rebukes and dislikes of the new nature, there being a fixed, settled frame and bent of heart towards God ; therefore the heart by consequence must needs be set against sin, which is irreconcilable with the motions and tendency of the new nature.

(2dly.) Its efficacy. The seed of God is an actuous, vigorous thing. The word *seed* imports it ; for the spirit of the plant is in it. If it be not a dead seed, we see how it will work through the hard and dry clods to produce its plant and flower ; so is this vital principle operative ; it will not easily suffer us to do an act contrary to it ; and it being a divine seed called Spirit, it is a principle of great strength and power. The apostle calleth it the lusting of the Spirit against the flesh, Gal. v. 17. Now if grace have any energy and life in it, it is directly contrary and incompatible with the committing of any sin. There is a seed and principle in him, which enlighten and enliven, and quicken him to serve and please God, and therefore he is held back from sin.

(3dly.) As to its permanency, a seed that remaineth ; which may be understood both of its own defixion and radication in the heart of man. It is not a light touch, but a thorough change, such an impression of God as becometh a habit and holy nature in us, and is the constant principle of holy, spiritual operations ; and also in regard of God's continuance of it, for it is one of the gifts of which the Lord repenteth not, Rom. xi. 29. It is so planted in the heart by God that it is not lightly inclined, but thoroughly set to holiness ; the good and honest heart, which, having received the word, keepeth it, Luke viii. 15 ; a heart sound in God's statutes, Ps. cxix. 80. Now where the heart is thoroughly changed, soundly set, they do generally live according to the operation of this seed and principle of grace, and is so governed and inclined by it, that he doth constantly do the will of God, and war, and watch, and strive against sin.

(4thly.) This seed is considered according to its prevalency and predominancy. To its prevalency, it hath the mastery in the soul ; for though there be a double principle in a christian, you must not forget the back bias of corruption, which still remaineth with us, and is importunate to be pleased ; but yet you must carry it so that you may plainly show it is not superior in the soul, and keep watching and striving, that as little of it may be discerned as may be, that your conversations be not cast into a carnal mould, and fashioned according to the former lusts of your ignorance, 1 Peter i. 14, that sin may be mortified and beaten down more and more. The apostle supposeth the best is most powerful, so that a christian showeth himself spirit rather than flesh. The apostle describeth him here according to the

operation of the better part. The old man in them is crucified, not wholly dead indeed, but dying, and greatly weakened.

Fourthly, I shall vindicate the words from abuse.

Men think, if they be regenerate, the seed of grace will preserve them without any care of their own. Herein they are mistaken, and that for two reasons—

1. Because there is an active warring principle still left in us; our lusts are but in part subdued, and our love to them is so soon kindled, that if we intermit our watching and striving, the gates of the senses are always open to let in such objects as take part with the flesh; therefore we must be beating down sin: 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27, 'I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.' What is said of the new nature is not to make us idle.

2. Because grace doth not work necessarily, as fire burneth, but voluntarily; it must be excited and stirred up, both by the Spirit of God, who giveth us to will and to do, Phil. ii. 13, and by ourselves: 2 Tim. i. 6, 'Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee.' We must be still blowing up this holy fire, and keep it burning, as the priests did the fire of the altar. The bent of the new nature must be kept up with much watching, striving, praying, and the use of all holy means, and the vigour of it maintained.

SERMON XV.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.—
1 JOHN iii. 9.

USE 1. Is exhortation, to press you that you are born of God, or profess yourselves to be so, to avoid sin.

1. You should look upon sin not only as contrary to your duty, but your nature; for the argument here is not taken from the law of God, but from the temper and disposition of a renewed man. The argument from the law is strong and binding, for no child of God should wittingly and willingly break his law. It is urged: 1 John iii. 4, 'Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is a transgression of the law.' Every deliberate wilful sin is an act of disloyalty and rebellion against God, like Absalom's treason against his father. You should not sin because of the law; but here the argument is more pressing and close. 'You cannot sin,' if you be what you profess to be, because God hath given you another nature. Now for you not only to offer violence to the law, but to offer violence to your nature, to go against the very constitution and frame of your own hearts, as it is renewed by God, will aggravate the guilt of the action.

2. The argument is not taken from objective, but subjective grace.

The law forbiddeth sin, and grace offereth help and remedy against it. What the law condemneth, grace teacheth us to avoid. Now grace is twofold—objective in the gospel, subjective in the heart of a believer. As, for instance, when some are said to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, Jude 4, is God's grace capable to be turned into lust or sin? It is objective, not subjective grace, which is there meant, the doctrine of grace, not the internal grace of the Holy Spirit, which resideth in the heart of a believer. Now objective grace yieldeth a notable argument against sin: Titus ii. 11, 12, 'For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.' How teacheth? Not as a man that would teach one that is ignorant; but as a man would persuade and quicken one that is backward. It is more by way of persuasion than instruction, as the doctrine of grace containeth many powerful arguments against sin; and it is a shame that we do not improve them to better purpose. But here the apostle reasoneth not from objective, but subjective grace; not from the doctrine propounded to us, but the seed which remaineth in us. Now this doth not only persuade but incline us to avoid sin, and yieldeth us help and strength against it.

3. This subjective grace is a vital principle, not a lighter disposition, but a settled and fixed frame of heart towards God and heavenly things, and therefore called life, and a new nature, and a divine nature. Now if there be such a principle, such a genius, such a new nature put into us, certainly upon the account thereof we cannot sin, as those do who have not such a principle; for *principiata respondent suis principiis*; the constant effects declare what is the principle, or principles are known by their proper actions, as fire by burning, and the rational soul by discourse and speech. So 'if we live in the Spirit, we must walk in the Spirit,' Gal. v. 25, and if we have a new heart, we must show it by newness of life, Rom. vi. 4. You cannot force men from their principles; you may put them out of the way a little, but they return to it again. You see it plainly verified as to the principle of corruption. Reason with men, persuade them, show them their danger, you may rouse them up a little, yet, till God change their hearts, they still return to their former courses: Jer. xiii. 23, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.' When men are habituated to evil, no means will work it out of them, or work them to any good. Nature will return, though you seem never so much to check it, and beat it back. Proportionably, if grace be as a new nature, you will find it work after this sort. Therefore it is utterly inconsistent with making sin our trade, custom, and delight. We have felt the tyranny of sin, but when we are renewed and changed, we should also feel the sacred power and influence of grace.

4. This vital principle containeth in it an everlasting enmity and repugnancy to sin, as sin also doth to it: Gal. v. 17, 'The Spirit lusteth against the flesh, and the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, for these two are contrary;' so contrary as never to be reconciled, no more than fire and water, light and darkness. Now a man that hath such a contrary principle to sin in his own bosom cannot give way to it

without great reluctancies and dislikes, and checks from the new nature. I observe this for two reasons—

[1.] Partly to show that that doth somewhat abate the operations of the opposite principle; the flesh cannot carry it so freely, you cannot do what you would in the satisfaction of your lusts, because of this repugnancy and dislike, Gal. v. 17. Therefore, if you sin freely, you have not the new nature in you, for where it is it will make resistance. It is not wholly dead nor asleep; if not strong enough wholly to defeat the temptation, yet certainly to break the force of it, that it doth not fall upon us with all its weight: Rom. vii. 15–17, ‘For that which I do I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent to the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.’ There is a contrary principle indeed, which retaineth some life and vigour; yet surely in the regenerate it is much abated; there is not such a reconcilableness to sin as there was before. Grace serveth us for some use, giveth some strength, or else why is this gracious gift bestowed upon us?

[2.] And partly to show that these checks and dislikes do aggravate the sins which we commit. We make it an excuse; I strive against them, but do not overcome them, and so the striving is an aggravation of the sin. Carnal men have their reluctancies, which aggravate their sins; as Pilate against the crucifying of Christ, but yielded to it at length against his own conscience, for his interest’s sake, to preserve the good-will of the people and his credit in his government; he would fain have washed his hands of it after he yielded to it. Balaam resisted a while, but yielded at length to the ways of unrighteousness. The conscience of most men will bear back and hold off for a time, because it apprehendeth sin to be offensive to God and destructive to the soul, but the pleasure and profit of sin prevaieth at length. Now if these reluctancies of bare natural conscience may aggravate the rebellion, and make it the greater crime for a man to venture upon that which is evil, against the checks of his own conscience, so much more doth this reason concern the people of God. He that will break through, not only when there is a rule or law in the way, but his natural disposition or the bent of a gracious heart in the way, in the general, he doth not only the sinful act, but overcometh that which hindereth the doing of it; he hath somewhat in his bosom to the contrary. Look, as it argued Christ’s love to lay down his life notwithstanding the innocent reluctancies of his human nature, Mat. xxvi. 39, these words, ‘Father, let this cup pass,’ did not argue his unwillingness, but willingness; ‘Nevertheless, Father, not as I will, but as thou wilt;’ we should not have understood the greatness of his love nor the dreadfulfulness of his sufferings if the human nature had not showed its just abhorreny against them; so it argueth the great heinousness of sin to break through notwithstanding these reluctancies, not only of enlightened conscience, but the renewed heart. If unrenewed men’s sins are aggravated by the dislikes of conscience, which pleads God’s right and our duty, so much more will renewed men’s sins be aggravated by the rebukes of the new nature, which not only show our duty, or excite us to our duty, but give us help and strength to perform it, and are so notable a check to sin.

5. There is not only an express contrariety to sin, but a predominancy above it. He that is born of God hath indeed two principles of operations in him, but the one hath the mastery over the other, and is superior in the soul, else he could not be said to be born of God: John iii. 6, 'That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' The best principle is the most powerful; so that a christian showeth himself to be spirit rather than flesh, and that Jesus hath a greater interest in him than Adam. The apostle here describeth him according to the operations of the better part; he doth not sin, he cannot sin; the old man in him is crucified, not dead indeed, but dying and greatly weakened; the new man is superior, and governeth our hearts and actions. The heart of a regenerate man is like a kingdom divided, but grace is in the throne, and the flesh is the rebel, which much disturbeth and weakeneth its sovereignty and empire, and by striving seeketh to draw the will to itself, that it may be sovereign and chief; but in those who are born of God, they cannot be, else there would be no distinction between nature and grace; for a man is denominated from what is predominant in him, and hath chief power over his heart. If it be the flesh, he is carnal; if it be the Spirit, he is a new creature, or born of God. Many convictions, and good meanings and wishes, may proceed from common grace, and be found in those that shall never be saved, because they do not prevail over the contrary motions and inclinations. But God's children have not only a spirit contrary to the flesh and the world, but prevailing over the flesh and the world: 1 Cor. ii. 12, 'Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God.' Men are denominated from that which beareth rule in them. If sin reigneth, or grace reigneth, that is his master to which a man yieldeth himself, Rom. vi. 10, by which he is ordinarily led and governed, and which disposeth of his time, and strength, and mind, and heart, and life, and love; so that though corruption remaineth in the faithful, yet it is a rebel, and the government is in the hands of grace. All the acts of sin are disowned acts, and we may say with Paul, 'It is not I, but sin that dwelleth in me.' They proceed from us against the bent and habit of our wills, and settled course of life; and therefore you see how it concerneth us to carry it so that as little of the flesh may be discovered as may be, that our conversations be not cast into a carnal mould, or fashioned 'according to the former lusts of your ignorance,' 1 Peter i. 14. That sin be more mortified, and not gratified. The flesh is importunate to be pleased, but our pretences to God and regeneration cannot be justified if we should please it, and turn head against the better part.

6. This vital, contrary, predominant principle against sin is the fruit of a new birth; and if it be so, there appeareth a shoal of arguments to draw us off from sin, and to press us to avoid sin. I will content myself with two—

[1.] The way by which regeneration is brought about, which is by a deep sight and sense of sin, and the dreadful consequences of it. And surely those that have been acquainted with the pangs of the new birth will not easily venture upon sin again, as the burnt child dreadeth the fire, or those that have been bitten by playing with a snappish cur will not easily expose their fingers to such danger. You remember what

sin cost you formerly when you were first reconciled to God, what terror of heart, what tremblings of soul, and how long it was ere you could settle in a holy peace and serenity of mind. Surely we should sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto us. Will you drink again of those bitter waters, and renew the cause of your anguish and sorrow, or taste again of the cold cup of trembling, which filled you with such astonishment and fear? A convinced sinner is filled with his own ways, Prov. i. 31. He hath enough of sin when God sets it home upon his heart. Then he seeth what an evil and bitter thing it is to make bold with God, Jer. ii. 19, at what a dear rate he bought the pleasures and contentments of the flesh: and wilt thou again run this hazard? The Israelites were jealous of setting up a new altar: Josh. xxii. 17, 18, 'Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day (although there were a plague in the congregation of the Lord), but we must turn away again from following the Lord?' Alas! we cannot forget the old scorplings of conscience, and shall we venture once more?

[2.] The effect of it, which is a settled constitution of heart, acted and discovered either in a way of faith, or hope, and love, and so the seed of God goeth under divers names: 1 Cor. xiii. 13, 'And now abideth faith, hope, charity;' 1 Thes. i. 3, 'Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope;' Jude 20, 21, 'But ye beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Now all those graces which constitute and make up the new creature give us powerful arguments and inducements against sin. Therefore, if we are born of God, we are highly concerned not to sin against him.

(1.) Faith maketh use of the whole christian doctrine to purify the heart, Acts xv. 9, or cleanse it from sin; especially that of redemption by Christ: 1 John iii. 5, 8, 'And he was manifested to take away sin. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.' And the eternal recompenses: when sin sets the bait before you, faith sets heaven and hell before you; heaven to sweeten the ways of God, and make them more easy to us, that we may be constant in them: 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.' Hell to deter and frighten you from sin. When the flesh showeth you the bait, faith showeth you the hook; and so take all together, the beginning and the end, you will have little stomach to sin. When you consider how many are suffering for those sins which you are now tempted to commit, dare you venture? What! upon the everlasting burnings, into which every one is cast, whosoever maketh a lie, or giveth way to his lusts, and filthy excess?

(2.) Love, which is the weight that inclineth and poiseth us to God, and so by consequence to hate sin: Ps. xcvii. 10, 'Ye that love the Lord hate evil.' Which is the great overruling principle which levelleth our actions to his glory, and directeth them according to his will: 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, 'For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead. And that

he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again.' Sin is not only impertinent, but inconsistent with our great end.

(3.) Hope, which looketh and waiteth that we may see God, and be like him: 1 John iii. 3, 'He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, as Christ is pure.' What! look for these things, and live so contrary to them? If this be the effect of the new birth, surely it concerneth us to mortify and avoid sin.

7. This birth draweth to it God's assistance; for whosoever is born of God is taken into God's family and under God's protection: 'For all things are of him, and through him, and to him;' as in a way of nature, so in a way of grace, Rom. xi. 35. They have their preservation from him from whom they received their being; the new creature is through him as well as from him; and no dam can be so tender of the young brood in the nest as God is of the new creature, which is of his own production. He cherisheth that grace which he hath infused: Phil. i. 6, 'Being confident of this, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ.' The same power doth carry on the work of grace which did begin it in us. Paul was confident of this very thing, of their perseverance in grace on this account. Now herein lieth the stability of the saints, not in the strength of their own resolutions; for our steps are apt to slip after the firmest engagements to God: Ps. lxxiii. 2, 'But as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped;' for fixedness of gracious habits is not from themselves, for we are to 'strengthen the things that remain, and are ready to die,' Rev. iii. 2; but from the power of God, which by promise is engaged for their preservation against all opposition. Now this doth secure God's children so far, that those who are born of God cannot degenerate so as to fall into total impenitency; and it does also condemn our laziness if we do not make use of the grace offered to keep ourselves from sin, and do not make use of the means provided, that we may be fortified against it. There is a waxing and waning grace, and ebbings and flowings in corruption; but God's covenant and paternal love admits of no abatement: our antipathy to sin may abate, but not Christ's compassion to the saints. He hath instituted, not only outward means to confirm us, but still supplieth internal grace to nourish our faith, hope, and love, that they may be lively and strong against sin.

8. If we sin wilfully, the seed of God that remaineth in us, though it be not utterly extinct, yet it is sore battered and bruised, and there is such havoc made in the soul, that it is hard to know whether we have any grace in us, yea or no. We are as if we had none; if there be any, it is best seen first in our sudden recovery; for the time we are as if we had none. Therefore David speaketh as if the work were to begin anew, and his recovery were a kind of second conversion: Ps. li. 10, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.' The grace of the Holy Spirit is so obstructed, and the flood-gate of natural pollution so opened, that it is a kind of creation, or second conversion, to restore the principle of grace to its vigour and power, as if all were to begin again. Indeed it was not so, for he presently added, 'Cast me not away from thy holy presence, and take not thy

Spirit from me.' He had some interest in God still, somewhat of the Spirit left which he did not lose ; though he had sadly fallen from his wonted purity and sincerity, yet he owneth some presence of the Spirit still, and desireth that God would not take it from him, as having never more need of it than at this time. Secondly, If we cannot lie in sin, but by our falls we do much more resolve and strengthen ourselves against sin for the time to come, running to our advocate, and seriously making our peace with God, 1 John ii. 1, and resolve to be more watchful and cautious for the time to come : Ps. li. 6, 'In the inward parts thou shalt make me to know wisdom ;' and Ps. lxxxv. 8, 'Let them not return to folly ;' that is, commit such foolish and inconsiderate acts again ; if it be thus with us, it argueth that the root remaineth, and hath life in it, though the branches be shrewdly rifled and withered ; if they work themselves clean again, as a living spring that purifies itself ; but where sin is made light of, and not truly repented of when committed, there it is not so.

9. That this avoiding of sin is here brought as the most sensible, visible note and character, to distinguish the children of God from the children of the devil : 'He that sinneth is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning : and he that is born of God sinneth not. In this the children of God, and the children of the devil are manifest.' To walk in a sinful course is plainly to entitle ourselves to the devil, who is the eldest sinner, as being the first of the kind ; the most constant sinner, for he sinneth from the beginning, never ceaseth, is never weary of sin ; and the most industrious and painful sinner, for he compasses the earth to and fro to draw men into a rebellion against God ; and therefore he is the father of all those that live in a trade and course of sin. But, on the contrary, he that sinneth not is born of God. God is holy, and the great work of his Spirit is to renew us in holiness and cleanse us from sin ; therefore by committing or avoiding sin we may soon see, yea, the world may see, to whom we belong. And surely it doth not become the children of God to border too near upon the wicked. There should be a broad difference between them and the children of the devil, or else they dishonour their Father, because they come too near the carnal life ; therefore when the two seeds are thus intermingled or blended together, it is a nice and difficult case to distinguish them ; so that either it must be determined against you, that you are not a child of God, or at least you perplex the case, and make it doubtful ; you are too like the ungodly, and Satan hath too much interest in you. Holiness is God's image ; doth it not grieve you that you are so little like him ? By his graces he keepeth possession of you ; if these have not their effect upon you, you dishonour him by professing such a nearness to him, and can so little distinguish yourselves from his enemies. Surely the more nearly you are related to Christ, the more tender you should be of offending and dishonouring him. If Christ hath done his part to difference you from all the rest of the world, and you will not declare the difference, and make it manifest, you harden the world, and they will think that to distinguish between the seeds is factious singularity, not regular zeal ; they hold up their ways with greater pretence, as justified by you, when you are covetous, envious, wrathful, giving to tippling or vain company.

10. The evidence of this character, and as it concerneth the satisfaction of our consciences, is made to consist in two things—(1.) That he that is born of God doth not sin ; (2.) Cannot sin ; and both expressions contain great arguments in them.

[1.] That he doth not sin. It is not to be understood that he doth not sin at all, for the contrary is verified by sad and lamentable experience ; nor yet it doth not limit and set out the bounds so exactly and plainly as that it may be stated in the word. If the scripture had set down how much sin is consistent with grace, we should then have gone as far as we could, and would not so strictly stand upon our guard as now we are obliged to do after such a warning and intimation. That the new creature doth not, cannot sin ; the very intent of these expressions is to make us afraid universally of all sin ; for the infirmities of the saints may be distinguished from the presumptions of the wicked, otherwise we could have no certainty of our sincerity, and the scripture would not distinguish between the spots of God's children and the spots of the perverse, Deut. xxxii. 5. Surely as the priests of the law had direction to distinguish between the leprosy that had malignity in it, and made the people utterly unclean, and the leprosy that did not fret the flesh, and made them only unclean for the present, so the ministers of the gospel have direction to distinguish between weaknesses and wilful failings. Yet there is great difficulty in the case ; partly because some sins, which in their nature are infirmities, may prove iniquities in the committer ; as suppose vain thoughts, idle words, distractions in prayer, if a man abandoneth himself to them, the case is altered ; and partly because the same sin may be an infirmity in one man which is not in another, who hath more knowledge and helps of grace ; and partly because that may be an infirmity at one time which is not at another, as it cometh backed with temptations, which make such a sudden and forcible impression upon the will that there is no time of deliberation, but its consent is precipitated, whereas at other times the sin may be withstood and resisted ; and partly because that which was an infirmity at first may afterwards commence into iniquity, as when a man hath sinned away his spiritual strength, broken the power of his will, lulled his conscience asleep by some foregoing sin ; partly because it is hard to determine how long sensual passions may keep the soul from sober consideration. Therefore our best way is to keep up a constant care and solicitous desire to please God in all things, at least to keep the soul from settling in a trade and course of vanity and sin.

[2.] The other part of the note, 'That he cannot sin ;' that is, the constitution of his soul, or the settled purpose and habitual bent of his heart, is more against sin than for it ; and then it will follow that his constant course or the scope and tenor of his life is accordingly ; for where sin is more hated than loved, and men are sincerely willing to avoid it, they will be watchful against it, groan under the burden of it, seek to prevent and weaken it by all holy means, as I shall show in the next verse. But here a notable argument ariseth. If we should plead, You can avoid sin, at least more sin than you do, if you were sincerely willing, we should plead strongly, and leave you wholly under blame for your transgressions. It is a certain truth that a man hath power

to do more good than he doth, and avoid more evil than he doth avoid. But the Spirit of God puts the argument into other words, of a higher import and signification, 'You cannot sin;' as if the business were not whether you could avoid sin, but whether you can commit it, being thus constituted, and having these advantages of grace which you have. You complain, I cannot renounce this bewitching lust, whereas the debate lieth here, how you can live in it, and lie under the power of it; which should rouse up christians out of their laziness and cowardly fears.

Use 2. Directions in this case.

1. The general mortification must go before the particular. The general mortification is when the first thorough change is wrought in us, and 'We put off the body of the sins of the flesh,' Col. ii. 11; for then the heart is fixed against sin. But the particular mortification is when some particular lust or sin is more struck at. Now the one must go before the other, because else all that we do is but like stopping a hole in a ruinous fabric, that is ready to drop upon our heads, or to make much ado about a cut finger when we have a mortal disease upon us. Besides, particular mortification dependeth on the general, as our avoiding sin doth on our being born of God: Col. iii. 9, 'Put off all these, anger, wrath, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouths, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds.' Seeing you have put off all corruption, allow yourselves in no one sin. Alas! to set against a particular sin before you set against the whole body of sin, it is but to put a new patch upon a torn garment, and so to make the rent the worse; or to lop off a branch or two while the root and trunk remaineth in full life and vigour, and so it sprouteth the more for cutting. Therefore look first after the general work, that you are born again; when sin is stabbed at the heart, the particular branches and limbs die by degrees.

2. Consider where the new nature is in most danger, there is *vitium sæculi*, *vitium gentis*, and *vitium persone*.

[1.] The fault of the age and nation, where sin being the more common, it is the less odious. Sins are in reputation where usually practised, and the inundation and torrent of examples carry men away strangely: Gal. ii. 13, 'Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation.' Though a good man could easily condemn the practice of the rude multitude, and be as Noah, upright in a corrupt age and time, Gen. vi. 9. But when those that we honour and esteem for godliness, have adopted such an error or such a sin into their practice, the error and sin is authorised, and we run into it one after another, as sheep do out of the pasture by the gap or breach in the hedge made by others that have gone before them. Oh, take heed of this; be followers of none no further than they are of Christ.

[2.] The fault of the person. We must labour most to mortify our particular sin: Ps. xviii. 23, 'I was upright before thee, and kept myself from mine iniquity.' Some that we may call ours, by temper, evil custom, course of employment. Now these should be the more mortified for their own sake, and for the sake of others; for the master-lusts, like great diseases, seldom go alone. Sometimes it is worldliness, or an inordinate love of riches, which gaineth such interest in the hearts

of many, that they set light by Christ and his precious benefits, and thoughts of God and heaven grow unwelcome and unpleasing to them, rather desire wealth than God's favour, do not lay up treasures in heaven, but value an estate by the possession rather than the use. Some men's distemper is a sensual disposition; their hearts are carried after all the alluring vanities of the world, and are basely surprised by the baits of the flesh, cannot deny themselves, or govern their fancies and appetites. Others' distemper is pride, when they mind high things, know little of that poverty of spirit recommended in the gospel, and is reconcilable with a mean condition; they can hardly live with any but those that will honour and please them. Now the darling sin may be known by the frequency of its assaults, its power over other sins, thoughts that haunt us in duty; and every wise man knoweth where his temptations lie most.

3. Remember the lesser acts of sin make way for greater, as the lesser sticks set the great ones on fire. As in anger; give way to the distempers of it, and from folly it groweth to downright madness, Eccles. x. 13. So for envy, if it break out into detraction, it will make us malignant, and undermine those whom we envy, and mischievous malice is the final product. So for pride and self-esteem, let it break out into boasting, and it will breed contention, Prov. xiii. 10. Let the love of the world make us immoderate in the pursuit of it, then God is neglected, charity omitted, and it will in time draw us to unjust gain. So for sensuality; pamper the flesh with all the delights it craveth, and in time men will be scandalous in their apparel, meat, or drink. Let lust break out into wantonness, and wantonness will produce downright uncleanness; lusts will beget acts, and these acts multiply into deeds of a more foul and heinous nature. Therefore stop betimes; when you run down-hill there is little hope of staying yourselves.

4. Renew the inclination of the new nature by the means appointed thereunto, especially the Lord's supper, which is the food of the new nature, wherein we remember Christ crucified, and we remember him, that the end of his death may be accomplished, which is, that, 'we may die unto sin, and live unto righteousness,' 1 Peter ii. 24. He purchased the grace whereby this might be accomplished, and wherein we renew our covenant with God, for the strengthening our baptismal vow. Baptism is an avowed death to sin, and here we renew it again.

SERMON XVI.

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.—1 JOHN iii. 10.

IN these words you have the conclusion of the whole discourse, together with a transition to another. The former discourse was about abstain-