

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE last time I spake to you on this occasion, I told you that the grace of God, and our duty in this ordinance, might be drawn under the three heads of recognition, or calling over, of exhibition, and of profession. The first of these I then spake unto, and shewed you what we are to recognise or call over therein.

The second thing is, exhibition and reception; exhibition on the part of Christ, reception on our part, wherein the essence of this ordinance doth consist. I shall briefly explain it to you, rather now to stir up faith unto exercise, than to instruct in the doctrine. And that we may exercise our faith aright, we may consider,

1. Who it is that makes an exhibition, that offers, proposes, and gives something to us at this time in this ordinance.

2. What it is that is exhibited, proposed, and communicated in this ordinance. And,

3. How or in what manner we receive it.

1. Who is it that makes this exhibition? It is Christ himself. When Christ was given for us, God the Father gave him, and set him forth to be a propitiation; but in this exhibition it is Christ himself, I say, that is the immediate exhibitor. The tender that is made of, whatever it be, it is made by Christ. And, as our faith stands in need of directions and boundaries to be given to it in this holy duty, it will direct our faith to consider Jesus Christ present among us by his Spirit, and by his word, making this tender, or this exhibition unto us. It is Christ that does it, which calls out our faith unto an immediate exercise on his person.

2. What is it Christ does exhibit and propose to us? (1.) Not empty and outward signs. God never instituted such things in his church. From the foundation of the world he never designed to feed his people with such outward symbols. Those under the Old Testament were not empty, though they had not a fulness like those under the New: they had not a fulness, because they had respect to what was yet to come, and could not be filled with that

light, that grace, that evidence of the things themselves as the present signs are, which are accomplished. Christ doth not give us empty signs.

Nor, (2.) Does Christ give us his flesh and blood, taken in a carnal sense. If men would believe him, he has told us a long time ago, when that doubt arose upon that declaration of his eating his flesh and drinking his blood; John vi. 52. (though he did not then speak of the sacrament, but of that which was the essence and life of it) 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' He told us, that eating his flesh profited nothing in that way they thought of eating it; for they apprehended, as the Papists do now, that they were to eat flesh, body, bones and all. Why, says he, 'the flesh profits nothing; it is the Spirit that quickens;' that power that is to be communicated to you is by the Spirit. So that Christ does not give us his flesh and blood in a carnal manner, as the men at Capernaum thought, and others look for. This would not feed our souls.

But then, what is it that Christ does exhibit, that we may exercise our faith upon? I say, it is himself as immediately discharging his great office of a priest, being sacrificed for us. It is himself as accompanied with all the benefits of that great part of his mediation in dying for us. May the Lord stir up our hearts to believe that the tender Christ makes unto us is originally and principally of himself, because all the benefits of his mediation arise from that fountain and spring, when God purchased the church with his own blood. A way this is which the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the wisdom of God, has found out and appointed to make a special tender of his person to our souls, to be received by us. And he tenders himself in the discharge of his mediation in the most amiable and most glorious representation of himself to the soul of a sinner. Christ is glorious in himself, in all his offices, and in all the representations that are made of him in the Scripture unto our faith; but Christ is most amiable, most beautiful, most glorious to the soul of a believing sinner, when he is represented as dying, making atonement for sin, making peace for sinners, as bearing our iniquities, satisfying the wrath of God, and curse of the law, to draw out our hearts unto faith and love. Christ in this ordinance makes such a representation of him-

self as bleeding for us, making atonement for our sins, and sealing the everlasting covenant : and he proposes himself unto us with all the benefits of his death, of that redemption he wrought out for us, peace with God, making an end of sin, bringing in everlasting righteousness, and the like. I intend only to remind you of these things, for we are at a loss sometimes as to the exercise of faith in and under this duty.

3. There remains to be considered, reception; for unless it be received, there is nothing done to any saving purpose. Notwithstanding all this tender that is made, the issue of all the benefit and consolation lies upon receiving.

There are two ways whereby we do receive Christ :

(1.) We receive him sacramentally, by obedience in church order. And, (2.) We receive him spiritually and really by faith, or believing in him.

(1.) We receive him sacramentally. This consists in the due and orderly performance of what he has appointed in his word for this end and purpose, that therein and thereby he may exhibit himself to our souls. It doth not consist (as some have thought) in partaking of the elements; that is but one part of it, and but one small part. Our sacramental reception consists in the due observation of the whole order of the institution according to the mind of Christ.

(2.) Spiritually, we receive him by faith : and if we could rightly understand that special act of faith which we are to exercise in the reception of Christ when he does thus exhibit himself to us, then should we glorify God, then should we bring in advantage to our own souls.

I have but a word to say, and that is this; it is that acting of faith which is now required of us which draws nearest unto spiritual, sensible experience. Faith has many degrees and many acts, some at a kind of distance from the object in mere reliance and recumbency; and many other acts of faith make very near approaches to the object, and rise up to sensible experience. It should be (if God would help us), such an act of faith as rises up nearest to a sensible experience. It is that which the Holy Ghost would teach us by this ordinance, when we receive it by eating and drinking, which are things of sense; and things of sense

are chosen to express faith wrought up to an experience. And they who had some apprehension hereof, that it must be a peculiar acting of faith and rising up to a spiritual experience, but finding nothing of the light and power of it in their own souls, gave birth to transubstantiation, that they might do that with their mouths and teeth which they could not do with their souls.

Faith should rise up to an experience in two things, [1.] In representation. [2.] In incorporation.

[1.] The thing we are to aim at, to be carried unto by faith in this ordinance is, that there may be a near and evident representation of Christ in his tender unto our souls; faith being satisfied in it; faith being in this matter the evidence of things not seen, making it exist in the soul, making Christ more present to the soul than he would be to our bodily eyes, if he was among us; more assuredly so. Faith should rise up to evidence in that near and close representation it makes of Christ in this exhibition of himself.

And, [2.] Faith is to answer the end of eating and drinking, which is incorporation. We are so to receive Christ, as to receive him into a spiritual incorporation, that the flesh and blood of Christ, as communicated in this ordinance through faith, may be turned and changed in our hearts into spiritual vital principles, and unto growth and satisfaction. These are the three things we receive by nourishment, and wherein incorporation does consist; there is an increase and quickening of vital principles, there is growth, and there is satisfaction in receiving suitable food and nourishment. Faith, I say, should rise up to these three things in its acts. I mention these things to direct the actings of our faith in this holy administration.