

SERMONS UPON EZEKIEL XVIII. 23.

SERMON I.

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways, and live?—
EZEK. xviii. 23.

THERE is nothing so necessary to draw us to repentance as good thoughts of God. In the first temptation the devil sought to weaken the reputation and credit of God's goodness in the hearts of our first parents, as if he were harsh, severe, and envious in restraining them from the tree of knowledge, and the fruit that was so fair to see too, Gen. iii. He layeth his first battery against the persuasion of God's goodness and kindness to man; if he could once bring them to doubt of that, other things would succeed the more easily. So still he laboureth to raise jealousies in our hearts against God. David was fain to hold to this principle when the prosperity of the wicked was a temptation to him; yet 'God is good to Israel,' Ps. lxxiii. 1. That was the truth which the temptation did oppose, that God is good to his people. With carnal men he prevaileth the more easily. The blind pagan world had this for a maxim, τὸ δαιμόνιον φθονερόν, the gods were envious, and took no pleasure in the felicity of man, and therefore looked for some notable cross after some eminent triumph or applause for any worthy undertaking. In the bosom of the church this conceit possesseth many men's hearts, that God is harsh and severe, and delighteth more in our ruin than salvation, and therefore they cast off all care of their soul's welfare. Oh, what a monstrous picture do men draw of God in their thoughts, as if he were a tyrant, or an inexorable judge, that gave no leave for repentance, or left any hope of pardon to the guilty! Thus in the prophet's days there were some that thought they must die and be miserable, and none could help it. They had a proverb, that 'The fathers had eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth were set on edge.' They must smart for their fathers' sins, whether they repented, yea or no. Therefore God standeth upon his justification and vindication from so foul a surmise. Here you have a part of his purgation; 'Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, saith the Lord God?'

The words are propounded by way of interrogation; in which form of speech there is more evidence, efficacy, life, and convincing force; *q d.*, Ye know it is evident that I have no such desire, no such pleasure. It dareth not enter into your thoughts that I should take pleasure in

the bare destruction of the creature. This pleasure of God is expressed—

1. Negatively, what he delights not in, ‘Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?’

2. Positively, what he doth delight in, ‘That he should turn from his ways, and live.’ God had rather his conversion. In both are implied two great truths; as, *omnis questio supponit unum et inquirat aliud*; namely, the connection between sin and death, repentance and life, wicked and die, return and live. God doth not obscurely null or disown his judgment and execution according to that law, or give you any hopes that his law shall not be executed, but telleth you what he taketh pleasure in; rather in the conversion than in the destruction of the creature. The first question implieth a strong negation, that he doth not delight in the mere slaughter of the wicked. The latter question is a strong affirmation; only remember in both parts that these things are spoken by way of comparison. Repentance is more acceptable to God, as an holy God, than sin and wickedness; their conversion than their disobedience. And as God is a merciful God, and loveth all the creatures which he hath made, so their life is more pleasing than their death; a thing more acceptable in itself to such a being as God is.

[1.] I might observe the immediate tie that is between sin and death, as between the cause and the effect, the work and the wages; how fitly these things are suited by God’s wisdom, which disposeth all things into their proper places. On the other side, the connection between repentance and life, but not of its own merit, but God’s grace. But that argument hath a more proper place elsewhere.

[2.] That the repentance and salvation of the wicked is more pleasing to God than their death and damnation. The point is clear in the text, and may be elsewhere proved, if we take God’s word or oath. His word, or simple affirmation: Ezek. xviii. 32, ‘For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye;’ that is, he hath no delight that any man should die and perish in his impenitency. It is not all one to God whether ye repent or no, whether you behave yourselves well or ill. Though they are sure to suffer, yet God doth not take delight in killing and destroying: Ezek. xxxiii. 11, ‘Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; why will ye die, O house of Israel?’ *Ne vivam*—Let me not live. We take a man’s oath; it is *πέρας ἀντιλογίας*, ‘the end of all strife,’ Heb. vi. 16. Our prejudices against God’s nature are so deep and inveterate that he needeth to interpose an oath.

To manage this argument with profit I will show—(1.) How God delighteth not in the death of a sinner, but in his conversion to life; (2.) How contrary it is to the nature of God to be otherwise affected; (3.) Give you some proofs of God’s having pleasure in our conversion and salvation, rather than our sin and destruction; (4.) The uses.

1. How God delights not in the death of a sinner; for it seemeth a contradiction to what is written: Prov. i. 26, ‘I will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear cometh;’ Ezek. vii.

8, 9, 'Now will I pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee, and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. Mine eyes shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy wages;' Ezek. v. 13, 'Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted.' Men are eased when their anger is executed. And it seemeth also to be contrary to the course of God's providence. If God hath more pleasure in the conversion of sinners than their destruction, why are there not more converted than we find to be? The greatest part of mankind are perishing in their unbelief and impenitency.

Ans. (1.) I might answer, that this text speaketh not absolutely, but comparatively. God rejoiceth in the execution of his justice, as well as in all his other works; but if you compare things with things, he rejoiceth rather in acts of mercy than in acts of vengeance. His disposition inclineth him to mercy rather than to wrath: 'Mercy pleaseth him, Micah vii. 18; and mercy rejoiceth over judgment in the conflict. Justice is *alienum opus*, 'his strange work,' Isa. xxviii. 21; Lam. iii. 33, 'He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men;' not with his heart. Mercy, like live honey, droppeth of its own accord. He is forced to the other; it is wrested from him. Though the properties are equally infinite in God, yet they do diversely exert themselves towards men as to the effects. Now the world is upon its trial. God's primary end is the conversion of a sinner; his secondary end the honour of his vindictive justice.

(2.) I might answer, that this place doth not speak of events, but constitutions; not what shall fall out, but what is fitly ordered; not what is secretly purposed in his decree, but what is by the sentence of his law declared to the creature, and this contrary to their thoughts. They thought it was all one whether they sinned or repented; they thought God had such a delight in killing and destroying that he would not save the penitent nor accept of their repentance. Now God in answer to this showeth how unfeignedly he should receive them to mercy, in case of repentance, that they may be saved upon God's terms. But to prevent all objections and misapprehensions in God, we must distinguish of the will of God, and a threefold resolution which is in him.

1. The will and pleasure of God; it is either taken for his simple complacency in things according to their worth, value, and degree of goodness that is in their natures, or for his purpose and effectual resolution to accomplish what he liketh. Liking and approbation in man is one thing, and choice and resolved pursuit is another. God may be said to like the salvation of all men, yet not to intend it with an efficacious will. Of his efficacious will he speaketh: Isa. xli. 10, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.' So that if God took no pleasure in the death of the wicked, that is, were resolved to do all that he can to hinder it, no wicked man would be condemned or die the second death. It is a thing more pleasing in itself, as conversion is better than disobedience, and salvation than destruction. The complacency of God in things is according to their nature and degree of goodness. He is unfeignedly pleased with the salvation of men.

2. The next distinction; there is a threefold relation in God; he

may be considered—(1.) As an absolute lord ; (2.) As a law-giver ; and, (3.) As a judge.

[1.] As an absolute lord, that hath grace at his own disposal : Mat. xx. 15, ‘ Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own ? ’ He may give it as he will, and withhold it as he will. Now the pleasure of God as a supreme lord is his efficacious resolved will, and respecteth events what shall be rather than what should be ; and so God willeth not the salvation of all ; that is to say, doth not all that he can to procure it.

[2.] As a lawgiver ; and so he declareth his pleasure, that is, his liking and disliking of things, by the laws he maketh, and the sanctions annexed thereunto. So he hath showed us what is good and pleasing in his sight ; innocence in the first covenant, and repentance in the second, and hath annexed to both the promise of life. This is the primary intention of the law, the obedience and happiness of the creatures ; but in case of refusal he hath threatened death. Now that which the lawgiver first and principally aimed at is the obedience of his laws. He doth not desire that men should incur the penalty ; that is only to bind the laws that he hath made for the common good. Other things he willeth and purposeth, but not principally : Deut. x. 12-15, ‘ And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to love him, and serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul ; to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes which I command thee for thy good ? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens is the Lord thy God’s, the earth also with all that therein is ; only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people as it is this day.’

[3.] As a judge that is to pass sentence according to the law so made. The relation of a judge in the exercise of that office hath respect to the law kept or broken, and accordingly he resolveth on rewards and punishments ; and in this sense we may say that he taketh pleasure in the death of the wicked. He rejoiceth and is comforted, in the places alleged before ; that is, he hath decreed to punish the impenitent, and they are sure to suffer his vengeance ; yet his end is not properly the destruction of the creature, but the manifestation of his justice. So the apostle telleth us God raised up Pharaoh that his glory might be manifested upon him : Rom. ix. 17, ‘ For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.’ I say, he doth not simply rejoice in the destruction of the creature, but the discovery of his own justice and glory in their destruction. The sum of all is this, though he doth not all that he can do, as an absolute lord and disposer of grace, yet he doth all that belongeth to him to do as a lawgiver ; and that not only in the first covenant, when he gave us an holy and innocent nature, and made a righteous law established by promises and threatenings, and adds penalties and rewards, but much more in the new covenant, when he did that for us which he was not bound to do, namely, in that he did provide us a saviour, and open a door of hope for us, and warn us of our danger, and called us to repent and believe in Christ, even every creature : Mark xvi. 16, ‘ He that believeth shall be saved, but he that

believeth not shall be damned,' with a promise of pardon, life, and salvation, which he will surely make good out of his abundant mercy. And on the other side, threateneth death and damnation on those that unthankfully reject his offer and continue in their sins; yea, he manifesteth the more grace and goodwill to our salvation, and that he is more ready to pardon than to punish, in that he waiteth so long on the sinner's choice: Rom. ix. 22, 'What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath filled to destruction?' He tarries the sinner's leisure till the day of patience be quite spent ere he executeth this threatening of the new covenant; and offereth men all this while many helps and advantages, enticing them by his mercies, awing them by his judgments, persuading them by his word, drawing them by his Spirit, knocking at the door of their hearts by the serious impressions of his grace, and awakening them by the stings and checks of their own consciences; all which are so many signs and evidences that he taketh no pleasure in the death of sinners, as the prejudiced world thinketh, but doth all that becometh him to do, as a prudent and gracious lawgiver (though not all that he could do as an almighty God) and sovereign disposer of his grace; and if he should do that, the world would never be put upon choice and trial, and obedience would be a matter of necessity and constraint, not of willing acceptation; and men may as well quarrel at this as that he hath not made them all angels.

II. How contrary it is to the nature of God to be otherwise affected.

1. It would be contrary to the wisdom of God simply to desire the destruction and death of the creature; for what wisdom can there be in that to mar his chiefest work. Would it become the wisdom of God to have raised such a creature as man is, with such faculties and endowments, merely because he would destroy him? We do not dispute of his absolute right and authority to do with his creature as he pleaseth; nor of his justice, when man abuseth his talents, and is unthankful to his Creator. We speak now of his wisdom. Will a wise man raise a curious structure with a great deal of cost and art, merely that he may pull it down again, as children build houses with cards to blow them down in an instant with one breath? Certainly the making of a second covenant showeth that it would not stand with the wisdom of God that the world of mankind should be wholly destroyed as soon as it was made; for then God might have broken off and dissolved all things; but it would not suit with his wisdom, and therefore he would try the creatures he had made with other means.

2. His goodness will not permit him to take pleasure in evil as evil, such as is the sin and destruction of the creature. They were accounted monsters of men that glutted their eyes with cruelties; and can we imagine that God will make sport with the eternal ruin of his creatures? Prov. xii. 10, 'A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.' The more good any man is, the less pleased with the torment of any creature, not of the smallest vermin. It was noted of Domitian as a piece of cruelty that he took pleasure in tormenting flies; and can we imagine it of God, that he delights in the torment, death, and destruction of what he hath made?

3. His mercy; how can it stand with his mercy to desire or take

pleasure in the misery of his creature? We read much of his merciful nature; where he proclaimed his name: Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, 'And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord thy God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.' In this description there is more spoken of his mercy than his justice. First, his mercy is described, and then his justice. Justice is only added to invite men to take hold of mercy, and to show that justice is never exercised but in avenging the quarrel of abused mercy. So in the prophet's exclamation: Micah vii. 18, 'Who is a god like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.' We may compare God with all other gods for any of his perfections, but chiefly for his mercy. The devil held the world in subjection by the tyranny of fears and torments, but God exercises mercy: Exod. xx. 6, 'Showing mercy to thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.' Therefore we ought to conceive of him that he can have no pleasure in our death, for mercy is an attribute that inclineth God to succour them that are in miseries. How then can our destruction be more acceptable to God than our salvation?

4. It would destroy all that natural reverence that man hath of God, and hope of pardon from him, which is the first motive to incline sinful creatures (such as we are) to come to him, and would choose the suspicions to prevail above our hopes, and so in despair we should hate God, and slight his service. In the conduct of the affairs of the universe there are mixed effects of God's justice and goodness; the one begets fear, the other hope. Indeed, fear is more natural to carnal men, because a bad conscience is very suspicious. Our observance of God's benefits is not so great as the sense of our own ill-deservings is quick and lively; therefore our serious hopes are weaker than our fears while we are in our natural estate. Now it would feed our prejudices if we did not strongly assert God's delight in our salvation more than in our destruction, and convince men of it; for as their fears increase above their hope, their hatred of God increaseth. *Oderunt quem metuunt*, and *Quem odimus, periisse cupimus*. Whom men fear they hate, and whom they hate they wish he were out of the way. When we only dread God for his vengeance, we keep off from him, and the least desire of repentance and amendment of life would never enter into our souls. A dissolute youth hateth his master that would scourge him for his debaucheries; but the hope of pardon, that inviteth men to return. 'God is good.' He made all good; he preserveth and maintaineth all: 'His tender mercy is over all his works,' Ps. cxlv. 9. We have no cause to suspect him. Notwithstanding our continual offences, he doth not cease to do good to us: Ps. cxxx. 4, 'There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.'

III. Wherein God hath showed that he taketh pleasure in our conversation rather than in our ruin and destruction.

1. In that, when we had forfeited the mercies of our creation, he was mindful of our sin and misery, and gave us warning of it when we were drowned in worldly cares and pleasures, and thought of no such matter.

He that warneth before he striketh, certainly he hath more mind to save than to strike. God might have left the sleepy, sinful, and secure world alone, till they had wasted away all their precious time in following their fleshly pleasures and the course of this deceitful world, till they had plunged themselves into their everlasting estate, and did awaken when it was too late, and then had nothing to do but despairingly and with fruitless cries bewail their past negligence; but the Lord took pity on us, and warneth us of the danger ere it come upon us. All his business is to make us mindful of our latter end: Deut. xxxii. 29, 'Oh that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!' Rom. vi. 21, 'What fruit had you then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death;' Jer. xvii. 11, 'At his end he shall be a fool.' By his word and by checks of conscience: Ps. xix. 11, 'Moreover, by them is thy servant warned.' God seeth how you forget him and your latter end, make light of everlasting things, as men that have no sense of their danger; therefore he telleth you that the end of those things is death. When he seeth you bold in sin, fearless and careless of your souls, he mindeth you of the dreadful end that is at hand, when your sorrows must begin. He that telleth you so plainly why it is: Luke iii. 7, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath that is to come?' As Reuben said, Gen. xlii. 22, 'Spake I not unto you?'

2. Not only warned you of your danger, but hath given you means to escape it if you will, a new covenant wherein he hath offered you free pardon upon the terms of faith and repentance, and set heaven before you to call you off from your carnal vanities. It is the great business of the word to call men to faith and repentance. John preached, Mat. iii. 2, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;' and Christ, Mark i. 14, 15, 'Now after John was in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God; and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.' And the apostles, what was the tenor of their commission? Luke xxiv. 47, 'And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.' Surely God would not have given such directions, made such promises, found out such a way for our recovery, but that he taketh pleasure in our conversion rather than our destruction.

3. In providing a redeemer to ransom us from the death which we had deserved, one that should keep up the authority of the law, and yet a way made to save the sinner: Isa. liii. 4-6, 'Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted: but he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.' Would God have bought us at so dear a rate, even with the blood of his own Son Jesus Christ? 'He gave him a ransom for us all,' 1 Tim. ii. 6. If he delighted in the death of sinners, he would not have been at such cost to save them.

4. With what passionateness and meltingness of expression he woeth men to return: Deut. v. 29, 'Oh that there were such an heart in them,

that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it may be well with them, and with their children for ever ;' Hosea xi. 8, 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together;' Isa. lvii. 16, 'For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made;' Ps. lxxxi. 13, 'Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!' Mat. xxiii. 37, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee! how often would I have gathered thy children together, as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not?' Luke xix. 42, 'If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes.' When a servant hath provoked his master, or a son behaved himself ungraciously to his father, will a master sue to his servant, or a father to his son for reconciliation? yea, will not an equal that hath a quarrel with his equal hold it a great disgrace and disparagement to make any means that the quarrel may be taken up? they keep at a distance, and look that the party offending should seek first; yet such an affection God beareth to us that he expostulates, prayeth, entreateth that we would return and be reconciled.

5. By the commission given to his ministers: 2 Cor. v. 20, 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead be reconciled to God.' He hath appointed some to call us to faith and repentance, and to quicken us to make ready for eternal life. He has appointed men in our nature to offer you mercy, and teach you the way to eternal life; to warn every man, to instruct every man; men of the same nature, the same affections, the same temptations; who have advantage of familiar converse with us to help, comfort, and quicken you upon all occasions.

6. The course of his providence. Mercies to entice you to him: Rom. ii. 4, 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' We might long ago have been in hell. God might have taken you away in the very act of sin; but he is pleased to use correctives. *Affligit, ut non affligat*—He afflicts that he may not afflict. He sent a tempest after Jonah. He sets our cornfield on fire to bring us to him, as Absalom did Joab's.

7. In the ready entertainment of returning sinners. Ahab's counterfeit humiliation had a temporal reward, 1 King xxi. from 19, to 29, but much more where it is real. Though sinners have done infinite wrong to his holiness, yet upon repentance, and as soon as they begin to submit, mercy embraceth and huggeth them, as if no breach had been: Luke xv. 20, 'But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and fell on his neck and kissed him;' Isa. lxv. 24, 'Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear;' Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin;' Jer. xxxi. 18–20, 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised; as a bullock unac-

customed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned. Surely after that I was turned, I repented, and after I was instructed, I smote upon the thigh. I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still, because my bowels are troubled for him. I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.' He comes apace to the sinner; is exceeding swift, like a roe on the mountains, Cant. i. 8. He is ready to support us with early comforts. We return to a father as the prodigal when he returned.

SERMON II.

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways, and live?—
EZEK. xviii. 23.

FROM the words I have observed this doctrine, That the repentance and salvation of the wicked is more pleasing to God than their death and damnation.

1. I have showed you how God delighteth not in the death of a sinner.

2. How contrary it is to the nature of God to be otherwise affected.

3. I have given you proofs of God's having more pleasure in our conversion and salvation, than our sin and destruction.

4. We now come to the uses.

Use 1. Of information.

First, That God is not the cause of man's destruction, but it is man's own fault if they be not converted and saved. That men are apt to charge God foolishly appeareth by that monition, Hosea iii. 9, 'O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help.' But more expressly by Prov. xix. 3, 'The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.' But the blame cannot lie in God; he doth all that seemeth fit to be done as a lawgiver and governor of the world. There is nothing wanting on his part: Isa. v. 4, 'What could I have done more to my vineyard that I have not done to it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes.' From first to last we may plead the cause of God with you. God made man upright, gave him a righteous law, which, when broken, that all hopes might not be cut off, he sent his Son: Rom. viii. 3, 'God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,' to be the foundation of a new covenant; offered you grace in him, pardon of all your sins past, to help you in the course of obedience for time to come; moved you by powerful arguments, not by low and cheap considerations, but those of the greatest weight, the joys of heaven, the torments of hell; called upon you often by the ministry, knocked at your hearts as well

as your ears by his Spirit; waited for your amendment for many years, tried you by mercies if they could melt you, by afflictions if they would reduce you to a sense of your duty. But all this will not do; yet you are still alive, and these means continued. What shall God do more? Now why are you not converted? Others are wrought upon by the same means and turned to the Lord, and have entered in by the strait gate, and framed their desire to walk in the narrow way. They have not offers more rich, or free, or particular. God hath not told them of a hotter hell or a better heaven, or another or a more taking gospel. God speaketh to you and them in the same terms, with the same grace and favour, and maketh the door wide enough to get in. Why are you not converted? Did God cut off all hopes from you, and tell you that your repentance would do you no good? No; certainly the fault is in your own obstinacy and impenitence: Ps. lxxxii. 11, 'Israel would none of me;' Luke xix. 14, 'We will not have this man to reign over us;' Jer. ii. 17, 'Hast thou not procured this to thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God when he led thee by the way?' It was not his leaving you, but your leaving him. You would not try what you could do with these common means. And will you after all this bring a charge against God and say, If you be damned, you cannot help it? It was God delighted in your destruction? What have you to allege against him?

1. Is it because you would continue in your sins and yet be saved? But God hath decreed the wicked shall be damned, and hath made a law that whosoever will not accept of his grace, but continue in their sins, shall perish for ever: Rev. xxi. 27, 'And there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.' This is to tax the wisdom of the lawgiver, and the whole way of his government in the world. Must God be accounted cruel because he taketh that course which all governors take to exact duty, upon penalties and rewards? Is there not a mercy and an help in that he will bind you to your duty by so strict a way of engagement? Are not these the 'cords of a man,' Hosea xi. 4. A way of dealing suitable to reasonable natures? Do not men even renounce humanity in excepting against such a curse, fear and love being the two things that excite us to anything? Or is it because these rewards and penalties are eternal? Is there not the more help, the more weighty the considerations are that move us? And can they be supposed to have any inclination to virtuous and holy living that will not be drawn by so great a benefit as eternal happiness, and warned by so great a danger as eternal misery? If God did enforce duty, and conceal the importance of it as to your personal happiness or misery, were not then the objection against his proceeding more rational? And besides, is it not fit that God should deal according to the excellency of his being in his way of government? That his laws should be more spiritual, since he is a judge of spirits? His punishments and rewards must be greater and eternal, since he liveth for ever. Earthly princes must promise and threaten as their being and power will permit, lest their authority be made ridiculous by affixing penalties which they cannot inflict. As your obedience to God is built upon an higher right, so his enforcements should be proportionable. The power of earthly princes is

temporal, and reacheth only to the body ; they die, and can reach no further than the outward man ; but God liveth for ever : therefore, according to the sublimity of his nature, so must his punishments be more terrible. Your offence is greater, so is your punishment. Or what is it that your cavil lieth against ? Not so much the making of the law with penalties, as the executing of it. Would you think so basely and blasphemously of God that he should not satisfy his word lest such as you should suffer ? Will it stand with his wisdom to make a law and never execute it ? or with his truth to threaten punishment and break his word, and cause it to become a vain scarecrow ? Must he rule the world by a law, and say that to awe sinners which he never meaneth to do ? with his goodness, that the worst should fare as well as the best ? that he should suffer a sort of sinful creatures to despise his mercy, abuse his patience, trample his laws underfoot, and after all this escape unpunished ? Oh, consider how unreasonable it is that God should alter the tenor of his covenant to gratify you in your sins ? Surely it would be a bold demand if any creature should ask it of God that he should turn day into night, and night into day at their pleasure, to gratify their sports. It is bolder by far that he should alter all his wise counsels by which he governeth the world ; to make the way to hell serve for the way to heaven ; that they may wanton it in their sins, and please their senses without control. Therefore your hearts should not fret against the Lord because he hath appointed such a punishment. You love the bait, and yet complain of the hook.

2. Is it because you would have God force you to be good whether you will or no, and by an absolute constraining power drive you out of your flesh-pleasing course ? Consider how unbecoming it is to the wisdom of God that men should be virtuous and holy by necessity, and not by free choice. Virtue then were no virtue ; not a moral, but a natural property, as burning is to fire ; and it were no more praiseworthy for us to mind heavenly things than it is for a stone to move downward or a spark upward. It is true God must make us willing, but willing we must be. Now there is no such thing on your parts, when you wilfully refuse the helps God affordeth : Acts xiii. 46, ' It was necessary that the word of God should have been first spoken to you, but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the gentiles.' At least you do not apply your hearts to meet with God, and to improve means and mercies, providences and helps. You refuse his help, and then God justly forsaketh you ; for he forsaketh none but those that forsake him first : 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, ' If thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever ; ' 2 Chron. xv. 2, ' If you seek him, he will be found of you ; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.' Did you improve your helps, and beg God's grace, and carry on his common work as far as you can, then it were another matter ; but you break off with God.

3. Is it because God hath given you such a mutable will, and an appetite and desire to those contentments that besot your senses ? God that hath given appetite, he hath given reason to guide it, and scripture to inform reason, and the Spirit to apply scripture. Your appetite was given you as a servant, not as a master. Adam might

have stood as well as fell. He had a mutable will, but more helps to stand than occasions to fall. What of corruption came in since the fall, man must bear the blame of it, not God. If Adam threw away original righteousness, God took it not away. He could not leave us original righteousness, no more than a condemned man can leave his goods to his children.

4. Is God to blame for leaving temptations in the world? Man's foolish heart thinketh so: Gen. iii. 12, 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.' She was given as an help, not a snare. The poison is in the spider, not in the flower. It is our naughty lustful hearts and inordinate affections that make our abode in the world dangerous: 2 Peter i. 4, 'The corruption that is in the world through lust.' And therefore, 'Let no man say, when he is tempted, he is tempted of God: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed,' James i. 13, 14. We are more ready to entertain temptations, than providence is to offer them to us; for we seek them out when they are wanting. All temptations work, not by constraining efficacy, but objectively, and by enticing persuasion; and have we not more earnest persuasions to be good, to serve God, and forsake sin? Persuasions to love God are as frequent as temptations to desert him to please the flesh. If you cannot deny the devil and the flesh, how can you deny God, who pleadeth with you with better arguments than the devil, the world, and the flesh can? by endless joys and caseless torments. The temptations from worldly comforts arise from your naughty hearts. You should thank God for his mercies, and use them as cords of love, rather than snares of sin. The creatures in themselves are God's spokesmen: it is we make them proctors for sin. Is not God and Christ a more lovely object than all the pleasures, profits, and honours of the world? These things do not force our will; they do but draw our consent; and surely more lovely things, and more apt to do that, are those things which God hath propounded to you in the covenant of grace. If the devil entice you, it is because you were more willing to hearken to him than to God who warned you of his wiles, and told you of your danger, and invited you to a better happiness. Satan can but solicit, not constrain. He findeth matter to work upon, or else you would not easily give entertainment to his suggestions.

The devil findeth the fire kindled, he only bloweth up the flame. Well, then, you see from all this that God is not to blame. He willet not the destruction of his creatures, but their salvation. But man is naught, and would fain transfer his guilt upon others. When Zopyrus had cut his own nose and lips, he gave out that the Babylonians had so barbarously used him. We ruin ourselves, and lay the fault on others, yea, on God himself. It is said in the gospel, 'The enemies of a man are those of his own house;' so we harbour these snakes in our bosoms that will sting us to death.

Use 2. Of exhortation.

To exhort you to repent and turn to the Lord. The Lord desireth not the destruction of a sinner. God doth not deny the sentence, or retract the law, only it is not his delight. Some abuse it to hopes of impunity, or at least to delay.

First, To hopes of impunity. Though God doth not with an antecedent will desire the death of a sinner, yet with a consequent will he doth, upon supposition of their sin and obstinate rebellion against him. Will you then grow the bolder in sinning because of God's mercy? This is to suck poison out of the sweetest flower. 'He will by no means clear the guilty,' Exod. xxxvii. 6; 'He will wound the hairy scalp of all such as go on in their trespasses,' Ps. lxxviii. 21. The pit is a-digging; sentence is given, but not executed, Ecces. viii. 11; condemned already, John iii. 18; forbearance is not remission: Rom. ix. 22, 'He endureth with much long-suffering, the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.' Here is suffering, long-suffering, and much long-suffering, yet all this while fitted to destruction. God giveth them a long day, but reckoneth with them at last. A man may be reprieved when sentence is gone out against him, and at last executed. We are not sure of a day's respite. The warrant for execution is signed, as well as sentence passed. All is forfeited; will you not be affected with this woful condition? What, condemned men, and never moved at it! there is but a step between you and death. Sentence is passed; God forbeareth the execution, and will you rest only upon that? it is but *I lictor, obnubito capus*. It is but one word from God's mouth, and they will cover thy face as they did Haman's and despatch thee presently. That little space that is given is not given to frolic away in sins and carnal pleasures, but for repentance, and making sure your salvation: Rev. ii. 21, 'I gave her space to repent, and she repented not.' God is bending his bow, and whetting his sword, if they turn not: God is angry with the wicked every day, Ps. vii. 11; their pit is a-digging, Ps. xciv. 12. Admire God's patience, and make good use of it. Build not thy hopes of heaven upon it. Sue for his forgiveness. Forbearance may be the portion of his enemies; forgiveness is the portion of his children. Punishment may be respited for a time, and then execution. Oh, therefore, do not make an ill use of God's unwillingness to strike; we know not the number of God's calls. See what is the right use we should make of it: Ezek. xviii. 32, 'I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God, wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.' Some abuse it to another purpose. When we tell men how ready the Lord is to receive them, this doth but make men delay their repentance, and grow the bolder in sinning. Oh, therefore, now turn to the Lord. If a malefactor arraigned at the bar should perceive by any speech or gesture, sign or token, any inclination in the judge to show mercy, how would he work upon that advantage? what suit, what means would he make for his life? how would he importune all his friends to entreat for him; fall down upon his knees, and beg for his life? God maketh an overture of his mercy; discovereth a desire to pardon you, yea, he stretcheth out his hands all the day long; why do we not make means to him? Time was when the flaming sword was in the way, and the curse of God's law would have kept thee back, if thou hadst been never so willing to turn to God; all that thou couldst do could never have procured the pardon of thy sins past, if thou hadst never so much lamented and reformed them; but this impediment is taken out of the way, and 'God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not

imputing their trespasses to them. But that this exhortation may not be lost, let us consider what this turning is; whether we have turned, yea, or no; whether we do not yet need a further turning.

1. What this turning is. We shall know that by three propositions which contain the whole sum of the christian faith.

[1.] That God is man's chiefest good and last end; and unless he be so to every one of us, we cannot be saved: Ps. iv. 6, 7, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.'

[2.] That there is no way of coming to God, and enjoying him everlastingly, but by Christ: John xiv. 6, 'Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.'

[3.] There is no way of enjoying communion with Christ, but in a constant uniform course of holiness and obedience: 1 John i. 6, 7, 'If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin;' Heb. xii. 14, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Therefore this turning that we may live everlastingly consists in three things—(1.) In a turning from the creature to God; (2.) From self to Christ; (3.) From sin to holiness, and herein lieth the great work of grace. Let me a little evince the necessity of these three things.

(1.) That there must be a turning from the creature to God. Here is man's original deviation, his lapse and fall from God to the creature, and by repentance we return to God again, as our chief good and last end. That appeareth partly by the end of our creation. Man was made for God, for the glorifying and enjoying of him: the very constitution of his soul showeth it. There are three sorts of beings; angels, that are pure spirits without flesh, made for heaven, and the company of God, not for earth. Brutes that are made flesh without immortal souls, made for earth, not for heaven; and man that is of a middle nature between both these, that hath a fleshly substance, and an immortal soul: so that he was made partly for earth, and partly for heaven, as partaking of both. A body that was made out of the dust of the earth, and a soul that came down from the superior world, and must return thither again. Now these two things must be sorted according to the dignity of the parts of which man consisteth. The soul being the better part, the good of the soul is the chiefest good, and the good of the body inferior and subordinate. The one is the way and means, the other the end. He was made for earth in his passage and way to heaven, but his house and happiness is in heaven, where he is to enjoy the blessed God, and to glorify him among his holy angels, and those blessed creatures that dwell above in the region of spirits. Well, then, this was the end for which man was created, and while he remained innocent he had an heart disposed and inclined to God as his chiefest good, to love and fear him, and depend upon him as the fountain of happiness. Partly by the first temptation, by which man was foiled. Satan's aim in the temptation was to set man loose from God; and to fasten him

upon the creature, that he might have no cause to look back upon God any more; to draw him off from God by unbelief and disobedience, and to fasten him to the creature, by bringing him to delight in some outward thing forbidden by God. Man at first referred and carried on all things to God's glory; afterwards made his own bodily good the end and scope of his actions: Jer. ii. 13, 'Left the fountain of living waters, and hewed out to themselves broken cisterns that will hold no water.' As subtle men, when they intend to break off a treaty of marriage, set another match afoot: as those that would draw a man's heart from the love of his own wife entangle him in the love of a strange woman; so as Jeroboam when he fell off from Judah for the securing of the kingdom of the ten tribes to himself and his posterity, thought of keeping them from going up to Jerusalem according to God's ordinance, which might in time unite them to the kingdom of Judah again, and for that end sets up two calves in Dan and Bethel; so Satan sets up sensual good, the creature, to detain our affections. Well, then, the fall was nothing else but change of the last end of man's actions. He fell off from God as envious, false, and wishing ill to him which before he loved and feared, and depended upon as his chief good and last end; turned to the creature, especially sensible things, that whether God would or no, he might seek his own happiness there. By the change of the end, all moral goodness is lost, for all actions are subordinated to the last end, and determined by it. In relation to it, things are good or evil. Here was man's disease, a conversion from God to the creature. Partly by his restitution by grace. What is the work of grace, but to bring us to this, that we may make God our great end and scope, that we may enjoy God? As the needle that is touched with the loadstone turneth to the north; so is the soul wrought upon by grace turned to God: Ps. lxxx. 19, 'Turn us again, O Lord of hosts; cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved;' Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee;' Deut. xxx. 6, 'The Lord thy God will circumsise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed to love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.' The soul is awakened, made sensible of the emptiness of the creature and carnal things, in the enjoyment of which we were formerly satisfied. Secular vanities become tasteless. Then seeking and inquiring after God, and how they may be happy for ever, is their work. Before they loved pleasures more than God, 2 Tim. iii. 2; now all their desires and endeavours are to enjoy him. This man is turned and gone a-whoring from God to the creature.

(2.) From self to Christ. When we think of turning to God, we cannot accomplish our purpose without Christ. There is a legal exclusion against us. We come to God by Christ: Heb. vii. 25, 'Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him.' To God as our chief good, by him as mediator: 1 Peter iii. 18, 'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;' in a joyful and delightful communion with him. Before that could be done, we were to be ransomed from the curse of God, and rescued from the power of the devil, which none but Christ could do for us. Well, then, till we give up ourselves to

him to be saved in his own way, we can never be happy. A man that findeth himself liable to the wrath of God must have a mediator, and he that would love and serve God must have a powerful helper. This is conversion, thankfully to entertain an offered saviour. Every converted man doth so that feeleth himself undone by sin, and liable to the wrath of God: he frameth himself to believe in Christ with all his heart, that he may become to him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. In his whole converse with God he maketh use of Christ, seeing his own lost and undone condition: not for a fit or pang, but Christ liveth in him and dwelleth in him.

(3.) From sin to holiness. We must turn from his ways and live; otherwise what communion between light and darkness, Christ and sinners? all that would make God their portion, and Christ their saviour, must be changed in the tenor of their lives. You can have no part in Christ, nor be saved, unless the current be turned, and the course of your endeavours run in another channel, 1 Peter i. 14, 15. As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but as he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. He is a man of another strain, and maketh it his business to become holy, and to please God in all things. He hath no sin but what he hateth, and striveth against.

2. Have you ever turned? It must be so, or you will never live; all by nature need a turning: John iii. 6, 'That which is born of flesh is flesh.' Since the corruption of nature in Adam, men have an inclination and poise of heart that inclineth them to fleshly and sensible things. Man lost that original righteousness that should dispose him and incline him to God as his chiefest good and last end; so that the bent of his heart in his degenerate estate is wholly set by natural inclination, much more by inveterate custom, to temporal and sensible things, to please the flesh, not to please the Lord. The soul being destitute of grace, or the image of God, or original righteousness, it can only close with things present and known, as the pleasures of the body, which being wholly minded divert us from the love of God, and the study of heavenly things. You were born after the flesh, and do only mind lower and earthly things; and if your hearts be not turned, and the bent of it altered, you are undone for ever. Though the soul still cometh down from the superior world, yet it soon forgets its divine original, and being put into the body conformeth itself to the body, and accommodateth all its faculties and operations to the interests thereof, and hath an inclination to please itself in earthly things; as water put into a square vessel or a round vessel receiveth a square or round form from the vessel: Rom. viii. 5, 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh;' are strange to God and strange to heavenly things.

3. Do we yet need turning? Two sorts of persons do yet need turning —(1.) The wicked, that wholly need a turning to God; (2.) The regenerate, that in this world are but turning in part.

[1.] The wicked. Certainly they have need to look to themselves. Now all the question is, who are wicked? The world hath a gross notion of this term, and apply it only to the drunkard, or swearer, or fornicator, or murderer. These indeed need to be turned and converted;

but the scripture giveth us another notion of wickedness; whosoever liveth after the flesh: Rom. viii. 13, 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.' Though he be not such an open sinner as others are. Whosoever hath placed his contentment in earthly things, and seeketh them more than heavenly felicity, that savoureth not the things of the Spirit, as heaven and glory, or the saving graces of God's Spirit, that cometh down from above, and tend thither: Heb. xii. 16, 'Not a profane person, as was Esau, who sold his birthright for a morsel of meat.' Such as count more of their sensual lusts than of their spiritual prerogatives, they are profane persons, they are *βεβηλοι*. It is not a glutton or drunkard only that is a wicked man, or an whoremonger, but any that loveth earthly things rather than heavenly; that doth not set himself to come to God as his chiefest good, and make that the business of his life. Profaneness is a light esteem of things of the greatest price.

[2.] Those that have begun already to turn to God. None are yet so turned but they need to be turned more. We still seek too much happiness in the creature, and do too little set our hearts on God: Col. iii. 1, 'If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above.' Though we be turned in part, yet still we must turn from the creature to God, from earthly things to heavenly, from self to Christ. To renounce your own righteousness: Phil. iii. 8, 'I do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.' From sin to holiness. We have not yet attained, Phil. iii. 13. The work is not the work of a day.

Use 3. Of comfort. To comfort the sincere and broken-hearted, that are troubled with the sense of God's wrath. God delights not in your destruction. There is joy in heaven at the conversion of a sinner, Luke xv. 7; Ps. xxxiv. 18, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and he saveth such as are of a contrite spirit;' Isa. lvii. 16, 'For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.'
