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PRACTICAL
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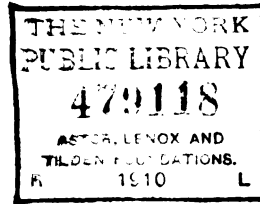
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NATHANIEL W. TAYLOR, D. D.,

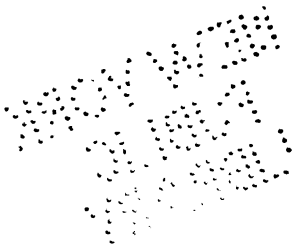
LATE DWIGHT PROFESSOR OF DIDACTIC THEOLOGY
IN YALE COLLEGE.

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DR. TAYLOR was for ten years pastor of the Center Church in New Haven, Connecticut, before called to the Theological Chair in Yale College. These sermons were written during this period, and preached in the ordinary course of ministerial duty. Many of them had reference to a state of deep religious interest in his congregation, with which his ministry was so frequently blessed.

They were the productions of his youth, before he had attained the full maturity of his intellectual powers; and in their adaptation to the pulpit, are characterized by a rhetorical style, in striking contrast with the precision of language and exactness of statement which so marked his lectures. They represent him as the pastor, rather than the professor. They were often repeated during seasons of revival in New Haven and elsewhere, and are now given to the public at the solicitation of many who heard them.

It is proposed to publish hereafter, in uniform detached volumes, such selections from his theological lectures, essays, and discourses, as shall be deemed advisable.

NEW YORK, *September*, 1858.

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and in the case of the Theological

GOSSNITZ

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CONTENTS.

I.

THEIR ROCK, NOT AS OUR ROCK.

"For their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being judges."—DEUTERONOMY xxxiii. 21.

II.

THE PROMISES DESIGNED TO MAKE MEN HOLY.

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature."—3 PETER i. 4.

III.

THE BETTER COUNTRY.

"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."—HEBREWS xi. 16.

IV.

PAUL AND SILAS IN PRISON.

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them."—ACTS xvi. 25.

V.

THE HABITUAL RECOGNITION OF GOD.

"I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved."—PSALMS xvi. 8.

VI.

THE SOURCE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S JOY. (A SERMON FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER.)

"There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time when their corn and their wine increased."—PSALMS iv. 6, 7.

VII.

"THE ATONEMENT A PLEDGE TO THE CHRISTIAN FOR EVERY REAL GOOD."

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"—ROMANS viii. 32.

VIII.

THE INCREASE OF FAITH.

"And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith."—*LUKE xvii. 5.*

IX.

GOD JUDGES BETTER THAN MAN.

"Should it be according to thy mind?"—*JOB xxxiv. 33.*

X.

THE RULE AND THE TEST OF MORALITY.

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."—*MATTHEW vii. 12.*

XI.

SINGLENES OF HEART.

"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"—*MATTHEW vi. 22, 23.*

XII.

PRACTICAL ATHEISM.

"The fool hath said in his heart. There is no God."—*PSALMS xiv. 1.*

XIII.

SINNERS HATE THE LIGHT.

"For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."—*JOHN iii. 20.*

XIV.

ON HEAVEN.

"After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."—*REVELATION vii. 9-17.*

XV.

HOLINESS ALONE FITS FOR HEAVEN.

"Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."—*HEBREWS xii. 14.*

XVI.

GOD ANGRY WITH THE WICKED.

"God is angry with the wicked every day."—PSALMS vii. 11.

XVII.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD DESIGNED TO RECLAIM.

"Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."—ROMANS ii. 4.

XVIII.

PARDONING MERCY ABUNDANT.

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."—ISAIAH lv. 7.

XIX.

THE TERROR OF THE LORD PERSUASIVE.

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."—2 CORINTHIANS v. 11.

XX.

REPENTANCE NECESSARY.

"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."—LUKE xiii. 3.

XXI.

IMMEDIATE REPENTANCE PRACTICABLE.

"Behold, now is the day of salvation."—2 CORINTHIANS vi. 2.

XXII.

ON STRIVING TO ENTER IN AT THE STRAIT GATE.

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."—LUKE xiii. 23.

XXIII.

SALVATION FREE TO THE WILLING.

"And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."—REVELATION xxii. 17.

XXIV.

THE GOSPEL HIDDEN TO THE LOST.

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."—2 CORINTHIANS iv. 3.

XXV.

THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee and the other a publican."—LUKE xviii. 10.

XXVI.

HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS.

"How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."—1 **KINGS** xviii. 21.

XXVII.

ON MAKING EXCUSES.

"I pray thee, have me excused."—**LUKE** xiv. 18.

XXVIII.

HARDENING THE HEART.

"To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."—**HEBREWS** iii. 7, 8.

XXIX.

THE SINNER'S DUTY TO MAKE HIMSELF A NEW HEART.

"And make you a new heart and a new spirit."—**EZEKIEL** xviii. 31.

XXX.

PUTTING THE HAND TO THE PLOW.

"And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."—**LUKE** ix. 62.

XXXI.

APOSTASY.

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."—**JOHN** vi. 67, 68.

XXXII.

THE HARVEST PAST.

"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."—**JEREMIAH** viii. 20.

I.

THEIR ROCK, NOT AS OUR ROCK.

DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 31.

“For their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.”

The language of imagery, however inadequate for many purposes, is unrivaled for beauty and force. By its conciseness it gives condensation to thought and ease of apprehension, and, by its allusions, imparts to merely intellectual ideas the power and pressure of sensations. It is always the language of feeling. Accordingly, all nations, in proportion as they are exempt from the restraints of artificial life, and accustomed to the indulgence of emotion rather than the abstract exercise of the intellect, are wont to express their ideas in the use of figures and similitudes taken from visible objects. Such was peculiarly the fact among Oriental nations. Accustomed as they were to contemplate the works of the Almighty, in the open air, and beneath a glowing sky, and led by their habits of thought and the structure of their language, they readily seized the prominent objects of material scenes to express in the strongest manner, the conceptions of their minds. The sacred writers furnish the most striking specimens of this use of language, and often astonish us, by the perspicuity, force and sublimity in which, by natural imagery, they present the great truths of religion.

In the chapter from which the text is taken, in not less than four instances the Infinite God is denominated “a Rock.” The same metaphor often occurs in the Scriptures, and to any one at all acquainted with the history of Judea, the propriety and force of the allusion must be obvious. The mountains

and rocks of Palestine, at an age when the present arts of war were unknown, often furnished its inhabitants with an impregnable defense against their invading enemies. To these rocks and their caverns, travelers also and others were wont to retreat, for shelter from the weather, for protection from the revenge of individual enemies, and the ferocity of ravenous beasts. Those who are acquainted with the history of David, especially the manner of his frequent deliverances from the hand of Saul, will see how naturally he could extend the allusion to his Divine Protector, and sing, "The Lord is my Rock, and my fortress;" "who is a Rock, save our God,"—and those whose experience enables them to enter into the anticipations of the evangelical prophet can easily perceive the fitness of the same image as applied to the Saviour of men. "A man shall be a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great Rock in a weary land."

But Moses not only declares God to be a Rock, as being the strength and the refuge of his people, but institutes a comparison between this rock and every other. "Their Rock is not as our Rock." The ground of hope and trust of others is not like that of the people of God. So plain and undeniable is the superiority of the latter, that he is not afraid to appeal to the judgment of enemies on the question, fully confident that they must make the reluctant acknowledgment of the truth of his position. "Their Rock is not our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges."

The truth which I shall attempt to illustrate is this:—*The Christian has a ground of hope and trust and joy, which all other men do and must acknowledge, that they do not possess.*

I. Let the appeal be made to the most determined enemies of Christianity. It would not be difficult to multiply the concessions of this class of men that they could invent nothing to supply the place of that religion which they rejected and labored to destroy. In its moral and social advantages, in the solace it administers to grief, in the support it gives in trou-

ble, in the tranquil pleasures it affords through life, and in the hopes with which it brightens the prospects and alleviates the fears of death, even those who have most scornfully rejected its proofs, have been obliged to confess its superiority. I can appeal to but few examples in confirmation of these remarks.

With respect to the superior *moral* influence of Christianity, we have the acknowledgment of two of the most distinguished infidels of the former age. They assiduously inculcated on their children the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, and when censured by their infidel friends for their inconsistency, the reply of each was substantially the same: "Show me better rules of life, and I will renounce these." Similar instances have often occurred, in which parental affection aided by conscience, has triumphed over the pride of consistency and labored to bless its object with the consolations of the hated religion of Jesus.

Of the comparative worth of the world and of religion, to render life happy as it passes, take the following confession of one of this class of men: "I have," says he, "run the silly rounds of business and pleasure, and have done with them all. When I reflect on what I have seen, what I have heard, and what I have done, I can hardly persuade myself that all that frivolous hurry and bustle and pleasure of the world has any reality, but I look upon it all as one of those romantic dreams which opium occasions, and do by no means desire to repeat the dose for the sake of the dream. Shall I tell you that I bear this melancholy situation with the sustaining constancy and resignation which others speak of. No; I bear it, because I *must* bear it, whether I will or no. I think of nothing but killing time now it has become my enemy, and my resolution is to sleep in the carriage during the rest of the journey." This is testimony to the comparative inanity and miseries of a worldly life, from a man who did not speak slightingly, because it was in the way of his profession. He did not deny through envy, the pleasures which he was forbidden to taste. The witness was Lord Chesterfield—a man than

whom none knew the world better or shared more largely in its smiles. He had discernment enough to see its comparative worthlessness, and magnanimity enough to confess it. You see how poor, how abject, how wretched he pronounced himself; how unlike in his own estimation, was his condition to that of the resigned and cheerful Christian!

Nor shall we find less decisive acknowledgments of the superiority of Christian hope, if we appeal to the death-beds of this class of men. None of them have met death in triumph; none of them have claimed superiority for their system over Christianity in the consolations it imparts and the prospects it opens, in the honest hour when man stands on the brink of eternity. All they have ventured to claim for any is, that it can then give calmness and composure, which result from all unconcern for futurity—which, in the judgment of God, and of common sense too, is the heaviest curse, in time, to an immortal being. If we go yet farther and inquire how many infidels have closed life in anguish, with “a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation,” how numerous the examples—how piercing their cries! That arch-enemy of the Son of God Voltaire, died with hell felt by anticipation, alternately blaspheming God and supplicating his mercy! Many others might be named who have yielded up the ghost with similar horrors, cursing with dire imprecation the hour when they abjured Christianity for the blasphemies of infidel philosophy! But who, on a death-bed, was ever heard to curse the day he embraced the Son of God as a Saviour? who would exchange the sweet submission and victorious hope which have shed the luster of heaven on the death-bed of the Christian, for the gloom and the horrors of being blasted into annihilation! Surely, “Their Rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.”

II. It is not to the avowed infidel alone that the declaration in the text applies. The more common, and perhaps the no less dangerous case of those who speculatively believe but practically reject the Gospel,—who take the world for their god

and portion instead of the God whom the Scriptures reveal,—is one in reference to which the Christian may also say, “Their Rock is not as our Rock.”

Here, too, we might appeal to the confessions of this class of men, made in all the different circumstances of life. These however, are so common, and so often witnessed, that it is hardly necessary to repeat them. We shall rather present the appeal to the understanding and conscience, and inquire, from the nature of the subject, whether every worldly man, himself being judge, must not confess the superiority of the Christian’s hope and portion to his own? That he must, will appear,

1. From the fact that he acknowledges the truths of Christianity, without practically embracing them. He professedly believes what he practically denies. Of course his very faith contains an acknowledgment of the point in question. In admitting the Gospel to contain the decisions of eternal truth, he admits the vanity of all his hopes from the world, and the stability of the Christian’s hope in God. How obvious then the contrast in his own judgment.

The Christian takes the God whom the Bible reveals as his God and his portion. The speculative believer admits that God is the only proper portion of the soul, but takes the world for his portion. The Christian’s views, affections, hopes, and joys, accord with his faith. He believes there is a God of infinite perfection—the Maker, the Preserver, the Governor, and Redeemer of men. He looks to him in this character. He practically recognizes him in all these relations. The mere speculatist also believes there is such a God, but refuses to recognize him in a single relation in which he reveals himself to man. The Christian believes the promises of God’s eternal covenant, and on the unchangeable word of Him who has promised, he rests, as a sure foundation, for confidence, amid the changeableness of all terrestrial scenes. The mere nominal believer admits the reality of the same covenant of God, but knows, from the very terms of it, that he shuts himself

away from all its provisions. The same is true of every item which makes up the Christian's portion in time and for eternity. The unbeliever admits their reality; he admits the riches of the inheritance of those who have God in all the majesty and glory of his perfections for their God; Jesus, in all the fullness of his love and sufficiency of his grace, for their Saviour; heaven, with all its purity and bliss, for their eternal home; but he knows by the decisions of the same oracle of truth, that in all this he has neither part nor lot; he knows that in contempt of all this he looks to a worthless world to bless him, and he knows how poor and wretched, and naked he is, compared with him who is an "heir of all things." His very faith in Christianity, though too cold and too distrustful to secure for him the least of its blessings, tells him to his entire conviction, what *his* portion is, and what is that of the real Christian. And thus the acknowledged record of eternal truth condemns every part of his practical system. True, he dreams of happiness from the world; he hopes the world will bless him. But what security has he for these hopes? Let himself judge. Can he challenge a comparison between them and the hopes of the Christian? Instead of being able to point for the warrant of his hopes to the page of inspiration—instead of appealing to the truth of the living God,—in his own decided conviction every declaration and every attribute of God sap his hopes to the foundation. Look now at the Christian: his faith is in God, in his Son, in his covenant; and his hopes, his confidence, and his joys are in accordance with his faith, and grow out of it. The hand of God's revelation draws aside the veil, and there are the disclosed realities of the Christian's inheritance, amid the scenes and grandeurs of eternity! Let those, then, who give to Christianity the bare compliment of cold assent, judge whether their rock be as the Rock of the real Christian.

2. The worldly man is compelled to the same confession by a comparison of the ground of his confidence with that of the Christian. It is a thought welcome to the mind of the worldly

man, that in point of present advantage he has greatly the superiority, and that, could he procure all he desires in this world, he should have no cause, at least so far as this life is concerned, to envy those who place their happiness in religion.

Yet on this ground—the strongest he can take—we are not afraid to encounter him in an argument respecting that religion which “has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.” Let him, then, bring forward his good things, and magnify them to their utmost extent; let the comparison be made in the most favorable light to himself, and then let himself judge. What, then, are his good things? Nothing, which so far as it is a real good, which the Christian may not possess and enjoy as well as he—yea, enjoy in a higher measure. He knows nothing of that gratitude and love, of that cheerful and confidential dependence on the all-bounteous Giver which the Christian knows, and which enhance the value of every gift a thousand fold. What are his good things? They are, confessedly, fleeting and uncertain in their duration. Longer than life they cannot last, commonly not so long. Anxiety for their continuance embitters their enjoyment. A thousand stings, loaded with secret venom, poison the most flattering joys. Satiety soon impairs and destroys the relish; the vicissitudes of fortune in a moment take his all away. Disease or calamities render every delight nugatory, and old age, with its infirmities, its trembling limbs, its painful days and wakeful nights, stamps all with “vanity and vexation of spirit.” Is it so with the Christian? With God for his portion, will his portion fail him? With the love of God shed abroad in his heart, with the tranquil consciousness of the presence and favor of God, what has the worldly man to compare for a moment in point of stability?

Let us concede, and more cannot be asked, the intrinsic worth of each to be equal, and allude only to the permanency and stability of these joys. One has this changing, uncertain world—its fading honors, its riches with their wings, its oft

disgusting pleasures. The other—*the eternal God*, in the fullness of his love, the extent of his wisdom, and the energies of his omnipotence. We ask for the verdict of reason and conscience, which has the most desirable inheritance? Again, worldly joys are confessedly unsatisfying in their nature. Ask the experience of the world for six thousand years. Have the gifts of earth and time satisfied a human being? When every thing around has smiled—when health and youth and wealth, and cheerful prospects have conspired to cheer and make happy, has there not, in every dweller on earth, been a want of true repose and settled confidence? Is not the bosom of man a void when the world has lavished all its gifts upon him? Show us the solitary individual who has said to his heart, “enjoy pleasure,” who has not been forced to add, “behold, this also is vanity.” Look at the nature of the soul. Is it not a rational and an immortal existence? Can the world then satisfy its desires—desires which stretch into immortality—and ask for a participation of God’s blessedness? “Without God” must not the soul, from the very nature of its capacities, be poor, unsatisfied, and forlorn? It must have more. It must have something which can fill and satisfy its desires; something grand like its capacities, something eternal like their duration. It must have *God*. Such a portion has the Christian; he has it now. It is a vile calumny on the religion of the Gospel to suppose that the Christian has nothing in God till death shall bring him to his home in the heavens. He is with God on earth. It is his prerogative to contemplate his glories here; to love and trust and adore God here; to enter into his designs, and to be active with him in advancing his purposes here. The Christian’s God is a God at hand, and he knows what it is to lean on his bosom and commune with him here. He indeed, takes not in that fullness of joy which the clearer visions of heaven will afford, but he has its foretaste. The same God whom he will then see he now sees, and the same fountain sends forth its communications to bless him here, which, when the fullness of God shall pour

forth its gifts, will bless him there. Let, then, the men that are lying down at the puddles of earth look up to the sources of the Christian's happiness, and let conscience tell the comparative worth of their portion. Ah! my brethren, there is no mistake, we know their decision. "Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges."

3. The superiority of the Christian's portion is equally undeniable, if we consider the remedies it affords under the evils of life. These evils are either spiritual or temporal. Advert, then, to the character and state of man as a sinner; the dominion of moral corruption; the curse of the broken law; the reproaches of conscience; the malignity and wiles of the powers of darkness. To these evils (what in comparison deserves the name) what has the worldly man to oppose? Nothing—absolutely nothing. He stands forlorn and naked in the conflict, without a shield, and without a refuge. Can he maintain an ignorance of his state, and thus exemption from the pangs of conscience? And is this torpor of soul, upheld by willful ignorance and obduracy, a blessing? Is it really desirable to sleep on the brink of damnation? Even this cannot be. Many a beam of light flashes terror on his mind—many a pang of conviction strikes a dagger through his heart. The curse of God rests upon him, and the depravity within reigns, without an authorized hope of its mitigation, even for eternity.

Behold the Christian rejoicing in remedies for these deadliest of evils—remedies obvious, all-sufficient, indefensible. To the power of in-dwelling sin he opposes the all-sufficient grace of God, to enstamp the image of God on the soul. To the curse of the law, and the anguish of a guilty conscience, the peace-speaking blood of the great atonement. When assailed by the power of the Prince of Darkness he is still safe, he is still happy, for he leans on the arm of the omnipotent God. Let us advert to temporal evils. Human life is a scene of suffering—from the cradle to the grave it is a pilgrimage of sorrow. None can expect exemption. It is a world of curse, and the cloud sits deep on the face of it. Under these

calamities and woes the mind sinks without support. And what support has the man of the world? Can he meet poverty, the loss of health, of friends and relations, with a natural fortitude and a stoical apathy that shall sustain him? Adjudge him then, the amount of his consolation—the consolation of a brute. Other consolation, other support, he has not. If he has, let them be specified. But he has them not. The world was his portion, his all; adversity strips him, and leaves him a prey to bitter recollections, to fruitless wishes, to disappointment without relief and without hope. Like the plundered Ephraimite, the wretched votary looks around in vain, for his idols. He had set his heart on shadows, and is miserable because they are gone. The waves of calamity have rolled over him, desolated every fair fabric of earthly bliss, and he has no refuge. How, in the mean time—how fares the Christian? His treasures are subject to no decay; stripped of earthly possessions, still he is rich, for his treasure is laid up in another world; deprived of earthly friends and comforters, he has a friend Almighty and ever present, who will never change and never cease to bless. He, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, takes up his abode with him; he numbers the hairs of his head; not a sparrow can fall to the ground without his Heavenly Father. He enters into the sentiments and plans of the Eternal. He knows he reigns. He knows he will glorify himself, and bless them that love him. And are not those perfections, which are equal to the government of worlds and systems, competent to direct his little concerns? And can he not trust him? Ask him, and you shall hear his answer: “The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, let the earth rejoice. Let the darkness and the tempest surround me; let the winds blow, and the waves rage, I have an interest in the Ruler of the storm; and when it is his wil and for my good, he will say to the winds, ‘Cease,’ and to the waves, ‘Be still.’”

Again, in the article of death, how stands the comparison? When that event comes to the man of the world, who admits

the decisions of God, concerning his own sinfulness and the punishment that awaits him; when under the pressure of pain and breathlessness, he knows he must die, what now shall support him?—what shall pacify a guilty conscience and still the anticipations of coming vengeance? His own righteousness? He has none, and knows he has none. Shall he now fix a hope on the indulgence of God? He cannot. He knows him to be a just God, taking vengeance on them that obey not his Gospel. Shall he sustain himself with doubts and unbelief, and really make it a question whether his soul will sink into annihilation or woe forever? or whether its stupendous faculties are to be inlets of pain, despair and woe? or to be expanded to the fruition of the infinite good? The question, if he could raise it, is enough to fill him with consternation—enough to make every throne in heaven tremble, and convulse the abyss beneath. Oh, no!—there is nothing to sustain the tranquillity of his dying hour. Behind him, a life of sin; within him, an accusing conscience; before him, an angry judge and an opening hell: and thus he must die. Look now at the expiring Christian. He has familiarized the scenes of death by devout meditation on the glories beyond it. He has fixed his trust in Him who came to deliver them, who “through fear of death were subject to bondage,” and is “ready to be offered.” To “die is gain.” He who has conquered death is with him; he longs to depart. The moment comes; the langnor of his dying eye is lighted up with celestial brilliancy, he shouts “*Salvation,*” and is away to the heaven of his God. Again, we put the question, Who has support, and peace, and safety, and hopes, and prospects, like the Christian? Whose rock is like his Rock? Let an ungodly world answer. We are willing to abide their decision. I might pursue the inquiry in reference to the results in eternity. It must suffice to ask, What is the portion now of the one? what of the other? Whether the rewards of religion, or the punishment of guilt—whether the blessedness of heaven, or the pains of hell, be preferable, is the question? Could we

summon a witness from the dread world of woe—could we obtain from a fellow-mortal—from the rich man in torment—from Judas, who went to his own place—their testimony: yea, could one of this assembly know the reality by feeling it—could we obtain a response from devils—could we ask angels, and the redeemed in glory—we should have but one answer from them all. On the united testimony of them all, united with the testimony of his God, the Christian might still triumph with the man of God in the text: "*Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.*"

REMARKS.

1. The Christian has abundant cause to be satisfied with the portion he has chosen. Its superiority to every other, and its all-sufficiency, are not matters of uncertainty admitting either of question or debate. The point is settled—not only by the testimony of the God of truth—not only by his own experience, and the experience of every saint that has gone before him—not only by the obvious and undeniable nature of things—not only by the clearest, fullest evidence that the subject itself admits of, but his enemies, those who practically despise and reject his portion, bring the reluctant homage of their acknowledgment. Let them, then, cast out your name as evil, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, and then let the appeal be brought home to their consciences, and it shall appear, not only that holy beings on earth—not that celestial intelligences—not that God approves, but that an ungodly world too, render their unwilling but profoundest homage of acknowledgment to the wisdom of your choice. They know that yours is the part of wisdom; theirs the part of folly. They know that you are rich, and that they are miserably poor. They know that you have consolations which stamp even their joys with wretchedness; they know that you are raised above disappointment and calamity and death, and that they are the helpless victims of these evils. They know

that you have an inheritance of life and bliss beyond the grave, and that they have none but the woes of the second death. They know that the everlasting God is your portion, and that this vain world, so soon to be left, so soon to be burnt, is their all; and what is the contempt of such men to be accounted of? The day of their judgment and of yours is at hand—the day of their confusion and of your triumph; when before the assembled universe, they, in the accents of despair, shall confess their folly and their madness; and when you, with the ecstasies of heaven and the song of salvation shall say, “The Lord is my *Rock*, and my fortress,” “Who is a *Rock* save our God?”

2. How concerned should Christians be to know more and more the value of their portion while on earth! If they do not find it draw their affections away from the world, if they do not find its efficacy in tranquillity of conscience, in that joy of the soul—that peace of God which passeth all understanding—if they cannot sustain and welcome the afflictions of this vale of tears, as the appointment of their Heavenly Father, if they cannot approach death with composure and even with triumph, it is not because of the insufficiency of their portion. It is because they have thought too much of the world and too little of the *Rock* of their salvation—too much of the enjoyments of the way, and too little of the blessedness of their eternal home—too much of the influence of instruments and second causes, and too little of the wisdom and the power and the goodness of a reigning God; too much of the conflict with the last enemy, death, and too little of its conqueror; too much of the body in ruins, too little of the spirit in glory. Come, Christian, and renew thy confidence in thy God. There is enough in him for thine every want, enough in his Son, enough in his Covenant. Oh, the sustaining peace, the cheerful hopes, the glad anticipations of trust in God! of a firm, unqualified, unshaken trust in God! What a radiance it sheds on every path, what life it gives in the midst of death! What light it sheds from the throne of the Eternal, as a prelude of everlasting day! Who

that knows *any thing* of its consolations, would not desire to know more and more of them ?

To conclude, let me ask those who have no hope in God, nothing to support, to comfort, to bless them for time or eternity, but *this world*, are you quite satisfied with your portion ? Is a world which corrupts, ensnares, afflicts and ruins the soul, a sufficient inheritance for an immortal being ? With no support under the afflictions that await you in this pilgrimage of sorrow, with no relief in the hour of death from the shudderings of guilt, and horrors of despair ; sinking into the grave, with no prospect, but of a resurrection to damnation, have you a satisfying portion ? You know you have not, you know you are wretchedly poor for time and eternity. And, my hearers, what is reason, what is conscience, what is it to know all this and yet despise it ? what is it to know the guilt, the miseries and the woes of an impenitent, unpardoned immortal, and to know that God has pitied his wretchedness, and provided relief ; offered you himself in all the glory of his perfections, his Son in all the fullness of his grace, all the provisions of his eternal covenant, offered all this as the ground of your security, peace, and happiness—what is it to reject all this, with a full conviction of its reality ? Is there nothing in God which you need both here and hereafter ! Does not hope—hope in God in the bosom of guilty man, stamp vanity on all you deem substantial ? Come, then, fellow-sinner, to this Rock of your salvation. Here is a sure foundation. Thousands have put their trust here, and have not been confounded. Do you not wish for something which you know others have, and you have not,—do you not wish for a better portion than the world ? Oh, say, do you not wish that the Almighty God were your friend, your protector, your refuge, and portion ? Do you not feel an inward sigh—oh, for the inheritance of a child of God, for his peace and hope and consolations in death, and his inheritance in eternity ! Cast in, then, your lot with him ; come, and put your trust in the same Saviour ; come and accept, as freely as he offers himself, God as your portion, and you are made for-

ever! Eternity shall open upon you with the full vision of his glory, and its rolling ages shed on you the gifts of all that he can impart to bless. But refuse, and death shall meet you with no supporting hope, no glad anticipations of joy, and eternity shall stretch onward its absorbing periods of duration, with no prospect but one—the flames of hell. And when this becomes reality, what will be your emotions, as you lift your eyes to the paradise of God, and think where *you* are, and where the *Christian* is?

II.

THE PROMISES DESIGNED TO MAKE MEN HOLY.

2 PETER i. 4.

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature."

WE may hope to derive benefit from the Gospel, in proportion as we understand its practical design and tendency. This remark applies not only to the precepts and doctrines of the Gospel, but also to its promises. This precious part of the sacred volume, like almost every other, has not escaped great practical perversion. The error seems to consist in regarding the divine promises as chiefly, if not wholly, designed to promote the comfort of Christians. It is true, indeed, that the promises of God are adapted to afford the believer rich consolation during his pilgrimage on earth. But they have another and a higher design, even to promote our conformity to the moral image of God.

This design is explicitly asserted in the text. The apostle, after referring to the fact that in Christ all things are given that pertain to life and godliness, specifies the promises of his grace as having the same design and tendency. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature."

Let us consider the truth implied in these words, that *one important design of the divine promises is to promote personal holiness.*

I. The Scriptures often declare this to be a principal design of the divine promises. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness

of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Along with such explicit declarations as this and that in the text, we find the sacred writers constantly referring to the promises of God, as containing the grand and essential motives to holy obedience. Whatever is necessary to encourage, to cheer, to animate, to strengthen, to prompt in the course of holy obedience, is derived by constant appeals and illustrations, *from the promises of God*. Of every one that hath this hope—the hope founded on these promises—it is said that he purifieth himself even as God is pure.

II. We argue the same thing from the character of man as a moral being, and the purpose of God toward him. As a moral being man is a subject of God under a government administered by moral influence—that is, by means of motives. The great purpose of God toward man is to perfect his moral character through moral influence. But where is this influence furnished? in what are these motives presented, if not in the blessings promised as the reward of obedience? If God, by these promises, intended merely to comfort his people, by quieting their fears and awakening their hopes, why are not his promises absolute and unconditional securities? But these promises of God are annexed constantly to his commands, which require the holiness of man, and their fulfillment is connected only with conformity to these commands. Plainly, then, we have no more evidence that it is the will of God that men should be holy, than we have that his promises are designed to produce this effect.

III. From the direct practical tendency of the promises of God. There is no higher evidence of the design or purpose to be answered by the appointments of God than the true tendency of such appointments. Let us then trace, in a few particulars, the obvious practical tendency of the divine promises to produce in man conformity to the divine image or personal holiness.

1. Such is the tendency of the divine promises, as they remove every obstacle to personal holiness. With God there is

forgiveness that he may be feared. Nothing is plainer than that man, under the burden of a hopeless controversy with God, would sink into the sullen inactivity of despair. He would never take a step in the path of obedience to that God who should look upon him only in his wrath. And yet to man, as a sinner, without the promise of mercy, the denunciation of the curse of God would remain in all its darkness and terrors, unmitigated by a ray of hope. To rouse him to holy activity, the promise of God is indispensable. You may shew him an opening hell, but without a promise revealing a pardoning God and opening heaven, he will never stir. With such promises all the hopelessness and despair of escaping the curse is taken away, by the assurance of favor and reward to obedience.

Without the promises there would remain also another obstacle of paralyzing influence—the impracticability of obedience without the grace of God. The Christian needs no other knowledge but the knowledge of himself to convince him that the assistance of God is necessary to lead him to engage successfully in his service. With the conscious fickleness of his own heart, his resolutions so often broken, his liveliest emotions of love so soon abated, his proneness to relapse into sin and insensibility so constant, his return to God so difficult, so forced, so unnatural; with so much to be done, while there is such a body of death to discourage and overwhelm, how soon, without the promise of divine aid, would the Christian abandon all in despair? But with the promise of a faithful God sounding in his ears, “My grace is sufficient for thee,” how will he rise, as it were, in the consciousness of that strength which shall be perfected in his weakness, and enter the career of obedience with the inspiration of hope? Thus, by the promises of God, the otherwise insurmountable obstacles of unpardoned guilt and unconquerable corruption are removed. The mighty barrier at the very entrance opens before him, the rough places are made smooth, every mountain is brought low, and every valley is filled,—by the promises of God is un-

veiled the salvation of God. Guilt is made to hope, and weakness itself to look up with confidence; and the language of obedience is adopted in all the strength of its purpose, "Lord, I am thy servant, I am thy servant; thou hast loosed my bonds."

2. This tendency is apparent in the nature of the blessings promised. Whether we look at the general or specific nature of the divine promises we see that they cannot become effectual as motives without producing holiness. In their general character they secure the real good, the highest interest, of the Christian. But what is the real good, the highest interest, of man, but perfection in holiness and happiness? in other words a participation of the divine nature? The actual import, then, of these promises is, that God will render every thing subservient to the holiness, and, in this way, to the happiness of his people. To be influenced, then, by these promises, is to be influenced by holiness and the happiness that springs from it. Holiness must therefore be the only possible effect. The motive is of such a nature that it can excite nothing in man but desires after holiness, and its appropriate influence is to heighten and invigorate the purposes of holiness, and to produce correspondent action.

In their more specific nature, what are the promises of God? Peace of conscience is promised. But who can think of escaping the reproaches of this inward monitor, except by the practice of holiness? Is justification unto life promised? But who can be influenced by this blessing as a motive, and still wish to incur the guilt and the condemnation of sin? Are deliverance from temptation, sanctification, and growth in grace promised? But who can be influenced by these blessings without aspiring after holy conformity to the divine image? Is heaven promised? but what is there in heaven but an influence of transformation into the likeness of the God who reigns there? Has God promised to give himself to his people to be their God? what is there in God, his attributes, his favor, his presence, his glory, but the

same influence of assimilation?—what, in a word, is the ultimate end and amount of all that God has promised to his people, but that they shall be like him—like him in character, and like him in blessedness? No sooner does the soul of man come under the appropriate influence of the promises of God than the progress of assimilation to God is begun, which is to be perfected in the heavens.

3. The same tendency is apparent in the circumstances or mode of the divine promises. Such is the manner of God's promises as to secure to the utmost their full energy on the soul. While the holiness of man is their grand and ultimate end, there is no sensibility or interest of man to which they do not appeal, and aim to render subservient to that end. They create no interference, but insure a perfect coincidence between man's temporal and eternal well-being. "Godliness" has the "promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." There is no interest of man in time, which they disregard or fail to promote; no wants to which they do not furnish the adequate and the best supplies. There are no temptations, nor trials, nor afflictions, for which support and deliverance are not provided; no affections, no relations, no duties which pertain to man's present state, to which their provisions do not fully extend, which they do not consult and regulate in a manner worthy of God. By precepts he regulates all, and by the promises engages to give grace and glory. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

Every sensibility of our nature is appealed to by these promises to urge us onward in the path of devotedness to God. In all the tender relations of life his promise invites us to him. "Leave thy fatherless children with me," saith God to his people, "I will preserve them alive, and let your widows trust in me." "When my father and mother forsake me the Lord will take me up." In all the offices of kindness to our fellow men, his promise meets us with its incentives. "He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord." Thus through the whole range and system of relative and social duties, God by

his promises appeals to our own natural affections and sympathies to excite us to conformity to his will. Nor is the appeal less powerful to our fears and our hopes. The promises of God as conditional, serve to give to fear on the one hand and to hope on the other, the most effectual operation. They fix all our anxieties concerning their fulfillment, where they should be fixed, on ourselves, and leave not one concerning what God will do. In exact proportion, therefore, to the strength of our purposes and the measure of our doings, they give strength to hope and animation to effort. They afford great consolation. But it is consolation in the path of obedience, and the end of the consolation itself is to refresh and cheer and animate the pilgrim in his weary way, and thus to keep him in it to his final rest.

Their fulfillment is certain. How painful for human guilt and human weakness to be left to mere conjecture on a subject like this! How perplexing, how inoperative is a mere intimation of what God might do! We want the security and the efficiency of promise. Here is the energy which alone can take effect on the despondency of guilt and the weakness of corruption, and we have it. In respect to what will be done on the part of him on whom we depend, all becomes certainty, by the promises, the attributes, the oath of the living God. To gratitude, that strongest principle of human action, the appeal made by the divine promises is no less powerful. The being that is dead to gratitude is hopelessly dead. All that there is in the abundance and the riches of the promised gifts—all that there is in being the very object toward which such kindness is directed—all that there is in the most decisive manifestation of earnestness and solicitude to bless, and all that there is in the quiet confidence and unshaken security that the God of the promise will fulfill it, is brought in the full play of its energies upon the soul. Is there a particle of grateful sensibility? it must be touched and moved by the love that beams upon us in the promises of a covenant God. Thus, throughout the whole range of moral action, and of human existence,

there is no duty to which man is not invited—no condition for which support and consolation are not furnished—no sensibility of the whole inner man which is not addressed by the promises of a faithful God. He can do nothing for God, he can suffer nothing for God, for which God will not reward him. He can feel nothing to excite and regulate and reward, in which there is not an influence from God. Thus surrounded by the fullness of God, encircled by the pledges of his favor—thus invited, urged and constrained by the riches of his gifts, with what a mighty energy is man impelled to consecrate himself, soul and body, to the service of his Maker!

4. The same tendency is apparent from the number and magnitude of the blessings promised. Of these we cannot attempt an adequate account. We may say that nothing can be added. For all things are comprised in the covenant of promise. "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." We may say the grant includes all that the infinite God can do for the well-being of man; that it far surpasses all human comprehension and thought. It is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, which is concerned for the believer's interests—it is that he may know this by experience, and that he may be filled with all the fullness of God, that God has made a covenant with him. It is pardon, grace, and eternal glory. It is pardon. It is cancelling the debt of guilt and eternal condemnation, with deliverance from hell and restoration to the acceptance and friendship of man's offended Sovereign, and thus offering to the benevolence of God a way of access to guilty men, whereby it is as free to expiate and pour its blessings upon him as had he never sinned. It is grace—grace to sanctify, sustain and comfort, to guide, to strengthen and keep—grace to recover man fallen through apostasy from God, to his original destiny in character and happiness—grace to animate by love, to invigorate by

faith, to gladden with victories over sin and death and hell—grace to remove each trace of moral deformity from the soul, and replace there the perfect likeness of God—grace to give the cheerfulness of hope and the joys of triumph at God's judgment-seat—grace by which we behold with open face as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image from glory to glory. It is eternal glory—glory in heaven—glory in that perfect purity and divine excellence which adorns the saved in God's immediate presence—glory in that assimilation to God and his Son which makes us one with them—glory in that communion of affection and that fellowship of activity with God and the full assembly of angels and the redeemed—glory on that throne of glory with the palm of victory and crown of life—glory in those ecstasies of the rapt spirit with songs to him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb—glory in that endless progress of perfection and bliss, rising from the thrones of angels and arch-angels by an endless approximation toward an absolute likeness to God himself. Thus is heaven opened to man by the promises of God; thus is all there is in heaven, all there is in God, all there is in the universe, concentrated and poured upon the heart of man by the promises of the immutable God. For what? To allure him "to be a partaker of the divine nature"—the holiness of God.

REMARKS.

1. We see the error of those who aim to derive comfort only from the divine promises. There are those who rest their hopes on faith without works, regarding the promises of God as ample security for every blessing, without obedience. To say nothing of the prostration of the divine law thus involved—the law of which it was said, "Till heaven and earth pass one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass till all be fulfilled"—the notion is a direct and palpable perversion of the very promises of God, which are pleaded as its

warrant. Where is the promise of life except to patient continuance in well-doing? Do you say the promise is to faith? True, but to what faith? "Faith without works is dead being alone." True, the promise is to faith, but it is to faith in its true nature and appropriate operations. It is the faith whose fruit is unto holiness, whose end is everlasting life. Away then with this fearful perversion of the grace of the Gospel. Its exceeding great and precious promises are given to promote practical holiness. Woe to him who makes them a warrant for dispensing with that holiness, and for securing its hopes and consolations to those who remain in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity.

Others there are who make the application of the promises to depend on the belief of their own personal interest in them, as if to believe one's self to be interested in the promises of God really made us so. This perversion is equally gross. The promises of God given to promote holiness, and made to nothing but holiness, do these secure an interest in their blessings to him who has no holiness? Does man secure such an interest, because he believes he has an interest in them, when he has not? Because he believes a lie, is that lie changed into truth? Beware, my brethren, of errors like these. Any use of the promises of God which excludes their *sanctifying* influence is to pervert them to your eternal undoing.

There is yet another error nearly allied to these, and still more common. There are those who though they deny not that the only warrant for the hopes of the Gospel is obedience to the Gospel, yet seem practically to disregard the conviction. Their concern is to discover the evidence of an interest in the promises, rather than to create that evidence, by increasing their holiness. *Their* chief design is to apply the promises, while the chief design of God is to secure the practical influence of the promises. *Their* great concern is about the fulfillment of the promises in their own case; God's is that they comply with the condition of their fulfillment; his purpose is that they should render obedience to his precepts,

and thus, so to speak, take the comfort of his promises made to such obedience as they go along; that the evidence of an interest in his promises to obedience, and the comfort and the hopes authorized by his promises, should co-exist. And here unquestionably is the reason why so many Christians are unable, as they say, to apply the promises. They have more solicitude to enjoy the comforts of the promises than to render the obedience to which the promises are made. If any of you, my brethren, know this to be your case, I would say to you, be not so anxious for comfort; be not so concerned for your hope, be not always exploring your past experience to find comfort in that, by applying the promises. Rather give yourself up to the sanctifying influence of God's promises. Let that weight and pressure of motive which these present, come in upon your heart to waken you to holy obedience; be zealous, be active, be laborious, steadfast, immovable, *always* abounding in the work of the Lord, and you will have comfort enough and hope enough. There will be no difficulty in applying the promises of God in such a course. To such a course they are made, and they will meet you at every step in it, with all their fullness of blessing.

2. How great are the obligations of the people of God to holy obedience. Had God required obedience by the mere sanction of law, by the weight of his authority and the penalty, none could deny or doubt their obligation. Indeed, that he has qualified man to become a partaker of the divine nature, to become like himself in moral character, is enough in itself to prompt to a conformity so exalted, so divine. But what shall we say of our obligations when we reflect that we are invited and urged to the adoption of such a character by the promised blessings of the covenant of God. Think what they are,—blessings of infinite value and extent, blessings temporal and spiritual, present and eternal, for the soul and the body. Whatever can be useful or desirable to them as immortal beings—whatever God himself can give—are comprised in the promises of his love; yea, *himself*, the sum of

all good, the overflowing fountain, the inexhaustible ocean whence every stream of joy flows, he promises to them as their everlasting possession.

To this boundless good, what security is given in these promises? The unchangeable truth of the unchangeable God is that security, and all is certainty. With what repose and peace and confidence may the guilty creature man, rely for the fulfillment of what a faithful God has promised. Oh, what is it to regard one's self as interested in promises like these; what is it for him to look through time and onward to eternity, and to behold these promises advancing to a regular, ceaseless, certain accomplishment in his own behalf, throughout his never-ending being? And what are the obligations of such an heir of promise, so lately an heir of hell? Can he slight them—can he resist them? My brethren, have we an interest in these promises?—are we looking to their fulfillment in us?—are we expecting the infinite God to do for us what he has engaged to do for his people? Is that God whose truth is as the great mountains, and whose faithfulness endureth forever, the promiser—and are his promises the charter of our hopes? Is this our anticipated inheritance—that God will do for us all he has promised to the heirs of his salvation? What then shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits? Shall we not present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God—is not this our reasonable service? Is God so solicitous to sanctify and bless us as to give these exceeding great and precious promises? Has he thus opened to us all the treasures of his own benevolence, and by all this power of motive, summoned us to perfect holiness in his fear? To whom then, shall we live if not to him? We have the seal of his promises, the blood of the everlasting covenant. Doubt not then the stability of that covenant. On God's part it is immutable, like himself. Ratify it on yours, and all is safe. Here indeed you may be tried and often walk in darkness, but soon you shall know what it is for God to fulfill what God has promised. On Mount Zion, in the songs and

ecstasies of salvation, you shall know and feel—yea, all hell and heaven too shall confess—that he has not deceived you. The reality shall displace every doubt, and show that what God hath said, God hath done.

3. How unhappy the condition of those who derive no influence from the promises of God. There are those on whom these high and holy motives have no sanctifying power, and of course no consoling influence. They leave the cold and stubborn heart free from every holy affection, every devout aspiration, every joyful hope which the God of mercy has thus aimed to awaken in the bosom of guilty man! What degradation is this? To remain so insensible to these designs of God's mercy—to cherish such a sordid love of the world, as to counteract all the holy, cheering influence of the promises of God, and after the fullness of blessing thus proffered, and the prospects which they open to his hopes, to be left through the love of sin, with no prospect before him but that of a dark and woeful damnation!

My dear friends, can you consent thus to live and die, to go through your whole probation blessed with such proffers from the God of grace—voluntary exiles from his love and friendship, without God and without hope, and thus poor, miserably poor for time and eternity, to reject the blessings, which by the promises, the oath of God, you are invited to accept. Oh, without these blessings, if you have no faith in God, all hope will expire, no mercy can be asked, and forsaken, friendless, an outcast from all good, you must be plunged into the realities of eternity, hopeless of love, hopeless of the least good from the God of eternity. Oh, fellow-sinner, open your eyes once upon the vision of Christian promise, the inheritance of God's covenant—accept the offered grace, and all things are yours, things present and things to come.

III.

THE BETTER COUNTRY.

HEBREWS xi. 16.

"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."

It is one obvious design of the revelation of God to gild the scenes of this fading and transitory world with bright visions of everlasting glory beyond it. This life is represented as a pilgrimage—heaven as our home; and we are summoned to set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. Nor is that world held out to the people of God as an uncertain possession, but as an inheritance secured by the promises of eternal truth; not as an inadequate reward for the service required to obtain it, but as a gift which will bespeak the bounty of the Giver.

Such were the anticipations of those ancient worthies, spoken of by the apostle in the text. "These all died in faith"—*i. e.*, Abraham and those who were heirs with him of the same promise; "not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." "For," as the apostle adds, "they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country—that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called THEIR GOD; for HE hath prepared for them a city."

The text in its connection is designed to present to us the manner in which the Christian in the exercise of lively faith

regards heaven. To this subject I would now call the attention of my audience in the following particulars :

I. The Christian in the exercise of lively faith practically regards heaven as a reality. There is an assent to what the saints declare concerning a future world of happiness, which brings no definite image of the object to the mind, and makes no practical impression on the heart. Thousands there are who will acquiesce in the truth of all that we say, and in some sense in all God says, of that world, and yet remain as anxious about this world and as indifferent about that which is to come, as if they believed the very reverse of what is said to be true—as if earth were the only reality, and heaven and all it contains a shadow. Now it is the nature and influence of faith to reverse this practical estimate of things. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith in the mind gives to its object the substance and weight of reality. When heaven is its object, heaven to that mind is reality, not less truly than the objects of sense that here surround us. Instead of that state of mind which can receive vivid impressions only from material and sensible things, there is another state of mind—that which gives reality to things unseen. As faith in man's testimony can make us think, and feel, and act, as if there was such a place as London, so faith in God's testimony can make us think, and feel, and act, as if there was such a place as heaven. The mind can bring itself under the same conviction, that there is a God, as that there are such beings as men; the same conviction that God has testified of the invisible realities of another world, as we have, that men tell us of things we have never seen; and the same conviction that what God says is reality, as we have that what men say is real. Indeed, we have only to get rid of those mental perversions, which sin occasions, our sloth, our worldliness, our absorption in vanity, and to come to the testimony of God, as ready to believe him as we are to believe one another, and we should have the same full, practical conviction of heaven and its realities, as we should;

were every saint and angel now to come and tell us, "It is just what the Bible says it is, for we have seen it all." Such is faith. When we give up the mind to God's testimony, as we give it up to man's testimony, then we have faith in God—the faith that gives reality to what He testifies.

Faith, then, brings heaven in view, opens its gates, and looks in upon its glories. It sees the order, the harmony, the purity, and the joys of blessed spirits made perfect; it sees the Redeemer of men in exaltation there, and God in that fullness of his glory which imparts to heaven its raptures. Earth with heaven thus realized to the mind retires into the background of contemplation, and sinks away into comparative obscurity. Its honors fade, its pleasures wither, its pomp vanishes, even its sufferings appear but for a moment, and the soul is swallowed up in that eternal weight of glory which is set before it. Such is the power of faith, and in proportion to its degree in the children of God, it strips the world of that imposing aspect of reality which hides from man every thing on the other side of time; it reduces it to its true character of a phantom, and brings the heaven of God's revelation near enough to make us realize that there is such a world; and we think, and feel, and act, and suffer, and live, and die, under the impression of its reality.

II. Faith leads the Christian to regard heaven as a satisfying portion. The man of the world looks not beyond this life for happiness. Exclusively devoted to schemes of earthly enjoyment, his cares and desires and efforts center in their accomplishment. When the sun of prosperity shines bright, he is at rest, he has all that his heart can wish. So had the rich man, when he said, "Soul, take thine ease." But alas! on what sand these hopes are built! Every such man is cheating himself with the dream, that that will prove real which the living God has pronounced hopeless. What if worldly prospects are the brightest, God has pronounced a curse on the world, and behold the reverses which it brings. Friends die—neighbors become enemies—children bring down our gray

hairs with sorrow to the grave—splendor palls on the sight—losses and disappointments follow—health decays—diseases and pains torment the frame, and the boasted Babel of human bliss crumbles into melancholy ruin. Not so with the Christian. By faith he is led to see by contrast with heaven, how vain this world is, and to abandon it as his portion. True, he does not refuse—he gratefully receives—the blessings which Divine goodness provides for him. But then, he does not look to them as his portion; he does not regard them as essential to his happiness. He habitually looks beyond these, and regards his treasure as laid up in another world. This world may pour its gifts upon him in rich profusion, but heaven is not forgotten. He is a pilgrim and stranger, and though he travel through a country smiling with verdure and beauty, he still values his home in the heavens. He remembers its joys, and scarcely prizes them less than were the scene around covered with desolation, and his path planted with thorns.

The same principle leads him to form a just estimate of the trials of life. Shocks severe to nature may be received; and though not without emotion, yet not with despair, not with repining. In the world he expects tribulation. When he mourns, it is not without hope. He does not feel under the sorest bereavement that all is lost. Nay, rather estimating the afflictions of time as he is taught to estimate them by his heavenly Father, he knows he has lost nothing. His sufferings are but the chastisement of a paternal hand, and any thing that promotes his fitness for the world of his hopes can be welcomed as a blessing. His journey may be dreary and toilsome—darkness may surround him—difficulties, and dangers, and trials may infest his way—but his consolation is, all this will soon be over, and he shall then be at home. Shall he then be dejected, because in the journey of a day, the accommodations of the road are defective? Shall he feel that all is lost, because the lodging-place for a night is uncomfortable? No. He rather hastens onward, and presses toward his object with greater eagerness. He thinks not of taking up

his abode in a land of strangers, of enemies, and of want. He seeks a better country. There, will be no disappointment. Heaven will afford all the happiness his soul desires. "Already he kens its hills of salvation, where reigns eternal day, and where everlasting spring abides." Gird thyself, then, O my soul! and hold on thy course. Heaven will make ample amends for all the toils and sufferings of the way to it.

III. Faith leads to ardent desires and cheerful expectations of heavenly happiness. Amid all the hopes of heavenly happiness cherished in this world, there is but little just conception of the nature of that happiness. All hope to go to heaven when they die, and to be happy there. But few inquire what heaven is, in what its happiness consists, and what qualifies for its enjoyment. Their hope is a vague, undefined hope of deliverance from dreaded evil. It has no warrant but their own wishes—wishes fixed, to say the least, with equal strength on continuance in sin, as on exemption from its punishment. In those exercises which are spiritual and holy, and which will constitute the happiness of heaven, their own consciousness tells them that they find no delight, but rather disgust and weariness. Thus the very nature of heaven debars a worldly mind from all joy in the contemplation of it. A Mohammedan paradise would be thought of and desired with far more intense and delightful emotion.

Not so with the Christian. Between his taste and the nature of heavenly happiness there is a holy correspondence. Heaven is just such a heaven as he desires and loves to think of. His soul in its affections and tastes accords with the pure and holy joys of that world, and his meditations of them are sweet.

The Christian desires heaven as a place of perfect freedom from sin and of perfection in holiness. It is indeed, a delightful thought to the Christian that in heaven there will be an end to all evil—that pain, and sickness, and death will be no more—that "God will wipe away all tears from their eyes." But it is a still more delightful thought that there, *sin* shall be no more. Here, sin is felt to be his greatest calamity. It is

sin which causes his deepest sorrows ; it is sin which invades his peace ; it is sin which overcasts his prospects with doubt and gloom ; it is sin which costs him so many prayers, and struggles, and tears, and causes him to exclaim, " O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? " There he knows every cause of sin will be removed ; there will remain no corrupt and deceitful heart to betray and ensnare the soul ; no evil world to tempt ; no adversary to deceive ; no cessation of Divine influence on the soul ; no lamentation for the falsehood, and treachery, and worldliness, and pride of a wicked heart. There he shall reach the consummation of his wishes, his prayers, and his labors in the purity of heaven. He prizes heaven for this, for he knows the anguish of a broken heart. He knows what it is to sin against God ; what it is, in all the baseness of ingratitude, to wound the Saviour that bled and died for him ; and he knows what it is to mourn in heaviness and with weeping for this worst of evils. But there God will wipe away these tears.

Not less dear to the Christian is heaven as a place of perfect holiness. Those who know not the happiness arising from this source by experience may form no adequate conceptions of it. But the Christian knows enough of it to know that religion—that holiness is happiness. He knows that perfect holiness is the perfection of his immortal nature ; that it is a refined and holy happiness only which is suited to spiritual beings, and that without it the disembodied spirit must be poor and wretched. This is the happiness which springs from the union of the soul with God, from uniformity of the will with his will, from fellowship with him in all the affections, and feelings, and purposes of the soul, and from bearing his perfect image. Happiness arises from a frame of soul suited to its object, and is great in proportion to the capacity to receive and the power of the object to impart it. When the soul, therefore, in most exalted state becomes perfect—when every faculty, affection, and sensibility are brought into perfect unison with the infinite and uncreated source of all good—its happiness must be the most

pure and perfect. God, the ever-blessed God, knows no other. This is that state of perfection, of moral exaltation, in which what gives pleasure to God, gives pleasure to the creature; in which there is a participation in the same feelings—in which the soul drinks at the same fountain, and in which the character and the bliss of God become the character and the bliss of his creatures. Such is the heaven the Christian desires. He looks to it as the place where the rays of the Deity will be softened to his inspection, where, surrounded with his glory, every desire will expire in the bosom of his God, and where, in the triumphs of perfect holiness, God's own blessedness will become the portion of his soul.

Inseparable from all this are the desires of the Christian for the society and the employments of heaven with its more particular sources of happiness. The society of that world will be made up of an innumerable company of angels, and of redeemed men from "all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues." Of this bright host of happy spirits he hopes to be one. He has been taught what the interest is which angels take in man's well-being. He has been told of their song when the Redeemer came, of their joy when a sinner repents, and of their sympathies and kindness as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation; and he knows with what warmth of affection they will welcome him to their blissful society above; with what transport they will lead him up to the throne of God and the Lamb, and point him to the surrounding glories of his eternal abode; with what joy they will relate, and he hear, the account of their embassies of love, while he was here training for heaven, and how, with a voice as the sound of many waters and the voice of mighty thunderings, they will strike the chorus of his eternal song.

There, too, he expects to meet all the pious, redeemed from among men,—those with whom he has prayed and suffered and taken sweet counsel in this vale of tears. There he hopes to be re-united to those pious friends, if such he had—a husband, wife, parent, child—who have gone before or shall come

after him;—there, as a minister, the seals of his ministry and crowns of his rejoicing; and there those who, under God, brought him back from sin and ruin to all this blessedness; there patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs, the pious Baxters and Newtons and Edwardses who have taught him by their writings and animated him by their example; there those rich monuments of grace, who, like Saul of Tarsus, once breathed out threatening and slaughter against the Lord, now shouting the praises of redeeming love; there all those whose hearts have been renewed and sins forgiven,—all those who as laborers together with God are accomplishing his designs of mercy in this guilty world;—all these he hopes to meet as friends and companions forever. In that world where the collisions of interest, the jealousies, the envyings, and the evil passions which deform this world, shall be unknown, he hopes to be united to them in spotless purity, in the most tender benignity and active love, and with one heart of gratitude and song of praise to that God and Saviour whose throne they encircle. What has this selfish world to compare with intercourse like this, where every mind thus shines with light and every heart thus glows with love? In such society the Christian hopes to spend his eternity.

Not less delightful to him is the anticipation of the employments of heaven. These consist in active beneficence and in the pure and perfect worship of God. God has established a system of instrumentality, by which is produced, and will be forever, all the happiness of his holy kingdom. The grand principle on which it all depends is, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Be the amount of happiness communicated what it may, greater still is the amount in performing the act of communication. Now heaven is a world of beneficence, of whose machinery of blessedness this principle is the mainspring—the animating, sustaining principle of its motions and all their results. In other words, heaven is a practical comment on this truth—that to do good is the highest happiness of which any being is capable. God is the great foun-

tain of this blessedness; and the united activity of all holy beings are streams of good—universal, unceasing, and immortal. No selfish affection deforms or contracts or limits the benevolence of that world. Every mind is expanded with affections embracing universal good. To this object every eye is turned; to advance it every heart thrills, every hand is devoted. No wonder that this world of sorrow is visited by ministering spirits from that, nor yet if other worlds and systems should call them thither on the same errands of kindness. And who can tell the amount of that happiness which shall be the result of such a system of being, as it shall continually increase and extend with the growing ages of eternity, and continually proclaim the capacity of God to bless? There to fly on angel's wings in executing God's commandments in the communication of good, is the employment in which the Christian hopes to bear a part in the world of spirits.

Another principal employment in heaven is the worship of God. In almost every glimpse afforded us of that world, we find the angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, bowing with adoration and praise before the throne of the Eternal. Every thing we hear is the voice of thanksgiving—the universal burst of gratitude and wonder and love, in songs of joy and transport, filling all its arches and making all its pillars tremble. To such a world God invites his children to direct, and to such a world they have directed their desires and hopes. Even in this world they often spend their sweetest hours in coming before the throne of God as his worshipers. Here they have been wont to come that they might adore the eternal Majesty—that they might derive new and deeper impressions of his Godhead—that new purposes of obedience might rise and strengthen in the soul—that they might taste anew the joys of pardoned sin, and fall at the feet and celebrate the love and mercy of their Saviour. And they know enough of the pleasures of this employment, to know that heaven would be no heaven to them without it. They long for heaven to know what heaven it would be with it. What it would be

to stand before that throne of God,—there to behold the unveiled glories of his face, and cry, under a full impression of the reality, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come;”—what it would be to behold their once crucified but now reigning Saviour—what it would be, after having loved and served him here below, to be admitted into his immediate presence, to learn while enjoying the bliss of heaven what that Saviour has done to confer that bliss upon them. Oh how will the beaming kindness and love of Jesus waken the soul to the liveliest transports of gratitude and joy, and call forth the song, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.”

It is this song, with the emotions which prompt it, that will give the most ecstatic charm to their immortality, and cause the joy of heaven to be full. That he may adore, and love, and praise, and serve God his Saviour, the Christian longs for heaven.

REMARKS.

1. What support under the trials of life, has the Christian in the exercise of lively faith? What if the world deceives and disappoints his hopes, heaven is a reality. What if poverty with its evils afflicts and depresses, a rich and a heavenly inheritance is his portion. What if the world afflicts in any shape, how light must appear all its trials and sufferings with the prospect of eternal glory ever dawning on the soul! One view of that glory realized by faith and appropriated by hope, will have an inconceivable influence on its possessor. It will arm him with the fortitude of a martyr; it will invigorate with the strength of an angel—the strength of faith and love. It will impart such support as the blessed apostle felt when no sufferings could move him. It will elevate the soul with gratitude and devotion unspeakably great,

for it will be gratitude and devotion awakened by the hope of heaven. It will render all earthly joys and sufferings vain, for, weighed in the scale with heaven, they are lighter than vanity. Let us then, my brethren, break off our affections from the earth, and believe what God hath told us of that world of blessedness. Let us fasten our hold on heaven, and then let this earth go as it may; let its bitterest cup be given us; let its heaviest stroke light on us; yea, let the last conflict come—we shall be able to say, "All is well; heaven is my home."

2. We may see why Christians derive so little present consolation from the prospect of future happiness, which the Bible reveals. It is not that the reality of such a world is not sufficiently evinced to their understandings—it is not, that there is not enough in it as an anticipated possession to cheer and gladden every step of their earthly pilgrimage. It is that their affections are still so strongly fixed on the world, that their conceptions of happiness are in such a degree confined to the enjoyments which earth can give. With such a state of mind, it is impossible that they should see heaven in that aspect of reality, and of course with those desires and expectations which elevate the soul above this world. The beaming glories of heaven cannot dawn on such a mind. The influence from things present is so strong, that the heart is but faintly touched by things eternal. These are in a manner hid by intervening objects, and removed into distant and dark obscurity. How can the vivid impressions of faith, the lively anticipations of hope, and the longings of desire touch the mind whose vision is bounded by time! My brethren, if we would know the consolations of regarding heaven as a reality, of looking forward to it as a satisfying portion, of anticipating its purity and joys, we must think so little of the world, place so little dependence on it, and form such low expectations from it, that we can think of heaven—that we can believe there is a heaven—that we can be satisfied with heaven, and long for and desire heaven as it is. It is in vain that God has told us

there is such a world of joy—it is in vain that God by his invitations and promises, and Jesus by his blood, have been thus concerned to remove our doubts and anxieties, and cheer our dark and gloomy pilgrimage with the bright visions of that glory—it will be no heaven to us; we must turn our eyes that way; we must tear away these evils of materialism which hide or obscure our prospect, make heaven a reality, and fondly and intently dwell on the contemplation of it as our home.

3. The Christian desires heaven as the world in which God's glory—his capacity to bless his moral creation—will be fully displayed. "When the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, he looks for a city which hath *foundations*, whose builder and maker is God." The visible universe around us discloses the glory of God, and so distinctly, as to take away all excuse from those who do not glorify Him as God. In that world, there shall be not merely such a manifestation of God as creates moral responsibility and renders disobedience inexcusable—not merely such a display of God as can be made through a material creation, or even in the happiness of imperfectly sanctified minds, but such a manifestation to perfectly pure and holy beings as is involved in the relation of **THEIR** God. It is not an earthly country, but a heavenly—"wherefore, God is not ashamed to be called **THEIR** God: for he hath prepared for them a city." That world shall tell the full glory of the great Architect who made it for them, and made it to show himself **THEIR** God. There, all that is comprehensive in the wisdom of God shall be revealed, without a cloud to obscure it, in the view of the happy beings assembled to behold it. There, the glory of his power is seen in removing every evil—in creating every good—in enlarging the capacity of creatures for purer and higher joys—in lavishing to bless, the wonders of Omnipotence upon them. There, the glories of his justice, the terror of hell, shall shine as the pledge and security of the everlasting perfection of the holy. There, the holiness of God in all its luster will beam forth to illuminate every mind and transform it into his own

image from glory to glory. There, will be seen the glory of his goodness, pouring its eternal tide of blessedness, and telling all in the ecstasies of heaven that "God is love." In a word, there all the attributes of the Deity are fully expressed; the glory scattered throughout the universe will be collected as in a sun, making that world the scene of his glories. And there, with an emphasis which the reality only can give to the inspired thought, it will be seen and felt by all in heaven, that "God is not ashamed to be called **THEIR** God: for he hath prepared for them a city."

By faith the Christian is transported to these happy regions, and walks with God. Thither he directs his thoughts and his desires, as the place where he shall see God as he is—God as his God,—thoughts and desires to be terminated in reality when he treads the threshold of eternity and saith, "Lo, this is my God; I have waited for him, and he hath saved me."

To conclude. We all hope for heaven; we believe it to be a world of unspeakable happiness, and we fondly hope, when death shall take us away from this world, to be admitted to the joys of that. But have we seriously and carefully examined the foundation of these hopes? Have we inquired what heaven is—what its happiness is—what *we* must be to be qualified to enjoy it? Do we give—are we willing to give, in our habitual views, that reality to heaven which makes this world comparatively nothing to us? Do we so look to it as our grand and only inheritance, as to displace the world from our supreme affections? And is it the freedom from sin—is it the perfect holiness—is it the bright manifestation of God—is it the holy society—is it the holy employments and the holy joys of that world which endear it to us? Is it such a heaven that awakens our desires, and is the object of our hopes? These are questions which must be answered.

Some there are, I trust, who can answer them in the affirmative. They may indeed regret that their faith is so weak, their desires so faint, and their hopes so fluctuating. Often may they complain that their fears exceed their hopes, and

sigh for clearer and brighter discoveries of that world of light, and joy, and holiness. They long for such a heaven. They expect no other. Are there any such before me? I would say, faint not. This conformity of affection to God, to Christ, to angels and redeemed spirits—these desires for heaven—are preparing you to partake of its blessedness. You are now on your pilgrimage. You wander in a vale of tears. Temptations, and sorrows, and sins await you. But your portion is not here. Your treasure is not here. You seek a better country. Think often of the glorious prize. Consider who is your conductor, and to what he is conducting you. He who made heaven knows the true sources of bliss, and he it is who will give you heaven. While you pursue the path of holiness, you are in the road to heaven. Heaven is already begun within you—heaven already dawns on the soul. Soon its full glories shall burst on your enraptured sight. Your spiritual joys, so often interrupted and so faint, shall be constant, full, eternal. One spirit shall reign through heaven; one song employ every tongue. From glory to glory you shall be changed. You shall be like Jesus, and near his throne. You shall see him as he is, and God shall be all in all, forever and ever.

It is now with painful emotion that I turn to another class of my audience. Alas, there are many whose hopes of heaven are mere delusion. They dream of being happy there, when the eternal God has declared except they be born again they cannot see his kingdom, and when their own consciences tell them that they have not been born again,—they dream of happiness in heaven without knowing or caring to know what heaven is,—when they know that the very elements of heaven, the joys that arise from love to God from the exercise of pure and spiritual affections, from prayer and praise and ready obedience, are to them irksome and disgusting.

And, my dear friends, is it possible that with such a state of mind you could be happy in heaven? Would not a religion made up of the faith and the hopes and the anticipations of

such a heaven as the Bible reveals, spoil all your present enjoyments?

What then is there in heaven to bless you? God you do not love; Christ you do not love; angels and redeemed men you do not love. To see God is not your desire; to behold the Saviour who has died for you, to be like him, to praise him, is not your desire. In the society of that world you could not be happy—in its employments you could not engage,—its songs you could not sing. The God who reigns there you hate; the Saviour whose love and mercy calls forth the echoing songs of gratitude and salvation, you despise. No—there is not an ecstasy felt there which you could feel; not a note in the eternal song which you could sing. How could you bear to stand before the God whom you hate, and endure the blaze of his glory? No. Amid that holy, happy throng you would feel yourself to be a forsaken, solitary outcast; and amid all its joys you would sink and wither as under a continual sense of dissolution. Instead of uniting in the hallelujahs of that world, your cry would be—“Fly, O my soul, from this place of torment, heaven is hell to me;” and yet you hope for heaven! and are quietly expecting to be happy there!

IV.

PAUL AND SILAS IN PRISON.

ACTS xvi. 25.

“ And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them.”

THE Christian looks beyond this world for complete happiness. Yet while here on earth he has something which the world can neither give nor take away. Deprive him of all that which ministers to the comfort and happiness of worldly men, and the loss of which will make them wretched, and still he is happy. We have a striking example of this in the text. We here are pointed to the gloom of a prison, and see two of our fellow-beings, the objects of the scorn and hatred of the world, friendless, poor and destitute, shut up in its inmost cell, their feet made fast in the stocks, and their backs torn with the scourge. They are awake at the midnight hour, and their voices are heard by those who are near them. Are they then recounting their trials and sufferings, mourning and repining under their hardships, execrating the tyranny of their judges, and the cruelty of their executioners? No; it is the voice of prayer, and songs, and praise that resounds through the dungeon. Wretched and forlorn as their condition appears, they are happy; they are singing praises with a loud voice to God.

Though we are not exposed to the same trials which these men endured, yet even in the height of prosperity something is wanting. The richest abundance of sensual gratification leaves a void which the world can never fill.

What then can make us happy in any condition, or under any circumstances? We answer—that which made Paul and

Silas so happy in the prison at Philippi. These holy men had neither worldly resources nor hopes. But they had an inward joy, which external trials and sufferings could not prevent from overflowing in songs of praise, in that hour of darkness and suffering.

The same sources of support and joy are open to every real Christian. Let us, then, examine them for our edification and comfort.

I. One source of their happiness was their comparative estimate of what they gained, with what they lost. It is by such comparisons that we form our estimate of almost every condition in human life. In this world, that is reasonably esteemed an eligible condition in which the good to be enjoyed far outweighs the evil to be endured. That loss is trifling, which still leaves its possessor abundantly furnished with the means of enjoyment, while the same loss would be deeply grievous to him who by it has lost his all. To judge, therefore, correctly of one's loss, we must bring into the account what still remains. What then was the case of these prisoners? Had they lost all? Far from it. What still remained in their possession? Blessings so great, so rich, that all earthly blessings put together were comparatively nothing. Blessings so great, that no worldly loss could lessen them—so rich, that no worldly loss could impair them. Were they in prison—it was not the prison of death. Were they in chains—they still possessed the liberty of the sons of God. Did they endure the pains of the lash—they had peace which passeth all understanding. Had they no hopes from the world—they had the hope of eternal glory. And who that was partaker of these blessings would count it insupportable hardship to bear a little contempt and pain? Who that possessed millions would grieve at the loss of a penny? Thus the apostles regarded their condition. Faith opened to them new views, and gave them a different estimate of things from that which the men of this world form. It was not this world, but the world to come—not man, but God—not the body, but the soul—not

time, but eternity, which they thought of. When, therefore, we hear them say, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as having nothing, yet possessing all things," their language is intelligible. The mystery is explained. Their faith brought spiritual blessings, eternal blessings near, and, placing them by the side of earthly blessings, enabled them to form some just estimate of both. Thus their afflictions, their worldly hopes, seemed light and trifling compared with the glory which awaited them. The former were so small by comparison as to be nothing; the latter so great as to be every thing.

II. These men were happy in the assurance that their sufferings were the means of great good. They were taught to regard suffering not only as inseparably connected with the crown of glory, in the presence of God, but as the appointed means of the preparation to wear it—the appointed means of growth in grace. The very first of blessings in their estimation was to have sin subdued in their hearts, and the image of Christ more fully enstamped on the soul. They therefore rejoiced; they gloried in tribulation because "tribulation worketh patience, patience experience, and experience hope"—that "hope which maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost"—love to God—that pure, holy, heavenly principle, that can make a heaven. They regarded their afflictions of a dungeon or a palace as the chastisements of their heavenly Father, laid upon them for their profit, that they might be partakers of his holiness. Such benefits they could not consider as dearly purchased by such means. They whose great object was to break off their affections from earth—who wished to renounce its pleasures, and to rise above its allurements—they who ardently desired a growing conformity to their Saviour's likeness, and to be made, in a fuller measure, partakers of the divine nature, could not but welcome the means appointed by God to produce these effects. They knew the divine influence of these means by their own blessed experience. They found their hearts more and more purified from the dross of corrupt affections, their faith

strengthened, their love for their divine Master and devotedness to his service increased and confirmed more and more. For this blessing they were willing not only to pray and labor, but to suffer. They rejoiced in tribulation; they rejoiced in the darkness of the dungeon, because there every Christian grace shone purer and brighter. With what sweet aspirations of praise did this chief of sinners and his companions pour out their souls for the sanctifying grace of God, and with what devout fervor implore it in still larger measures? How happy in the assurance that these things were working together for their good—to see even in their heaviest trials not the frowns of God's anger, but only the graver countenance of eternal love—that every loss, every pain was the means appointed by divine mercy for perfecting their likeness to Christ!

Did we well understand this, how afflictions tend and are designed to bring eternity, and God, and heaven near, and how in this way these things of a moment are making us partakers of God's holiness—did we see them as *means* to be worth as much as the end, they would be to us as unspeakably important as the end itself.

III. Another cause of their happiness was love to him for whom they suffered.

Love is the strongest passion of the human heart. It is delight in the object loved. What efforts will it not make—what sufferings will it not endure for the sake of that object? With what cheerfulness and pleasure does it lead us to act or suffer? How unhappy would it render us to be deprived of the opportunity to do either? The tender parent, the affectionate child, and faithful friend well understand the nature of this principle. In its present and most perfect manner it warmed the hearts of Paul and Silas. The love of Christ constrained them to act, and to suffer for his sake. Their whole lives testify in the most decisive language to this. What things had been gain to them they counted loss for Christ, for whom they gladly suffered the loss of all things. When arraigned and scourged they departed rejoicing that they were

counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake. They took pleasure in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake.

It was not a principle of pride and vain glory that animated these men. It was a flame of disinterested love to Christ that glowed in their breasts;—it was that love which extinguishes every selfish regard; which exalts its object so much that by the side of it all else is mean and trifling. It was this principle which one of them described when he said, "*For me to live is Christ.*" They had no other supreme end to promote by living—no other reason why they wished to live. They were ready to be offered, they even longed to depart and be with Christ. Yet they were willing to abide longer in the flesh, that Christ might be magnified in their bodies. It was love to Christ that carried them through all their perils, and sustained them under all their sufferings. It was this that levelled every mountain, filled up every valley in their path; it was love to Christ that renewed their strength—that lightened their toils and almost annihilated their sufferings;—it was this that turned the dungeon at Philippi into the temple of God, and brought forth, not the sighing of the prisoner, but the song of everlasting praise. Oh, my brethren, what love to Christ was this!

As intimately connected with their love to Christ, I ought to mention the great object of these men—the honor and glory of Christ—as another ground of their happiness. How exclusively their hearts were set on this object, and how nobly and perseveringly they pursued it, are points known to every one who is acquainted with their history. Consider the picture drawn by one of them: "God hath set forth us apostles last, as it were, appointed to death, for we are made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. Even to this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place. We are made as the filth and offscouring of all things until this day." He adds, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear

unto me, that I may finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." There is no example on record of a more entire dedication of the whole man to any other object, than this. They sought not the things which were their own but those which were Christ's. Ease, pleasure, honor, interest, life were nothing in their view, and Christ was all in all. His honor and his glory, as displayed in subduing a revolted world to the obedience of faith, was their object,—on this their heart was set as supreme. Surrounded by enemies, insulted, deceived, deserted—in the darkness of a dungeon, in the jaws of death—you see them calm, cheerful, devoted, rejoicing,—willing to live, ready to die, to advance it. With a heart thus fixed on an object which was great and good and glorious enough to bring the Son of God from heaven—enough to awaken angels to new songs of praise, and, so to speak, to command the sweetest and warmest love of God himself—with such an object occupying their whole souls, they must be happy.

Thus the glory of God their Redeemer darkened every other object; their own wants dwindled to a point; their own concerns—nay, the universe beside, shrunk to nothing. They showed a holy and sublime oblivion of themselves, and seemed absorbed in the effulgence of Deity—lost in the radiant beams of Jesus' glory. Happy prisoners! Who would not envy them the possession of joys springing from such a source as this? Well might they sing praises to God at midnight.

That we may make a profitable use of this subject, let me call your attention to the following

REMARKS.

1. We see wherein it is true that godliness hath the promise of the life that now is. Real religion in its nature is a rich source of support and joy in every condition. True it is, that the humble Christian, while struggling with his corruptions and his fears—while his knowledge of God is imperfect and

his faith weak—may for a season sow in tears. But this is to be ascribed not to religion, but to the want of it; not to the holiness, but to the remaining depravity of his heart. There is no viler slander on the religion of the gospel than that it makes its subjects gloomy and melancholy. Religion gloomy?—religion make men unhappy? Who then or where is a happy man? Compare them; compare the rich, the honorable, the gay—they who riot in sensual indulgence, who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves on their couches—who chant to the sound of the viol—with those who know the joys of religion. Look at Paul and Silas in their prison; see what religion can do to make men happy; see what a luster it can shed on the gloom of a dungeon;—how it can fill the mouth with songs of praise, while the limbs are racked with pain, and enable the happy spirit to soar above earth to heavenly bliss, while the body is bound in chains. You here see men raised by the force of their principles and by their inward joys, above all the trials, insults, injuries, temptations and sufferings which men or devils can inflict—happy, yea, joyful in the midst of them. And can any thing but religion do this? Can a regard to any other object—a love for any other being, a consecration to any other service—do so much? Tell, ye lovers of the world, what would your pleasures, your indulgences, your objects, your motives, your habits, do for you confined in the darkness and gloom of a dungeon? What will they do for you on the bed of death? What will they do for you when the eyes of the omniscient Judge are fixed upon you, and the final sentence is passing his lips? Away, then, with these miserable grounds of reliance; be ashamed of the wretched delusion, that religion is a gloomy thing. When your dying bed shall be hung round with the gloom and despondency, the terrors and remorse of sin—when you shall hear the noise of the final day, then, oh, then, you will wish you had been the disciples of Jesus!

2. Religion is as good a thing now as in the days of the apostles. A different opinion is undoubtedly entertained by

many. Multitudes suppose that some peculiar supports and consolations were given to them, which are not vouchsafed to us, and which we are in nowise to expect. That they had peculiar support under trials and peculiar joy in the Christian course, is not denied. But to what was it owing—to their miraculous gifts, or to their higher attainments in religion? To which was it owing—to their miraculous gifts, or the holy feelings, that Paul and Silas sang praises to God in their dungeon? Plainly to the latter. And why will not the same cause produce the same effects in our day? Will not the same faith, the same love, the same hope, the same devotedness to God, produce equal results? If heaven were as much in our minds, as our chief possession, as it was in theirs—if the vanity and uncertainty of this world were as justly estimated—if growth in grace were equally prized—if the Saviour were loved as much—if the heart and soul were as much fixed upon, and occupied with his honor and his glory, could we fail to be happy as they were? Is not heaven worth as much now as it then was? Is not the world as really vain and unsatisfying now as it then was? Is not conformity to the divine likeness as truly desirable? Is not Christ as worthy of our love and confidence as of theirs? Are not the benefits of his death as full to us as to them?—the promises of his gospel as free? Is not the glory of God in the salvation of men, and the joys and triumphs of his kingdom, as much to be loved? Can any lapse of time change the objects, or the nature, or the power of religion? Has the work of redeeming love lost its importance because years have elapsed since the Son of God died on the cross? Are the realities of heaven no longer glorious because a few centuries have passed away since the everlasting doors were thrown open? My brethren, find the man who makes the same comparative estimate of heaven and this world—who has the same sweet sense of forgiving mercy, the same hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the same love for Jesus, the same zeal for his glory—find the man who regards this life as the first short hour of an immortal exist-

ence—who by faith in God has learned how to see, and feel, and surround himself with the realities of eternity, and there you will find the same principles which influenced the apostles—there you will find one equally happy in his spiritual and eternal portion.

3. We see why Christians have not the same enjoyment now as in primitive days. It is not that religion must make its subjects unhappy; it is not that the religion of Paul and Silas cannot do as much for others as for them. Religion is the same thing now, that it was in their day. The same sources of enjoyment are open to us as to them. The same love to Christ may rule in us. The benefits of his death are as full—the promises and privileges of his grace are as free, to us as to them. Our obligations are the same as theirs. Why then should not religion support, and cheer, and bless the Christian under the little crosses of this tranquil age, as well as under the terrors which the annals of persecution record? Alas! here is the defect. They have not as much religion as they ought to have and might have. It is because they still cherish so much of that earthly-mindedness that debases the soul, blinds the understanding, hardens the heart, and destroys its relish for spiritual enjoyments. They do not think enough of heaven to reduce the things of the world to their true insignificance. These are so dear, and the loss of them so bitter, that they are not ready to part with them for a larger measure of faith and holiness. Suffering to them, is too high a price for the peace of pardoned sin, and for a perfect likeness to their Saviour. They do not feel sufficiently that love of Christ whose height, and depth, and length, and breadth is enough to bear them up under every pressure of affliction—that devotedness to his honor—that absorption of soul in the glory of God their Redeemer, that bears it away from earth, and annihilates every thing beside. Hence it is that they so much want the supports and joys of religion. Hence they are so much harassed by doubts, so easily disturbed by the changes of the world. Hence they pass their lives in so much fruitless

regret and impious distrust. They are not doing their Master's work. The ways of Zion mourn. Sinners are going on in sin, thronging the broad way—falling into perdition, as it were, every hour. They look on and stand idle. Hence they are guilty and unhappy; they dare not cherish the hope of heaven, nor dare they abandon it. How unhappy—how almost wretched they are! Mustering fortitude and resolution to bear the burden of guilt and self-condemnation that weighs on the conscience, and still leaving the cause of Christ to languish, and souls to perish.

My brethren, these things ought not so to be. We ought to understand our calling better. We ought to know our privileges better. We ought to have religion enough—we ought to esteem heaven enough—we ought to love Christ and God's glory and the souls of men enough to rise above these external things, and do the work to which we are called. The unhappiness we feel is owing to this want of religion. Although there are many things which cannot but be grievous, yet there is no event, no pain, which religion may not relieve with its consolations. It has done it. It has done it in the case before us. It has done it in later times. It has disarmed the rack and the fire of power to torture; it has lifted the soul up to the bliss of God's presence and begun heaven's song, while the body was consuming in the flames. All this it has done; all this it can do again. That man cannot be unhappy in whose heart the peace of God rests. Let us, then, my brethren, think more of heaven and less of earth. Let us by faith often bring near the glories of the upper world, and compare them with the vanities of this. Let us prize the image of God in our souls, and regard our afflictions as brightening that image. Let our hearts be filled with love to that Saviour who has loved us and died for us. Let us make God's glory our portion, and although the sun be darkened and the moon withdraw its light, this dark world itself will be changed into a sanctuary, like to that temple where the glory of God doth lighten it, and where the Lamb is the light thereof.

And now, my dear brethren, let me make a personal application of this subject to each of you. You profess to be Christians—to have experienced the religion of the gospel in its power. What does your religion do for you? Does it sustain under trials? Does it place you at rest with respect to the changes of this world? Does it give heaven its proper importance when compared to earth? Are spiritual blessings the chief objects of desire? Are you willing to suffer, that your faith may be increased—that you may be more like your Saviour? Does the blessed Jesus occupy the purest, warmest affections of the soul? Does his glory veil every other object in darkness? Have you that peace, and hope, and joy which these things afford? Are you thus ripening for glory? If not, where and what is religion? Is that religion which knows nothing of these things—is that religion which sinks under the pressure of earthly trials—is that religion which makes earth dearer to the heart than heaven—which leaves growth in grace, Christ in all his excellency and beauty, and God in all his glory out of the account? My brethren, you know it is not. Why then profess to have religion when you know that you have none? Why be satisfied to have so little? Why not have enough to smooth and cheer your path through this thorny world? Why not have enough to support you in the hour of death? Why not enough to rejoice that life is wearing away—that heaven is approaching, and will soon be your eternal home?

V.
THE HABITUAL RECOGNITION OF GOD.

PSALMS xvi. 8.

“I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved.”

If we observe the pursuits of the men of the world, we see how they set their object, be it what it may, always before them. It is well understood that the constancy of purpose and perseverance of effort which are necessary to success in any worldly enterprise, cannot be maintained unless the object of pursuit be continually kept before the mind. The same necessity exists in religion. If we would derive any practical influence from God, and so partake of the promised blessings, God must be to us, in our habitual regard, an ever-present God.

The psalm from which the text is taken, in its primary and prophetic import, doubtless refers to one greater than David, even the Lord Jesus Christ. And whether this and similar passages can have more than one application, which some deny, is quite immaterial. Whether the text has but one application, and that to the Son of God, or whether it has a secondary application to the Psalmist himself, the speaker, by the weight of his own example and as the result of his own experience, teaches us the same important truth, viz. :

That habitual piety is attended with the constant protection and friendship of God. “I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved.”

I propose to consider—

First, What it is to set the Lord always before us;

Second, The blessings which are certain to follow.

I. To set the Lord always before us, is to maintain a supreme and habitual regard for God, according to the relations which he sustains toward us. Every one knows what it is thus to regard any worldly object. A man has fixed his supreme regard on wealth. The object may not be one of incessant thought and exclusive contemplation. He may often think and talk on other subjects. Still he has formed a practical estimate of wealth, as the means of happiness. He has fixed it on the mind as an object of commanding pursuit; and whatever other subject may occupy his thoughts, he carries with him an ever-wakeful remembrance of his main object and an habitual regard for it, so that he holds himself in constant readiness to act in reference to it. Let any means of promoting it occur, or let any event happen to interfere with and defeat his purpose, and you will always find that his object is before him. In whatever way his end is to be attained, whether by hoarding, or by accumulation, or by use, to that he resorts—whatever means will contribute to the success of his design, those he adopts—and whatever tends to hinder or defeat the accomplishment of his object, that he avoids to the extent of his power. If by the force of some peculiar temptation he can be diverted from the pursuit—if under some sudden stroke of adversity the controlling power of his object seems to be suspended—still no sooner is there time to recover from the shock than you find that he has not abandoned his object, but is again under its full and habitual influence. Thus, according to his estimate of its adaptation to his happiness—and according to all the ways and means of turning it to his account—you find that his object is continually before him. This we all understand.

Now it is precisely in the same way that we set the Lord always before us. It is true, the nature of God and his relations toward us differ widely from those of the world. Still, to place him before us as a practical object—that is, as a being whose nature and relations to us are realities of practical in-

fluence—and thus to regard him supremely and habitually, is to set the Lord always before us.

God is a being of infinite perfection. He is a God of infinite goodness, of unspotted holiness, of inflexible justice, of unchangeable truth. He is the Omniscient, Omnipresent, Almighty God. To set him always before us, is habitually to regard him as such a God.

God is our Lawgiver and Sovereign. He has given us his laws as the rule of all accountable action. We are under his rightful dominion, and are to remain under it throughout our own immortality, according to the sanctions by which his claims are enforced, and the retributions of eternity are soon to be fixed.

God is our Creator, Preserver and Benefactor; and our obligations to him are the obligations of dependent, helpless and unworthy creatures, to a creating, persevering and all-providing God.

God is our Redeemer and Sanctifier; and it is only by the wonders of his mercy and his grace that we can have an authorized hope of deliverance from hell and elevation to heaven in his moral image, with meetness for its joys.

God is a covenant God. In that covenant which he has made are the treasures of his goodness—all the provisions of grace for time and for eternity, guaranteed and made over to us on its own conditions. It is the charter of hope, whose security is the oath of God, whose promise is, all things that we need.

God is our Judge and Rewarder. He has forewarned us that a day is coming, when the world and its works shall be burned up; when, throned in the clouds of heaven and encircled by hosts of angels, he will appear in judgment; when the counsels of the heart shall be made manifest, and all the deeds done in the body shall be brought up for inspection and adjudication. He has announced the sentence that awaits us on that dreadful day, according to the character we shall be found to sustain, and apprised us that we shall be exalted to

glory and happiness that fadeth not away, or be cast into the lake of fire which is the second death. He has taught us his displeasure toward us while we go on in sin; and that all the the retributions of eternity become unchangeably fixed at death, and that die we may, at any moment.

Now to maintain that habitual sense of God, which shall secure the practical influence of all these perfections and relations of God upon us, is to set the Lord always before us.

Let us consider—

II. The advantage of setting the Lord always before us.

This part of the subject may be illustrated by some examples in the different circumstances of life.

1. Let us suppose that we do this in following the daily business of our life. The whole life of man ought to be a continued act of religion; and such is the condition of man in the world, that far the greater portion of life is made up of the performance or neglect of those duties which result from his worldly calling or occupation. Would we fill up this portion of our existence with its duties we must set the Lord always before us. Are we engaged in mercantile transactions—let us reflect that God is present—that our supreme Lawgiver and final Judge sees and knows whether we are satisfied with just and reasonable profits, whether we are desirous of imposing upon the other party, whether we are aiming to deal with strict honesty and uprightness. How would an habitual sense of God on the mind, secure us from swerving to the right hand or the left in these transactions! Have we promised to execute a piece of work for an employer, were we to set God before us, and maintain an habitual impression of what he is in himself and what he is to us, how scrupulously careful would we be that we devoted to our employer's service all the time and labor for which he pays us, and that our conduct should be exactly that which in a change of circumstances we would wish from him! Are we cultivating our farm, or selling our articles in the market—are we employed in the mechanical arts—are we serving one for wages by daily labor—

are we managing the concerns of others or of our country by agencies or by commission—how effectual to a right and faithful discharge of our duties would be an habitual regard to a present God! What motives would then press on the mind from the character of God and those relations which he sustains to us! and how would those innumerable departures from duty, which we so constantly meet in these departments of human life, be prevented, and succeeded by the strictness of honesty, truth and justice! Throughout the various commercial, agricultural, mechanical world God would be present. In all these doings of men, God would be felt to be with them; and who would sin in the very face of his Maker and his Judge!

2. The advantages of setting the Lord always before us may be seen in some of the more unimportant and ordinary occurrences of life. It is not merely under the severer dispensations of divine providence—not merely under the great and striking occurrences of life that we are the subjects of duty. Our life is made up of unimportant circumstances rather than of great events. These are designed to answer the purposes of our discipline, as they are quite sufficient, for the most part, to exercise the Christian temper and affections. But it is in this part of our trial on earth, that we chiefly fail. Great events arrest our thoughts, and force us to think of God and of duty. But how many, how innumerable are those to which we attach so trivial an importance, as scarcely to imagine that any duty is connected with them, or that they bring with them any responsibilities! The imperfections and disagreeableness of those around us, the perverseness of those with whom we transact business, the fretfulness and indiscretions and noisy disturbance of children, the interruptions which break in on our favorite engagements, an importunate application, a disqualifying but not severe illness, a letter important to another but not to us, break in upon our plans and try our temper. Or perhaps we place a high value on our leisure—our religious leisure or opportunities—on the duties of retired devotion or

social worship, and say with cheerful anticipation it is good for us to be there; but the duties of the family, or the indispensable calls of business, defeat our schemes. Or perhaps we actually partake of these enjoyments. The divine vision is withdrawn, and we are compelled to come down from the mount. Under these and a thousand like occurrences of life, how little do we feel that we are creatures of duty—how common is it to regard a measure of fretfulness and discontent as lawful, and to yield to a state of feeling that is as really offensive to God, as the outbreakings of murmuring rebellion! And in this way how great a portion of life is filled up with overt sins against God! What is the remedy? Set the Lord always before you. It is he who directs these inferior trials no less than those which are more severe. Constantly then, trace his hand even in the little disappointments and hourly vexations which occur in the most prosperous state. God reigns alike in the fall of a sparrow and in the revolutions of systems; and a perpetual conquest over impatience, and ill-temper, and self-will, is the service to which he calls us in every condition. To feel this, by habitual regard of him as the omnipresent reigning God, is the ample and the only security that we shall not habitually be turned from the path of duty.

3. The man who sets the Lord always before him will not be moved by temptation. Every one acquainted with the nature of the human mind knows that its power to repel temptation depends chiefly on its habitual state and governing aim. It is equally plain that that state of mind which brings it under the greatest force of divine truth must be the most powerful and controlling. Here is the advantage of setting the Lord always before us. It guards the heart alike against the seductions of the world and the allurements of the grand tempter, by bringing upon it the fullest measure of counteracting influence. Is there not enough in God, in his perfections, his law, his government, his favor, his covenant and his retributions to make the world seem little? Can the

mind that sees these realities in God be attracted and seduced by any temptation? Can temptation of any kind, or in any shape, or with any promises, assail that mind without meeting a mighty and efficient counteraction in the manifested glories of God? Nor is this all. Here is the grace, and the strength, and the sanctification, and the hopes, and the rewards of promise. To set the Lord before us, therefore, consecrates the mind with the very presence of the Deity, and repels the tempter with discouragement from the sanctity of a temple so holy. The man who lives thus, enters as it were, beforehand into heaven itself. And will he defile the purity of heaven with the deeds of hell? Will temptation triumph over him under the influence that there descends from the promised grace and unvailed glories of God? Let him then, as it were, place himself in this sanctuary. The thought of sin would be loathed as an unhallowed abomination, and all the assaults of earth and hell be impotent to seduce him from his allegiance to his God.

4. He who sets the Lord always before him will be steadfast in all holy obedience. Such a man is pre-eminently prepared for the duties of devotion. God is with him amid all the cares, and business, and bustle of the world. He thus maintains in lively exercise all those graces of humility, faith, and contrition that constitute the devout worshiper. His heart is ready. His sacrifice is prepared, and there is nothing to hinder his coming to the throne of the Eternal with adoration, and gratitude, and praise. He is also faithful in the discharge of his relative duties. He that fears not God, will not regard man. A heart penetrated with a sense of our relations to God, steadily fixed on the glory of his name, cannot but be warmed with those sympathies and affections which prompt to deeds of beneficence. He who, like his divine Master, is habitually devout and pious, like him also will go about doing good; he will be a follower of his Saviour—an imitator of his God—the almoner of heaven's gifts to his fellow-men.

The same influence will render him faithful in his own

house. He will be self-governed. The cause and kingdom of God will claim his zeal and his efforts. With God before him, he will see that, for the purpose of advancing his kingdom he reigns. Here he will see the purposes of his grace and mercy are to be fulfilled—he will feel the authority of his commands, the encouragement of his promises, and enter into active fellowship with him. In a word, this sense of God will impart stability and perfection to his whole character. The mind that continually sees God in the character and relations he sustains—as the perfect God, the supreme Lawgiver, the continued Benefactor, the Redeemer, Sanctifier and Judge of men, and thus derives from these relations their appropriate influence, will hold its holy purpose to the end. So certain as causes produce their effects, there will be that firm resolution which will form the whole character—that magnanimity which will rise superior to the events of time—that fortitude which bears up under the pressure of affliction, and that holy heroism which, fearless and unmoved, follows the path of duty through difficulties, enemies, and dangers to the prize of our high calling in God.

5. This habit of mind will prepare for all the scenes of life, for death and for heaven. In prosperity, the man will remember that he owes his prosperity to God—that it is he who has crowned his industry and exertions with success, and filled his cup with blessing—that it is he who gives health, and friends, and children, and causes him to rejoice in his gifts. With this view of God, every blessing will be augmented by gratitude, will be held in subjection to the divine will, yielded cheerfully to the divine call, and consecrated by a sacred devotion to the demands of duty and the glory of God.

He is in adversity. His comforts are few—poverty and want assail him—sickness wastes his strength—the stroke of death takes away his beloved offspring, and kindred friends forsake or betray him, but he sets the Lord always before him. He sees that God, without whose permission no affliction overtakes him, who sends distress and sorrow as fatherly chastise-

ments, and he knows how to receive the trial as a lesson of faith, of submission, and of holiness. He sets God before him—that God who reigns to fulfill his own wise and holy designs—that God in whose government he can confide, and in whose promises he can trust. The image of God is before him, and he is encircled by the visible forms of his majesty and goodness. Are his perfections inadequate to protect? will his oath be violated? God is his refuge and he has strong consolation. He stands on the rock of ages and sees, unmoved, the fury of the tempest, and the swelling of the billows that rage and dart harmless around him.

He hears the summons of death; but to him, it is but the expected call of God. True, nature is alarmed when the mysterious union between the soul and body is to be broken. To have a name no more among the living, to pass into the dominion of the dead and have the worm for a companion and a sister, are events from which nature shudders and starts back. But even here, there is adequate support for him who sets the Lord always before him. His Lord and Redeemer has the keys of death. He lay in the grave before him and hallowed it, for the repose of the just. Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. He knows, then, whom to trust and what to expect. He knows that he whom he trusts has power over death and the grave, and will raise again his sleeping dust. He knows that he will be with him through the dark valley. Death is the entrance into the more immediate presence of that God whose presence is the object of his strongest aspirations. God is with him now, and his presence sheds the luster of heaven around his bed of death. He partakes of the spirit of that world to which he is going, and with a face that looks to the heavens, departs for the bosom of his God and Saviour. Why then be afraid to die?

Is the judgment next? The Judge is his friend. He has nothing to fear from an appearance at his bar, for even to the majesty that occupies the throne he is not a stranger. God his Judge he has habitually set before him; God his Judge

'is God his Saviour, and he goes fearless—yea, with the confidence of victorious hope, to hear his final sentence for eternity; for he goes prepared for the service and joys of heaven. His preparation is, that he has habitually set God before him. In that world God is all and in all. This frame of soul devoted the whole man to the service of God here, and it must qualify for his service there. This found its highest joys in the visions of God by faith here—this must find its perfection of bliss in full and unclouded vision of God there. It is this frame of soul which animates all the activity of heaven—which wakes its raptures and all its songs of adoration and praise;—it is this which presents the immortal spirit faultless in the eye of God, and qualifies it for fellowship with God and his Son, with saints and angels in their employments and their blessedness.

If any are disposed to regard the duty of setting the Lord always before them as impracticable—rather as one that looks well in description, than one which is realized in actual life—we would confront their skepticism with what has been realized in fact. Amy Fowler,* whose death we deplore—or rather I might say, in whose death there is so much reason to rejoice—is our witness. And I appeal not to the case of a stranger. She was born here, and has lived in the midst of this people more than seventy years, and for about fifty years has been a professed follower of Jesus. I appeal not to the mere fact of a religious profession;—I appeal to many—to all who knew her—and I ask, can you doubt that she maintained an habitual thoughtfulness of God? Did you ever know a human being in whom it was made more manifest that she

* The students of Dr. Taylor will remember how often and how eloquently he would speak of "Old Amy" as understanding the gospel practically—more fully than any one whom he had ever seen. From this one example he would always enforce the truth, that but little intellectual power or cultivation is required to understand the gospel, and to secure that blessedness which is described as being "filled with all the fullness of God."

Amy Fowler was a colored woman, who was for fifty years a member of the first church in New Haven of which Dr. Taylor was the pastor.

set the Lord always before her—that she entered into the reality of those relations in which God discovers himself to his people, and in which the state of mind evinced more decisively its results in peace, and hope, and love, and gratitude, and joy? It is not indeed claimed that she possessed a cultivated and expanded mind; it is not pretended that she instructed the understanding of her acquaintances, but seldom do we meet one whose conversation so warms the heart. It was not the light of intellect that attracted, it was the glow of holy affection that touched the heart with kindred emotion. And it was this that gave to her conversation a strong attraction, and often brought the most cultivated minds to seek her society. There was a simplicity of faith which regarded God in his testimony as meaning what he said, and relied on it accordingly. There was a fervency of spirit unquenched by the chills and damps of the love of the world's good things. There was a spirit of gratitude, that overflowed in the holy and yet cheerful inquiry, What shall I render unto the Lord for all his kindness toward me? There was a consciousness which almost cleared the whole deportment in the human eye from the spots of sin. There was a submission under the trials of life, and there was a confidence and a hope in God her Saviour at death, which took away the anguish and even the anxieties of death—a confidence in God which cheered and sustained and gladdened the soul by its own influence; it was a faith that did not stagger at the promise through unbelief, but took hold of it as the anchor of the soul, and triumphed in the visions of glory which were disclosed to the departing spirit. It is, then, my hearers, a practicable state of mind to set the Lord always before us; and it is its blessed influence in life, and death, and glory eternal, which rewards its possessor.

And now, my dear hearers, is there such a God as we have spoken of—is such his character—are such the relations he sustains toward every one of us—are such the practical benefits of setting God always before us? If, indeed, it be so—if

there be a God of infinite perfection—if in his attributes are combined all that is grand and awful, and lovely and glorious—if he be our Lawgiver and Sovereign for eternity—if he be our Maker, Preserver and Benefactor, our Redeemer and Sanctifier, our covenant God, our final Judge and Rewarder—if in this character and these relations of God there be every thing of practical moral influence, to perfect man in character and happiness—if to set him always before us is to secure his protection and friendship, according to our every want in time and for eternity, ought this God to be ever absent from our thoughts? Is it safe, is it wise ever to forget him? What real interest have we to promote by forgetting God? What higher interest have we, than the perfection of our own immortal nature—what higher interest, than to maintain that habitual piety which secures to us the protection, the support and the friendship of the Almighty?

How then is it in fact? Do we set God habitually and practically before us? Is it our honest aim that all our purposes and affections, our plans and our doings, shall be precisely what a just sense of God on the mind would make them? Do we actually find that the influence of having God always before us does tell in its proper results? Do we find that this influence is with us in our calling in the business of the world—with us alike under all the occurrences of life, whether trivial or important? Do we find it in weakening and counteracting the power of temptation—in prompting a steadfast obedience, and fitting us for all the scenes of life, prosperous and adverse—for death, for judgment and for heaven? Alas! my brethren, though we may believe that we are not utter strangers to all this, we know and must confess that more of this influence from God is needed. Indeed, if we are Christians, more is desirable. Let us, then, turn away from these scenes of materialism that surround and hinder the visions of faith. Let our views be so fixed on the majesty, the purity and the glory of a present God, and the relations between him and us, that we shall feel their sanctifying energy. Let the

weight of these realities concerning God so lie on the mind that we shall never be able to escape the impression. In God thus before the mind, is every influence present that can adorn the character with the graces of holiness, and cause a well-spring of peace, and hope, and joy, and life immortal to rise in the soul. Let God, then, never be lost sight of. Let us so accustom ourselves to the contemplation, that when the veil of eternity shall be drawn, we shall hail with triumph the distincter vision of all that is great, and awful, and glorious in God.

One word to those from whose thoughts God is habitually excluded. There are those who are conscious that they do not thus set God before them. They know that none of the effects are found in their affections or conduct which would result from an habitual practical regard to a present God. They well know, that, busied as they are with other objects, devoted as they are to other pursuits, the inner man would be offended and annoyed by habitual thoughts of God, and that the Being who upholds them every moment is unregarded. They know that if they were to think of God according to his true character and his real requirements, they would think of him with impatience or disgust. Think then—oh! think—how far you are from all that influence from God, which can sanctify and save the soul—how far you are from the protection and friendship of that God, whom you thus banish from your thoughts! What will you think of him when he shall be revealed in the clear light of eternity? If thoughts of God are unwelcome to you now, what will you think of God when forced to look upon him constantly and forever?

VI.

THE SOURCE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S JOY.

(A SERMON FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER.)

PSALMS iv. 6, 7.

"There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time when their corn and their wine increased."

In one respect all men are alike; all desire to be happy. But in their special desires, and in the objects on which they are fixed, there is that difference in men which decides their moral character and their eternal allotment. Whether a man be a child of God and an heir of all things, or a man of the world and under condemnation, depends on the nature of his prevailing and supreme desire for happiness.

This difference among men is presented to our consideration in the text. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good?" The multitude, with vague and indefinite desires, look to the world for happiness, and in whatever way the world can contribute to their enjoyment, it is the object of their desires.

The inquiry also bespeaks inward dissatisfaction and perplexity. "Who will show us any good?" Hitherto we have found nothing to satisfy us. A life of experiment has told them that a worthless world cannot bless them, and still they prosecute the fruitless search. Amid a constant succession of disappointments, and with a full conviction of the vanity of the inquiry, they ask, with the same strength of desire, "Who will show us any good?"

Not such was the desire of the psalmist. His language, speaking in the name of the godly, is, "Lord, lift thou up the

light of thy countenance upon us." He then appeals to his own experience, and declares, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time when their corn and their wine increased." His desires are specific. He needs not to inquire where the supreme good is to be found. He *knows* that it is to be found in the light of God's countenance—that all other sources of happiness are unsuited to the nature of the immortal spirit. On the light of God's countenance, therefore, his desires fix and center, as a source of happiness far superior to what worldly men know, or what the world can give.

I propose to consider—

First, What we are to understand by the light of God's countenance; and,

Second, Why the Christian desires it above all earthly good.

1. The phrase, "the light of thy countenance," though highly figurative, is not the less obvious in its meaning. Light is in itself pleasant to the eyes, and still pleasanter as the medium of clear and distinct vision. *The light* of one's countenance denotes that peculiar aspect which bespeaks affection and favor; not a countenance dull with indifference; not a countenance darkened with frowns; but one whose aspect is bright with smiles of friendship and love.

By the light of God's countenance, then, we are to understand *that clear and full manifestation of God to the soul, which assures it of an interest in his favor.*

That I may more fully explain this manifestation of God to the soul, and the assurance of his favor which it imparts, I would remark, that it does not consist in any bright vision of light to the bodily eye, nor in any vivid impression on the imagination or fancy, nor in the communication from God of any truth or any fact not contained in the Scriptures. Such impressions and such communications are all superseded and terminated, by that full revelation which God has made in his written word. To suppose otherwise, is to suppose either that the revelation of God is not sufficient for its avowed end and design, or that God adopts in some, and these not un-

frequent instances, a mode of communication with the soul which stamps his revelation with insufficiency and uselessness. Whatever peculiar or supernatural communications from God some may suppose themselves to have in dreams and visions, whether asleep or awake, they are dreams and visions, and they are nothing more.

At the same time there is a manifestation of God to the soul of the Christian, which is not enjoyed by other men even with the Bible in their hands, nor always by the Christian himself. When he has it, though not one of his conceptions or emotions go by a single hair-breadth beyond the communications of the written word, he still lives, in an important sense, under a revelation to which all other men, and himself at other times, are strangers. Though he does not pass one step beyond the limits of the written revelation, yet he sees in a peculiar manner what lies within these limits. He sees God, the great object of this revelation, in the light and radiance of reality.

This manifestation of God, as unknown to other men and peculiar to the Christian, may be thus illustrated. Other men may read and understand what the Bible reveals concerning the attributes of God and his relations to men. They may speak of them consistently, reason about them conclusively, and admit them formally into their creed; and yet with all this light and knowledge, many remain in utter darkness and blindness concerning God as a reality. The light that beams upon the senses of such a man, from the objects of sight, so completely overpowers the light which ought to beam on him from God, the object of faith, that to him there is no God. To him God is so lost behind these shadows of material things—so put away in darkness and distance, that he is as though he were not. Now, to rectify all this, it cannot be necessary for this purpose that any new truth be added to the written record. It will be enough, that every truth here revealed concerning God, comes home to the mind with its proper power and pressure. What if it were so? What a God would be seen were the God of the Bible to be seen!

What a peculiar manifestation would that be, by which God, as it were, should become visible to the mind in all his glories as an impressive reality! This is the *kind* of manifestation of God, which the Christian has, when under the light of his countenance.

Nor is this all. This manifestation of God is made to the Christian in the exercise of holy affections, and he is therefore assured of the divine favor through the promises.

It is obvious that the mind of him whose affections fix with some just measure of strength on God, must have very different discoveries of God from any which are known to those who have no such affections. When the truths concerning God come home with effect on every conviction and feeling of the soul, the mind has and must have a clear and realizing view of what God is, which the world, while unmindful of God, knoweth not of. Such a mind is placed in a region of light, where the great object of faith is seen in the bright aspect of reality, and compared with such a manifestation of God, every other state of mind leaves it in utter darkness. The character of God may be described—the accuracy of the description may be admitted to be just, but so long as it awakens no corresponding emotions, a dark cloud separates the soul from God, which hides the reality. The exercise of holy affections removes the cloud, and brings the soul into the very sanctuary of God's presence, and throws the bright coloring of reality over all that is within it. In proportion to the strength and intenseness of holy affections, the misgivings of doubt and fluctuations of faith vanish, and that God is, and that he is just that God which the Bible reveals, is a full reality to the mind, as the sun when the eye is opened on its splendors.

Again, the assurance consequent on this manifestation of God to the soul, is through the medium of the divine promises. It is easy to see, that however full might be the discoveries of God to the soul, they would not necessarily bring with them any conviction of his friendship and favor. They might only bring God nearer as an object of terror. Since God, then,

makes no direct personal assurances of his favor to individuals—since he furnishes no warrant for any such assurance except in his written word, it is plain that such an assurance can have no warrant save the promises of God. On these the Christian relies. Whether God has promised—whether God is faithful, is not a matter of doubt to his mind. With the conscious exercise, then, of those holy affections which bring God in distinct vision before the soul, is associated the unwavering conviction that he is one to whom God hath promised himself in the fullness of his mercy and grace. Is it, for example, the affection of love that glows in his heart toward God in this full manifestation to his soul, he knows it is that God of truth who hath said, “I love them that love me;” and he dishonors him not by a doubt of his friendship. Is it the exercise of trust or confidence in God, he knows it is that God of truth, who has said, “They that trust in the Lord shall not be moved;” and as the child under apprehension of danger no sooner feels the embrace of parental protection than every fear is hushed, so too the Christian throws himself into the arms of his God, and there feels that conscious safety which gives quietness and assurance forever. It is the embrace of his God, pledged to him by his eternal truth.

Such is the import of the phrase, “The light of God’s countenance.” It is a manifestation of God to the soul, not by dreams and visions, but in the exercise of holy affections. A manifestation of God which assures the soul of his friendship and love, not by direct personal communications of any kind, but through the medium of the divine promises.

I proceed to show—

II. Why the Christian desires the light of God’s countenance above all earthly good.

1. He thus values and desires it, as it removes a sense of guilt from the mind. The Christian has seen and felt what it is to deserve and to be exposed to the punishment of sin. “The fearful wrath of the Almighty will fall on me, if I die as I am, and I may die at any moment,” is a thought which has

entered his mind, with its power to distress and to imbitter every earthly joy. In the sorrow which the world occasions, man may retire for consolation to the conscious rectitude of his own breast. But when the pangs of an accusing conscience are felt, the executioner is within. In the hostility and trials of human enemies, it may be some mitigation that they can only kill the body, and after that have nothing else that they can do. But now, God is seen as our enemy, "who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Every real interest—all that is worthy to be valued, is in awful hazard, and the tears wrung from us by outward calamities are pleasure, compared with the quakings of a heart under some just sense of its guilt and the inflexible justice of God. What can bring relief—what can hold back the arm of an incensed Deity, when raised to strike? Vain is it to think of tranquillity to such a mind, till something shall remove this sense of guilt—till something shall alter the countenance of an angry God. True, it may be that even the Christian who has once felt this, may bring over his mind a measure of senseless stupidity; he may surround himself with an air of mirth, and derive a species of alleviation from false imaginations of his security, even when known to be false. But in the midst even of merriment, his heart bleeds. Nothing can remove the burden of his sins—nothing still the shudderings of guilt. Or if we suppose the Christian cherishing only some occasional feeble hope of the divine favor, still the hours of doubt are hours not without painful forebodings. With a mind sensibly alive to the interests of eternity, that uncertainty that obliges him to say, perhaps heaven, perhaps hell is to be my portion, weighs on the soul with a measure of distress, with relief from which no earthly joy can compare. Perhaps in the case of every Christian there are seasons of darkness, when the number and enormity of his sins will be felt, and point him with full conviction to the avenging arm of a holy God. By such experience the Christian is led to estimate the value of the favor of God. And what is it from this place of terror and of darkness—darkness more terrible by the splen-

dors of divine justice which gleam on it, to come into the light of God's countenance; to pass from beneath that cloud whence God looks out in the dark frown of vengeance, and to come under a full manifestation of God reconciled—under the light of that love which beams peace, and life, and joy on the soul—and to hear the accents of assuring mercy, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee!" Tell us, Christian; for you have felt it—what peace and joy succeeded—tell us your triumph when, with clear discoveries of God, you rested on that oath of his, sealed by atoning blood, that he was your everlasting Friend. What in comparison had been a world and all it could give?

2. The Christian desires the light of God's countenance for its own inherent consolations. It is then that the Christian is in that state of feeling and affection which most approximates the perfection of his nature, and which has most of the happiness of heaven in it, of which he is ever the subject in this world. It is then he has an intimate access to God, a holy familiarity with him. We all know the difference between the cold and distant reserve which we feel in the presence of a stranger, compared with the unrestrained familiarity and undisturbed quiet which we feel in the society of a confidential friend. So essential to our happiness is the latter state of mind, that to live, and to feel that we live, surrounded by strangers, would render life wretched and almost intolerable. The Christian knows what it is to regard God as a stranger. By his own sins he often loses a sense of God's friendship. By the doubts and fears and suspicions of conscious guilt, God is placed at a distance. He dare not presume on that approach which known friendship would authorize. His neglected closet tells him this fact, and often in mourning and tears he estimates his loss. It is that painful loneliness which excludes from that happiness which his own experience will hold up continually before him. There have been seasons in which he has known the delight of peaceful confidential familiarity with his Maker; when fearless and unrestrained he would approach him, and pour out all his

disquietudes into his bosom, assured of finding the heartfelt sympathy and ready assistance of his God. If then we so highly value the peaceful, quiet, and unchecked familiarity of earthly friendships, if without them, all the warmth and glow of our happiest emotions would be chilled and frozen, by making each a stranger to all, what must be the joy of that conscious friendship with the living God, which brings the soul into a peaceful, unchecked familiarity with him—to speak to God face to face as a man speaketh to his friend; how ardent the desire of it in him whose past experience tells him its consolations!

This state of mind implies the serenity of unreserved confidence. There is, in the very nature of confidence in another who is able to protect and bless us, a serenity of mind which nothing can disturb, a stability of soul which nothing can agitate. Our confidence must falter before the soul can tremble. Did we never see this power of confidence in the child, when his fears and agitations were allayed, and tears changed for all sportive glee, by the assurances of parental protection? Thus it is, when the Christian confides in God, that his soul returns to its rest. It is confidence in God, under a full manifestation of God. And though he knows what it is to be without it, and to be racked by the tossings of uncertainty and fears, he yet knows how to value it, by at least some short intervals of that quietness of spirit which it affords. He knows what it is by prayer, by meditation, by self-consecration, and other exercises of devotion, to come near to God, even to his seat; what it is for him to break forth on the soul with a clear manifestation of the perfections of his Godhead, and to impart to it a serenity "mild as the zephyr and more rapturous than song." What care, what fear, what inquietude can intrude into that breast which has within it that consciousness of safety which such intercourse with God affords—the same security to his interests which there is to the interests of the Infinite Being himself; what tempests of earth can agitate the soul that has an anchor thus cast within the veil, thus fastened to the throne of God?

Again, in this state there is a peculiar manifestation of God's love to the Christian. We cannot love another without the strongest desires of a reciprocal affection from the beloved object. How miserable should we be to know that the tender affections which we give to others are answered by no return of regard; that not a being around us, not even one of those whose welfare we are eager to promote, and whose sorrows we feel as our own, has any more feeling for us than for the inanimate objects which they see, and pass without a wish to see them again! The same principle holds with respect to the Christian. He loves his God, and though his love may be too feeble to furnish decisive evidence of its genuineness, it is seldom so feeble as to render him indifferent to the reciprocal love of God. To know that he was regarded by him with indifference would render him an exile from the universe, and shut up against him the only fountain of good, from which must proceed every stream. While the Christian has in some degree known and felt all this, he has also been, during some longer and shorter intervals, under such discoveries of God's love as are enough to tell him its value. He has so felt it as to find his heart warmed with its consolations, as to find it breathing into the soul so much of the inspirations of heaven, such a peace, such a joy, such a holiness, such a superiority to earth, such a devotedness to God in return, such a thousand all-sufficient consolations, as to sink all earthly good into comparative annihilation. And oh!—'tis the language of his fervent aspirations—oh! that this heart could so dissolve in love and flow out to him, as to meet that rich tide of affection rolling back from God on the soul, and bringing with it its own unutterable joys! Do any say that all this is but a fiction of the imagination? Ask the experience of Scripture saints, of the noble army of confessors and martyrs, or appeal even to the humblest, the weakest believer who has felt that hope in God which maketh not ashamed—who has maintained a devout intercourse with God by daily communion in his closet and hourly thoughts directed to his heavenly Father—ask him if his own experience

does not prompt these desires for the light of God's countenance; ask him if it has not brought the fullest conviction to his mind of the practicability of an intercourse with God, which shall cause the love of God to beam on the soul in all the assurance of its reality, and all the riches of its consolation?

In this state of mind, also, there is between the soul and God a delightful fellowship of affection and of interests. Could we suppose two bound together in the relation of friends, so far as mutual complacency in each other's character would form a bond of union, and yet separated by affections fixed on different objects, and by different and even clashing interests, how would the jar and the discord of such a friendship be felt—how would it want perfection! Such is not the friendship felt to subsist by the soul between itself and God, when enjoying the light of his countenance. The supposition could not be realized in fact, and it is made only that we may see more distinctly the ingredients of the blessed relation. While the soul fixes its strongest, purest affections on the divine character, and while the love of God comes home to its full and satisfying apprehension, the soul also loves what God loves, and proposes those ends and no other than those which God proposes. The experience of every Christian tells him that there is no more unhappy and painful state of mind than that in which his will clashes with the will of God. It is not the trial, not the affliction which he feels; it is the dissatisfied temper; it is the inward controversy with the God that appoints it, that weighs down and crushes the soul. But from all this, when under the light of God's countenance, the soul is far removed. It is a transforming light, changing the soul into the same image from glory to glory. Now, every desire, every wish of its own, expires in the bosom of God—every interest, every plan, every hope is absorbed in the designs of God. His own happiness and God's glory become identified. If it be the highest earthly gratification to accord with those we love in affections and interests—if the humblest effort is delightful when dictated by such an affection, it can be no mean delight to

cherish that submission and devotedness to the will of God which make us one with him; that devotedness to his will and adoring joy in his desigus; that assimilation to his character and union in emotion which are the very elements of heavenly happiness; that oneness for which the Saviour prayed, "As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may be one in us." Whatever may be the diversity in the experience of Christians, there is not one who has not felt some of the smaller rays of this transforming light of God's countenance—felt enough to darken the luster of earthly joys, when compared with that vision of God which is the object of his desires, and transforms the soul into the likeness of God.

3. The Christian desires the light of God's countenance, as it gives assurance of those future blessings which are the objects of hope. Did the time permit, I might dwell on the sorrows and darkness which await the Christian in the future scenes of life—the many and powerful temptations to which he will be exposed, and which so constantly seduce the heart and mar his peace. I might refer to that heart within, always too cold, and often hard as a stone, and a source of constant grief—the last enemy, the dark and lonely grave, the spirit's departure for the unchanging allotments of eternity—to the judgment, that place of solemnities and terror, where one conscious of deserving hell is to be tried by a God of spotless purity and inflexible justice—on these evils in anticipation to the Christian—for such they are in most cases—I might dwell, and tell you of the peace, and the composure, and the triumph with which they are looked forward to by one under the light of God's countenance; I might show you how this state of mind is adequate to banish grief and fear—to dissipate every cloud of sorrow, and cause, even in death and at the judgment-seat, the sun of heaven to dawn on the soul, and how for all this the Christian values the light of God's countenance. But I will only briefly refer to the assurance it gives of deliverance from sin and of future glory. It is sin which to the Christian is the cause of his deepest sighs, and his most alarming fears.

It is this which he deems his greatest calamity; it this which makes him an object of self-abhorrence. How cheering, how delightful, then, is the assured anticipation of deliverance! How must he long to escape from this prison of doubt, and fear, and self-defilement, and self-deformity, and to place himself in anticipation before the throne of a spotless God, meet to stand there! To be placed under those smiles of God which are the prelude to final redemption—free from every polluting wish, every irregular affection, every unhallowed temper—from every doubt and every foreboding, and every tear which sin occasions—to live under that clear and attractive light of the glories of God, which gives the assurance of soon awaking in his perfect image, to glow with ceaseless love to him, and be a meet companion of his presence throughout his own immortality—to be able to fix, too, a steady eye on all the glories of that world of his hopes, and, filled with admiration and love, to say, “This glory is mine, and every moment brings me nearer, and brightens still the prospect”—oh, who does not long for this! What cause of regret can remain, save that the next moment may be the moment of departure? And what a duskiness does it spread over the trifling scenes of earthly joy? Who would exchange its smallest ray for all the pleasures of time combined? Ask the Christian who has seen and felt it. Yes, ask any Christian, for he has felt enough of it to know its value. Ask him whether there is not such a thing as an intercourse with God here on earth, which in no trifling sense lets down heaven into the soul, and causes it almost to emulate the joys of angels. He has answered, “Yes, I know it.” Then ask him what earthly joy he would not resign for that manifestation of God, when he lifts the light of his countenance upon him.

REMARKS.

1. We see why Christians so often mourn under the hidings of God's face. The fact is common; the causes different.

Sometimes it is owing to false and groundless expectation of the mode of obtaining the blessing. They are looking for some direct supernatural manifestations, consisting in some mental vision—some strong impressions of feeling—some personal assurance, not through the channel of the written record.

Others are continually looking for evidence of their safe estate, scrutinizing their past experience to find the proofs of their reconciliation, and their warrant for applying the promises. I do not say that self-examination is not useful and is not necessary. But this is not the way to find the light of God's countenance, to be always looking for evidence instead of creating it.

Others there are who refuse to see the nature of their own affections and exercises. Their fears of mistake and self-deception guard the mind against any favorable conclusion, while not unfrequently there is an anxiety and an agitation of mind which renders it incapable of discerning the nature of its own emotions. Now all this is wrong—the certain means of darkness, doubts and fears—the fatal cause of separation between the soul even of the Christian and his God. Thus, he will go mourning all his days. The course must be changed. He must begin anew. That manifestation of God to the soul, which brings the evidence of his favor with it, is in the exercise of holy affections. Here, then, he must begin. He must come out into that field of manifestation where the truths concerning God—*i. e.* what God is—where the reality of a perfect God comes home to the soul. He must see and know so much of God in his perfect mercy and grace, and not to be afraid to trust that mercy, guilty as he is; and so much of his justice and holiness, in the exercise of love, and confidence, and submission, and devotedness. Let him do this, and the very doing of it, if it be blended with a belief of God's promises, will bring with it the assurance of God's love, and favor, and protection in return. Do this, and God, in proportion to the strength of your affections, will be seen in the cloudless vision of reality, and the sight will pour all its joys upon the soul.

2. This subject addresses those who have been taught to value and desire the light of God's countenance above all things. Many there are, I trust, who can say this. If they have never had those manifestations of God which have given even for one moment the full assurance of his love, they have had those which have awakened some reasonable hope, some just persuasion that it was so. If they have never come into the full brightness of this light, they have felt some of its fainter yet reviving rays, and this has been enough to awaken supreme desires for still clearer visions of God, and still stronger assurances of his love. Have any of you, then, desires like these? Do you long for that clear vision of God, in the exercise of holy affections, which imparts to the soul that peace of God which passeth all understanding? Remember whence these desires have come. It is because "He who commanded the light to shine out of the darkness hath shined in your hearts." Remember, too, by whom these inestimable hopes and sustaining blessings were purchased for you: by that Jesus whose love ye commemorate to-day. Without his atonement, the fires of eternal justice had ever flamed around that throne of God before which you stand. Jesus' blood hath changed it into a throne of mercy, and that God whom you now venture to approach is God in Christ. Though sin's unchanging foe, he wears to you only the countenance of reconciliation and love. Come, then, boldly to his throne of grace and mercy. Come, expecting new manifestations of his love. By the exercise of lively faith and ardent love, bring God your Saviour here, and fearlessly, joyfully, look on him as your God and your Saviour. Then will he lift the light of his countenance upon you, and you shall say it is good to be here. Should seasons of doubt and darkness overtake you, still cherish these desires for this light of heaven—still watch and pray and labor for its consolations, and even here ye shall find it sustaining and gladdening your spirit in its weary pilgrimage; and soon the darkness shall be past—soon these glimpses of the light of God's love shall be changed into the full visions of eternal day. Him you shall

see face to face, and in the full fruition of his gifts shall have the pledge of his friendship throughout your own immortality.

But oh, ye who still value the world and its joys more than the love and favor of God, what are your prospects? What is your portion? What are your corn and oil and wine? What is all this you covet? What are all the joys which it can give? Such as the animal creation knows as well as you. What have you done for that higher part of your nature—those capacities of the soul that qualify it to draw its happiness from friendship with God? Oh, think what it is for such a being as you are freely, voluntarily, to qualify yourself for no higher pleasures than the polluted fountains of earth can afford; what it is for a being made in God's image to forego God's friendship, to be an outcast from his love, to go away an exile, a friendless, forsaken orphan, to wander on and still onward through eternity, to meet no smile of love, receive no pledge of friendship—alone and unblessed, in that universe of which God is the Father! Eternity, what a desert to thy soul! But more:—soon your mirth and thoughtlessness, and all your gay dreams of earthly joy, will terminate, by a vision of God in the frowns of his vengeance. In that dark cloud of his anger which hovers over you, his thunder sleeps, soon to burst upon you in one eternal tempest of wrath. Oh, how would you, then, love and value the friendship of thy God! Make him, then, thy friend to-day. He waits to be reconciled. Come, give him the love of thy heart, and he will lift on thee the light of that countenance which is the pledge of his eternal friendship, and of all its joys. Take care of these interests; make sure of these joys *now*. Make the God of eternity and of all that blesses it, thy friend.

VII.

“THE ATONEMENT A PLEDGE TO THE CHRISTIAN FOR EVERY REAL GOOD.”

ROMANS viii. 32.

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

NEVER was a conclusion of deeper interest to the children of men—never was a conclusion sustained by such an argument. The conclusion is, that God will freely give all things to his people; the argument is, that he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for them all—an argument which not only convinces the understanding, and bids defiance to doubt and unbelief, but at once summons the heart to its devoutest gratitude, and awakens its sublimest hopes.

The text needs no other explanation than what will naturally arise from the consideration of the *grant* which God here makes to his people, and the *warrant* by which the validity of the grant is supported.

I. The grant which God makes to his people. Of this it were too little to say that it is liberal and large. What it contains is as truly beyond limit and beyond enumeration as are the wants and the interests of an immortal being. They comprise every thing in time and eternity, in earth and in heaven, which can in any degree affect the Christian's real interests. Thus the same apostle has unfolded the extent of this grant in a more particular enumeration. “All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or

life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

The objects of the grant, then, are those whom God, according to his eternal purpose, has sanctified by his grace, and brought into a state of reconciliation and favor.

All things are not in their possession to be appropriated and used according to the erring dictates of their own independent judgment and wishes. This would often prove their ruin. They are theirs, for their good, and therefore in better hands than their own, even at the disposal of the infinite God, as he sees their interests to require. The Lord Jesus Christ did not submit to poverty to secure to his followers independent fortunes; he did not submit to hunger and thirst, that they might riot in luxury; nor to shame, and reproach, and death, that they might be exalted to worldly honors and princely dignity. These, comparatively, are ciphers—things of no significance or value, except what delusion gives them. And as the gratifications of a mere worldly spirit, they deserve not the name of *things* in that inventory of blessings which infinite wisdom has made over to the Christian. They are only curses. The Christian, then, has no reason to complain of any defect in this grant, because carnal enjoyments are left out of it; no inducement to interline his charter, if he could, with such additions. All things are his, as they will subserve his best interests in time and eternity—God being both the Judge and the Director of all. If health, if riches, if honor will promote his real good, they are his. If sickness, if poverty, if obscurity or reproach will be good for him, they are his. Pardon to remove his guilt—grace to aid him in the performance of duty—strength to sustain him under trials—fears and doubts and perplexities enough to keep him watchful, and to prepare him to thank his deliverer, when he finds himself over the threshold of eternity, safe from hell—every needful supply for his temporal and spiritual well-being in time—immortal life and glory in the world to come. Thus every thing in God and in creation—every thing in time and every thing in eternity—so far

as the least value pertains to it, is the Christian's. Such is his heritage—such his all-sufficient portion. God and the created universe are his.

II. Having thus considered the grant itself, let us examine *the warrant* which secures its validity. The apostle, to give weight to his conclusion, puts it in the form of a question. "How shall he not freely give us all things?" It is impossible that God should deny to the Christian the least real good. The assurance is absolute; it is founded on the impossibility that God should do otherwise, and this impossibility results from the fact, that "he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." The atonement of the Son of God, then, furnishes absolute security that God will give to his chosen people all that their real interests demand. This will appear, if we consider—

1. That the atonement in its ultimate design and end, was a provision for them. There is a sense, and no unimportant one, in which God gave his Son to die for all men. He is a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. The Lord Jesus died to make a complete provision for the pardon and salvation of all men as moral agents; so that in this character the blessings might be offered to their acceptance, and so that nothing could hinder their acceptance but their own voluntary refusal of the offer. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him *might* be saved." But this was not the only nor the ultimate design of God in this work of mercy. Indeed, had he formed no other purpose, Christ had died in vain. Rich as had been the provision of mercy—free as had been the overture of it to guilty men—not one had accepted it. Merely to provide salvation for men, and to make the offer of it, would, we believe, have never brought the Son of God to die on the cross. We must look for some further and higher end. This is abundantly revealed, as we have seen from the context. This end is the actual restoration of a part of mankind to the favor of God. Now, every real Christian is reached by this design of the sacrifice of

Christ. He is one of the called, according to God's purpose. That he might be a partaker of the great salvation—that he might be brought into a state of reconciliation with God, and become as really the object of his favor, as if he had never sinned, was the express and ultimate purpose for which God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to die. Will this purpose fail of its accomplishment? Will the ultimate end for which God gave his own Son to die—that end without which he had died in vain—that end without which he had not died—will that end be lost? Will the grand object of God in this greatest miracle of his mercy be defeated? The immutability of the infinite God answers that question. But let this purpose be fulfilled, and what real good can the Christian want? Let the end for which God delivered up his Son, in behalf of those for whom this mighty sacrifice was ultimately made, be answered—let the whole design be brought to pass in the way and by the means in which the infinitely perfect God accomplishes his designs, and what blessing is not secured to the Christian? What more could he ask than to be the object of such a purpose of God? What more could God do for him than fully to accomplish it? So sure, then, as the grand and ultimate purpose of God in giving his Son to die will be accomplished, so sure is the Christian of all real good.

2. The atonement of Christ has taken away every obstacle to the fullest expression of the divine benevolence toward the believer. Now, there is nothing in the severer attributes of God's holiness and justice, nothing in the honor of his law, in the interests of his kingdom, nothing in the multitude of the believer's sins, nothing in the aggravations of his guilt, to obstruct the largest gifts of divine benevolence. At the same time God is love. Love is the essential perfection of the Godhead, and commands and directs all its energies. And now, when the benignity of the divine nature is free to fix upon the believer as its object, and to flow forth to him in its largest communications of good, when it does, in its fullest intensity, actually fix upon him as its object, what must be the result? Such is the

relation to himself into which God, by the atonement of his Son, has brought every Christian. By it, on the one hand, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in himself, in God, in the universe, to hinder the fullest exercise of mercy toward him; by it, on the other, the benevolence of a God, like a sun, concentrates its beams upon him. Such being the effect in behalf of believers of God's delivering up his Son for them, "how shall he not also with him freely give them all things?"

3. The argument derives additional force from *the nature of the obstacles to the divine favor which the atonement has removed*. The simple removal of these obstacles decisively evinces the kindness of God; but the proof is augmented by the nature and the magnitude of the obstacles themselves. These are the truths of God, which are as great mountains, the holiness of God, which cannot look on sin, the justice of God, which is inexorable, though a rebellious world be plunged into deepest perdition; these as they involve the glory of God, all his designs as a moral governor, and all the interests of his kingdom, beset the path of our return to his favor. And yet the mercy of God has found its way to our guilty world in circumstances like these. The wisdom of God has discovered, and the benevolence of God has executed a plan, by which his truth—pledged to our destruction—can be vindicated; by which his justice, equally committed to execute the last jot and tittle of his law, can be sustained; by which his holiness, which only moved to the frown of his indignation, may be converted into the smile of eternal favor; by which his law can be honored, all the principles and interests of his moral government be upheld, yea, all his attributes be more impressively illustrated in the pardon of believing sinners than in their punishment. Thus has the mercy of God forced its way to our guilty world through every barrier which the truth, the justice, the holiness, the law, the throne and the kingdom of God could interpose. There was nothing to hold it back from coming to a revolted world on the errand of our actual salvation, and instead of tarnishing one of the attributes of God, it has shed a

richer glory on them all. Mercy triumphs over the brightening splendors of every other attribute in the eternal redemption of believers. Such are the wonders of the mercy of God; and who or what shall now limit its gifts towards those for whom, in the highest sense, it has done all this? If God, by not sparing his own Son, but by delivering him up for his people, has changed, in its actual operation upon them, the whole administration of his moral government; if he has changed that throne which, according to the principles of eternal righteousness, had stood forever a throne of wrath, into a throne of grace—changed in their actual influence upon the people the very attributes of his nature, and thus, instead of guarding against them the sanctuary of his presence by all the jealousies of his Godhead, has opened to them the largest embrace of his love and friendship—if God has done all this for his people by giving his Son to die for them, how shall he not with him give them all things?

4. The strength of the argument is increased by the character of those for whom God delivered up his Son. "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins." "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die." "But God commended his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." This fact, momentous and affecting as it is, is so familiar to us that it is hardly possible to derive from it its due impression. In estimating the kindness of a benefactor, one method, and a just one, is to recur to the magnitude of his gifts. But rich and abundant as the gifts may be, if there is in the relation or the character of their object a fitness to receive them, there is sufficient cause for gratitude, but none for admiration. The constant gifts of parental kindness may and ought to command returns of gratitude, but they awaken no surprise. The manifestations of God's kindness to the sinless beings around his throne justly call back their echoing songs of praise, and awaken their fearless confidence in him for every

future blessing. But in all this what is there to compare with that love to sinners, to rebels, to the just objects of his eternal wrath, which gave his son to die for them? What is there in the love of God to angels to evince the continuance of his gifts should they rebel against him? What is there to show that his love will triumph over every cause for wrath, and that however deserving they may be of his vengeance, he will still impart to them the richest gifts of his love? Nothing. Proof of such love to angels God has never given. Thus hath God loved sinful man, and as the proof of it has given his Son to die for him. "He commendeth his love toward us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us." When there was every cause in us why he should come out in wrath against us, every cause in us which there was in rebel angels why he should bind us as he did them in chains of darkness, then we received the highest proofs of his love. The very causes, and the only causes, which could check that love, have not checked it. All that reason could conclude, all that suspicion could devise, all that fear could forebode, as having power to close against us the fountains of divine love—all this has only served to draw forth its most abundant stream. All our guilt—our literal desert of hell—instead of drawing forth the thunders of the Almighty, and sinking us in the flames of his wrath, have only furnished the occasion for the triumph of his mercy. It was in view of this that angels sang with raptures of wonder and joy, "Glory to God in the highest!" Here is the love of God in meridian brightness and glory. With such a view of the love of God, given in the death of his Son, well may his redeemed people say, "How shall he not with him freely give us all things?"

5. The argument of the apostle derives its utmost force from the nature of the gift. "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." Two things are referred to; the character of the sufferer, and the sufferings he endured. It was not an angel. The highest created being is bound, to the extent of his powers, to obey the law man had broken, and could

do no service to supply the deficiencies of man. It was God's own Son, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." Angels are indeed called the sons of God; "but to which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" To what angel, to what creature, to whom but to him who "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," said he, "Let all the angels of God worship him." Christ is styled the well-beloved Son of God—the only-begotten Son of God. Such was the person whom God sent to save us. And if the love of the giver is to be estimated by the value of the gift in the estimation of him who makes it, what shall we say when God has given his Son? The object is too vast, the gift too great, for the imagination to grasp it. To have given worlds and systems of worlds, had been a comparative trifle. But he gave his Son. There, on that cross—the sun hides his face, the rocks rend, the earth trembles, dead men come out of their graves—there hangs, there dies, the Son of God—and there is nothing great beside. He spared him not. He would not abate one tear, one groan, one drop of blood, one circumstance of ignominy and pain, that was necessary to the work of expiating human guilt. He delivered him up. He delivered him up to poverty, to shame, to reviling, to persecution, to sorrow, to the agonies of death. He put the bitter cup to his lips, and held it there till he drank it to its lowest dregs. He said, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow." He laid the full burden of wrath due to us on the head of the innocent sufferer, and witnessed all his bitterness and anguish and tears, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death—when he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—when he bowed his head, said "It is finished," and gave up the ghost. Thus God's own Son—God's well-beloved Son, suffered from his Father's hand—suffered for us. And when God hath made such a gift, what blessing has he to give or the Christian to ask, too valuable for God to bestow? The gift already conferred is infinitely more precious than aught

that remains to be given; and whatever the Christian can want in time or eternity, how shall not God freely give him?

The ransom was paid down; the fund of heaven,
Heaven's inexhaustible, exhausted fund,
Amazing and amazed, poured forth the price—
All price beyond."

REMARKS.

1. What strong ground is furnished to the Christian for habitual trust in God? His every interest is safe. That point is settled. God has evinced—has proved beyond the misgivings of fear, or of doubt—that he has fixed his love upon him. The very design for which Jesus died must fail—the very benevolence of his nature, fixed in fullest intensity upon its object, must cease to bless;—that love for him which accomplished the mighty enterprise of opening the channel for its gifts through every obstacle—that love which did it for him when a sinner—an enemy,—which spared not God's own Son, but delivered him to bear the full burden of expiation for his guilt—that love must lose sight of its object, and refuse to bless, or the Christian's every interest for time and for eternity is as safe as the wisdom and power of God can make it.

Have you, then, beloved brethren, evidence of your calling and election of God. Put your trust in him. All things are yours. Trust him in prosperity and in adversity; trust him in sickness and in health;—trust him under temptations and trials;—trust him in the hour of darkness and under the power of indwelling sin;—trust him when the guilt of sin and the condemning sentence of the law oppress and terrify your soul;—trust him under the infirmities of your daily experience, the wandering of your thoughts, the coldness of your love and the feebleness of your desires;—trust him under the assaults and wiles of the grand adversary of your souls;—trust him when the world smiles and when it frowns;—trust him when friends around you are kind; trust him when enemies reproach;—

trust him when friends live and when they die;—trust him in life; trust him in death;—trust him at the judgment-seat;—trust him as you pass the threshold of heaven. Here, indeed, you may have perplexities and distresses; here you may be unable to unravel the mysteries of Providence. You may wish things were different; you may be tempted to say, “These things are against me.” But he who sees the end from the beginning chooses your inheritance for you. He will not indulge you to your ruin, but manage all for your good. Of all, he is the infallible Judge. Let us drop, then, every murmur and every anxiety, and remember the words on which he hath caused us to hope: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, shall he not with him freely give us all things?”

2. Under what obligations are the people of God for gratitude and love and obedience to him? Trust him too much we cannot, but presume on his goodness we may. God loved us when we were yet enemies to him by wicked works, and deserved nothing but punishment at his hands. God loved us with an everlasting love. And oh! how shall we estimate—how shall we feel—how express the extent of our obligation! If we think what God is, and what we are—of the blessings bestowed, and the price by which they are obtained—what abundant cause do we find for songs, adoring gratitude and praise! Here is indeed “a length and a breadth, a height and a depth.” On earth we shall never understand it; never till we read it in the light and feel it in the joys of eternity, shall we be able to comprehend this love of God or our obligations. To the blessed hope of these immortal joys *he* hath brought us. From despair, fear, hell, he hath redeemed us. He hath bought us with a price. Oh, how dear a price! He gave his Son for us. The Son gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity. Let us not defeat this purpose of infinite love. Oh, let us not name Christ to dishonor him. Let us never bring on him the reproach of calling him “Lord, Lord, and doing not the things which he says.” Let

the life we now live in the flesh be lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us.

3. Let me ask those of my audience who have no interest in a Saviour's love, are you quite satisfied with your portion? Are you not already weary with a world that affords you little but vanity and vexation of spirit? Would you not have an inheritance with them that are sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus? Are you not willing that the infinite God should provide for you—that he in his infinite wisdom and goodness should mark out your portion? Are you not willing that the God who gave his Son to die for you should become responsible for your interests—that all things in time and eternity should be yours? Come, then, to the Saviour of sinners. For you, too, God gave his Son to die. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And can you not trust him? Come, sinner, you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. You have nothing of real value. You have nothing in all the blessings of earth and time, continuing as you are, but ultimate curses. You have no support under affliction—no peace under the reproofs of a guilty conscience—no hope, no comfort in the hour of death—no prospect but that of damnation at the judgment-seat; and thus poor, forlorn and wretched, the eternal God offers you all that God can give! And, fellow-sinner, will you not take it?

"Dost thou feel these arguments?

Or is there naught but vengeance can be felt?"

4. How unparalleled, how resistless it would seem, is the love of God! His love to sinners is the love which spared not his own Son, and with him is ready to give all things to the returning penitent. Had you, fellow-sinner, become a wayward, ruined prodigal from your father's house—had he, in the yearnings of parental love pursued you on your way to ruin—had he done all, by sacrifices, by entreaties, proffers,

commands and tears—all which a father's broken heart could do—had he watched you with an ever-wakeful eye, administered to your every want, in all your guilt and miseries, with his hand of unchecked bounty—could no requitals, however base on your part, no abuse, no provocations abate his love or check his solicitude to recover you to his abode of peace and your home of joy—oh, could you, would you resist him? Would you still resist and wring his heart with the anguish of despair over the lost object of his love? But you have such a Father, and this Father is God.

VIII.

THE INCREASE OF FAITH.

LUKE xvii. 5.

“And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.”

FAITH is the grand cardinal principle of the Christian life. Imperfection in this principle was not peculiar to the apostles of our Lord, nor can such imperfection fail to render the increase of the principle desirable to all real Christians in every age.

Let us, then, consider—

First, The nature of faith ;

Second, The means of its increase ;

Third, The desirableness of its increase.

I. Faith is an influential belief in the testimony of God. All the truths which constitute the gospel are either directly or indirectly practical truths, designed either to guide man by precept or to influence him by motives. With this view of the truths which God testifies to us in his word, it will be easy to ascertain the nature of true faith. This may be done by comparing speculative faith in practical truths, with that which is influential. Mere speculative faith in a practical truth leaves the heart either indifferent or opposed to that truth. An influential belief necessarily implies in all cases the absence of all indifference and hostility to the truth which is its object, and also a state of heart or moral sensibility which is adapted to receive its appropriate influence. For example, the man by long habit addicted to intemperate drinking, speculatively believes that his conduct is ruinous both to his own present happiness and to that of his family ; yet his

fondness for strong drink is greater than his attachment to that happiness which his conduct destroys. This creates aversion and resistance to the truth which he speculatively believes, and thus, with his eyes open on the ruin which he brings upon himself and his family, he goes on in his iniquity. Another believing the same truth, yet having either a less attachment to strong drink, and more sensibility to that truth which discloses the consequences of intemperance, yields to the influence of that truth. Again, suppose a man to be informed by credible testimony that his house is on fire, and his family and substance exposed to the fury of the flames. Now, if you will imagine him on the one hand to be so degraded by vice, so devoted to some sensual indulgence, as to be dead to natural affection, and to all the practical influence of the truth testified, you will easily perceive that he may speculatively believe the fact, and yet not make an effort to extinguish the burning. On the other hand, if he have those sensibilities which are common to humanity, the truth testified will be so regarded as to wake all his energies to action. In the one case there would be merely a speculative, in the other an influential faith.

Now, between this influential faith and the faith of the gospel there is an exact similarity. What the faith of a man possessed of the ordinary sensibilities of our nature, in the testified truth that his house is on fire, is to that truth, as affecting conduct, so is the faith of the gospel to the truths presented by the testimony of God. It is that strong, feeling perception of them as realities, which secures to them their true influence on the believer, and thus becomes what the apostle terms it—"the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen."

It is easy to see what the character must be, formed by the power of such a principle. Holiness, perfect holiness in man, in all its peace and hopes and joys, is nothing more nor less than the truths of the gospel carried into effect by faith. Let there be the impress of the gospel on the heart and life, and what dignity and perfection of character—what noble superi-

ority to the vanities of the world—what lofty conceptions of God and the things of a future world—what a resemblance to the Son of God would be furnished by such a man!

Such is the nature of faith. I proposed to consider—

II. The means of its existence. The text leads us to mention—

1. Prayer. That prayer is one indispensable means of the increase of faith is unequivocally taught by the example in the text. Prayer not only brings the soul under the grace of God; it not only, according to God's appointed method, brings the Holy Spirit into the soul, with that light, and strength, and purity, which flow from his sacred inspiration; it brings the soul, also, under the very eye, and into the very presence of God. The suppliant at God's throne is surrounded by divine realities. Nor is there a spot on earth where the tendencies of the heart to depart from God are more effectually counteracted, and where the soul comes in more direct contact with the objects of faith, than the closet. Prayer directly leads to the mortifying of unbelief in its very root and element, by opening a direct intercourse with heaven. Men may be unbelieving anywhere else, but in fervent supplication before the mercy-seat they do and must believe that there is a God, and feel that they are standing "in a temple resounding with awful voices, and filled with holy inspirations." It is by shunning this sacred spot that the world gains such an ascendancy. It is from the neglect of this duty of secret prayer, more than from any other single cause, that arises the low, and feeble, and inoperative faith of multitudes. Their faith is the faith of education—a faith which they might have though there were not a single truth in the Bible—or it is the faith of fashion, of systems of philosophy—or any thing rather than the faith of the closet, the faith which results, as it were, from the direct contact of the mind with the things of an unseen and spiritual world.

2. Our faith may be increased by examining the *evidence* of divine truth. In all his demands God deals with us as intelligent beings, and instead of requiring faith without or against

evidence, he requires it only in view of evidence. It is not, indeed, always true that faith ever bears an exact proportion to the degree of evidence perceived. A perverse heart can reject any degree of evidence. One Christian with less evidence presented to his mind, but with a higher measure of sanctification, may possess stronger faith than another who sees more of such evidence, with a heart less holy. Still, as natural causes tend to their effects, so an increase of evidence is allied to an increase of faith. On this principle it is, that God, in his works, has multiplied around us the proofs of his being and perfections; and in proportion as we examine these traces of his eternal power and Godhead, will our faith increase in the reality of his being and his presence. On the same principle it is, that so much of the inspired volume is occupied, not in presenting directly either doctrinal or practical truth, but the evidence of that truth. It is not merely to produce the conviction, once for all, that the Bible is true, but to revive and enlarge our views of that evidence, and thus to confirm and increase our faith. The effect is in perfect accordance with the natural operations of the mind. What Christian could, as an eye-witness, survey the works and wonders which God has wrought in attestation of this holy book, and not find his faith strengthened? Let him, with this well-authenticated history of these facts in his hand, revert to their actual occurrence. Let him thus go back, for example, to the scenes of the Saviour's life and death; let him witness the blind restored to sight by his word; let him hear the dumb speak; let him see the lame walk, and the dead arise; let him go to the foot of the cross; let him follow his Saviour to the tomb; let him see the angel descend and roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher; let him see the Son of God rise from the dead; let him, as it were, eat, and drink, and talk with him; let him, like Thomas, thrust his hand into his pierced side, and like that disciple, he will be no longer faithless, but believing, and, like him, in the language of wonder and love, he will exclaim, "My Lord and my God!"

3. To the same end we must cherish a deep and an abiding sense of the mean and degrading nature of earthly things. One grand reason why the faith of men is so weak and inoperative is that the mind is so much occupied with the objects of time and sense. These so engross the thoughts and sensibilities of the soul, that the objects of faith have no influence, or, at most, that which is feeble and fluctuating. The only remedy is in the correction of these views of the world. We must see and must feel how low and fading are these objects; how poor and transitory are all earthly things; how vain the fairest prospects; how false the most glittering hopes. Would we carry about with us a continually just estimate of what man is, as a being created, at first, in the image of God, and destined to eternity—rescued from condemnation to endless death by the stupendous mercy of God—called by the gospel to seek for glory, and honor, and immortality—capable of contemplating, resembling, and enjoying God—how childish, how trifling would appear the pursuits of men—how degraded the character of him who is sunk in the love of wealth and pleasure and honor—how forgetful of his first duties, and of the high destination from his God! Such views would teach us to rise above the trifling temporary scene around us; for we should look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. We should acquire an increasing practical impression of the unsatisfactory and inferior nature of worldly objects; we should readily drop them from our grasp, that we might lay hold on things which are not seen and are eternal.

4. Closely connected with this subject is the kindred one of keeping death and eternity continually in view. Certain it is that this world is never overcome but by intent meditation on another; nor shall we think much of another while we regard its realities as confused and lost in an uncertain and distant futurity. But let death be brought near to our minds—let us carry about with us an habitual sense of the frailty of these tabernacles of clay, and of our exposure to drop every moment into the grave—let the realities of an eternal world break in

fully upon us, and how should we learn to despise the turbid and transient pleasures of this world, for the pure and unfading glories of eternity. If, then, we would increase our faith, death and judgment and heaven must be much in our thoughts. We must especially bring near to our hearts the purity and bliss of the saints above. We must aim at the love, and peace, and joy which constitute their happiness, and pant after more of that life of God in the soul, which we hope to possess perfectly in his presence hereafter. Such anticipations of death—such near visions of heaven—such aspirations after its light and its holiness—such foretastes of its employments and delights, will not only mortify our hearts to the world, but will invest the future scenes of hope with the aspect of reality. Our faith would grow so strong as to make us feel that our residence on earth is a pilgrimage, and quite absorb us in the greater work and greater prospects of eternity. We should feel as beings surrounded by the unvailed objects of a spiritual world, and endure as seeing him who is invisible.

5. Another means of increasing faith is its *repeated exercise*, in retirement and meditation, as well as in the business of life. Every natural faculty, and every moral principle of the soul, is strengthened by exercise. The power of evil habits is universally acknowledged as adequate to a fatal resistance of all moral influence to change. Not less powerful would be habit in a holy course, were it equally confirmed by exercise and indulgence, to resist the temptations to sin. Nor is there any holy principle capable of more decisive confirmation by exercise, and of rising to a more absolute dominion in the soul, than faith.

At the same time, man is a fallen creature, so quickly occupied with objects of sense, and so easily losing sight of his higher destination, that there is no safety but in a continued apprehension and vivid impression of eternal things. The stone forced up the mountain does no more certainly roll back when the impelling cause is removed, than the Christian sinks under the influence of worldly objects when faith languishes.

Nor is the temptation ever intermitted. The world is about us, within us, on our right hand and on our left. The most vivid moral impressions, unless repeated and often repeated, will, like the morning dew, be brushed off by our necessary contact with the world, or exhaled by the sun of worldly prosperity. Hence the absolute necessity of retirement and meditation, as well as constant watchfulness against the influence of worldly things. We must retire from the world—we must resort to that sacred retreat where we shall be alone with God and the things of eternity. Daily should we look into this holy book, as revealing to us the things of another state of being. We must accustom ourselves to reflection and thought. We must bring before the mind the great realities which the revelation of God discloses, and arrest them and hold them to the eye of the mind and the sensibilities of the heart, and we must look, and still look, till the impression is felt—till the objects rise and swell to something of their real magnitude—till the effect becomes fixed and incorporated, and till we can go out amid sensible objects, and carry the holy and sanctifying influence of the things of another world along with us. Thus in the very business and bustle of life our thoughts would recur to the topics of retired meditation. Our worldly schemes and purposes would be formed and pursued under some just estimate of the comparative value of things temporal and things eternal. We should walk by faith. Unseen realities would come so near as to occupy the field of vision; the glare of worldly objects would fade away in the brighter splendors of heavenly things, and we should feel and act as living and moving amid the scenes of eternity.

6. Important to the same end are just views of the truth and faithfulness of God. God has given to his people exceeding great and precious promises. The only ultimate foundation on which faith can rest in these promises, is the unchangeable truth of God. Especially when we consider how often the best men sin against him and forfeit his favor—how they multiply their provocations and dishonor their covenant,

we shall see that they need all the truth and faithfulness of God to sustain and invigorate their faith. The faithfulness of a creature would fail here. We need a firmer foundation, even the faithfulness of him who changeth not. Nor is there perhaps any single topic of contemplation better adapted to strengthen the faith of the children of God than the faithfulness and truth of their heavenly Father. When they consider those attributes which raise him far above every temptation to deceive—that the very attributes which move God to promise prompt the whole Deity to fulfill—that in every age and in all the circumstances of man he has been faithful without variableness or shadow of turning—that in his very nature, as the eternal, self-existent God, he changeth not—then they can repose in his declarations an unwavering faith. In proportion as they meditate on God, will this only foundation of their faith become firm, and they will feel that resting here they rest on the eternal Rock. Neither sins nor provocations will shake the basis of their hopes. The changes of earth and time may threaten to invade their peace, empires may rise and fall, friends may betray, or sicken and die, but, whatever else may change God is the same forever. Whoever else may be deaf, God will hear; whoever else may deceive, God abideth faithful. By such views of God unbelief will be weakened and faith encouraged to anchor her hopes with unshaken confidence in his eternal covenant.

I proceed—

III. To consider the desirableness of increasing our faith. This appears from the character it gives, the consolations it imparts, and the glory for which it prepares.

1. From the character it gives. All the defects and blemishes of Christian character may be traced to the want or the weakness of faith as their cause. It is through the imperfection of this principle that the character of man is formed so much by the influence of objects that here surround him. Every man is what his object is. Nor can we well conceive of greater deformity and degradation of character than that of

an intelligent and immortal being whose character is voluntarily formed by the exclusive influence of the low and fleeting vanities that here solicit human pursuit. What prostration of his faculties! He was made in the image of his God. What frustration of the great end of his being! He was destined to eternal fellowship with God in character and blessedness. He retires from, or rather rejects all that moral influence which would render him a kindred spirit with angels, and sinks and grovels with the beasts that perish. Nor is the guilt and moral turpitude of such a character less conspicuous or less odious. What obligations to his Maker are slighted; what contempt of the glorious designs of God in the erection of a moral kingdom and in the formation of man as its qualified subject and active instrument of Jehovah's glory;—and all this, too, in direct resistance to the overtures of grace and forgiveness through an incarnate Redeemer! To such degradation and guilt even the Christian in his present state is lamentably subject. How shall he be rescued?—what is the redeeming principle? **FAITH.** The sum of all moral excellence in man is Christianity embodied in practical results by faith. The complete influence of this principle would form a character corresponding with the truths of God's revelation, as the image answers to the seal. It would give a substance and reality to eternal things which would annihilate the practical ascendancy of temporal things. It would correct his wrong estimate of things and bring him under the exclusive power of every high and holy motive. God would be with him; the portals of glory would be open before him; and thus surrounded by divine objects his heart would imbibe their influence, and he would feel and act as living and moving amid the scenes of the eternal world. He would be like God, for he would feel and act under the same influence which awakens the affections and prompts the works of God. In such a character we should see an exemplification of the power of faith—we should see a living image of the Son of God, in all the moral beauty and majesty of one walking as

Christ also walked. I need only ask, is such a character desirable ?

2. From the consolations which faith imparts. It is not only the prerogative of faith that it adds to our peace and our joys in the prosperous scenes of life. Here, indeed, it moderates and directs, and governs our desires and expectations from the world—it gives serenity and contentment instead of the corroding cares and agitations of a worldly spirit—it gives to every blessing enjoyed the enhanced value of a gift from an eternal and an unfailing friend ; and awakens that gratitude, which, purified and invigorated, will hereafter pour the tide of ecstasy before the throne of God. But its power is still more triumphant in scenes of affliction and trial. To the eye of faith every event has a tendency and an aim. Nothing is accidental—nothing without a purpose. Amid all that is dark and dreary, in the storms and tempests of this world, the sun of the believer's hopes is still shining in his strength. Faith shows him his God in the mild majesty of his parental character—

"From seeming evil still educing good,
And better thence again, and better still
In infinite progression."

Faith penetrates the unseen world ; and with heaven in view, with all its glories dawning on the sight, how must the light afflictions of a moment be lost when set in contrast with that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory !

Nor do its consolations fail at the hour of death, or when the believer is called to judgment. Never indeed does he look at death without seriousness, nor forward to judgment without humility. Yet he often looks at both with composure, yea with triumph. By faith he is enabled to lean on his arm who has destroyed him that has the power of death, and to put away the tremblings of guilt. Faith sheds light on the darkness of the tomb, and looks to the morning of a glorious resurrection. Faith brings eternal glories near, and discloses, in earnest and foretastes, the joys of heaven, and sees the dark

valley opening into the paradise of God. Faith rests its confidence on the atoning blood of Jesus, and on the threshold of eternity authorizes the triumphant shout—"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Faith appropriates the righteousness of him in whom there is no condemnation, and conducts fearless to the judgment-seat. Faith, then, can welcome death, for it is sleep in Jesus—the rest of heaven. It can welcome the judgment too, for that is the day of the consummation of its hopes, the day of eternal triumph, in which the believer will be seated on his throne above, to hold the palm of victory and to wear the crown of life.

3. From the glory for which it prepares. Preparation for the glory that shall hereafter be revealed must be begun in this world. It must be begun in that character, which is the only true appropriate preparation for the services and joys of heaven. The happiness of heaven must result from the objects of heaven, and the capacities or fitness of the soul to derive happiness from those objects. If the character be formed here by the exclusive influence of the objects of sense, if all the desires and affections be confined to these, there can be nothing in the world of spirits to meet and satisfy a single desire of the soul. The character, then, must be formed by other objects—the desires and affections of the soul must be fixed on things above—it must thus become capable of heavenly joys, or in vain were it admitted into heaven itself. But it is by faith, and by faith only, that the influence of these divine and glorious realities can be felt in our present state. Without faith, the immortal spirit must be exclusively occupied and influenced by objects of sense, and all its powers and capacities be contracted and shrivelled to the limits of those of the animal creation. But by faith, we live as seeing things invisible. By faith, we extend our views beyond the material objects around us, and bring realities which lie beyond the organs of sense as realities no less present to mind. By faith, eternity links itself with time, and there is no chasm in our existence. The kingdom of God is within us. The same objects of affec-

tion touch the heart, the same sources of joy pour their streams upon the soul, and the same character is formed—which are found in the residence of the blessed. Thus faith joins heaven to earth, and sings in this vale of tears the same song that love and gratitude and joy will sing before the throne of God and the Lamb. Faith beholds the order, the harmony, the happiness of the heavenly hosts, the person of the great Mediator, the glories of God, and the joys of his presence; and thus that character of the believer, and those capacities of the soul are formed here on earth, which are its preparation for the purity and employments, and bliss of that world of light and glory. As his faith increases, his preparation for heaven increases; and he partakes here below, in enlarged measure, of that perfection and those joys which shall be completed when faith is lost in sight, and when we shall see as we are seen, and know even as we are known.

And now, my brethren, do we not need an increase of faith? Do the divine realities, disclosed to us by the revelation of God, have that moral influence upon us which they ought to have? If heaven and hell, if God and Christ were regarded in some such manner as visible objects are regarded, would not Christians be better Christians? Would it not give them a more holy elevation above the world, and impart a firmer reliance on the promises of God, and wake up a more decided spirit of devotedness to his service? We can be at no loss for the answer. Let us, then, strive to cherish and strengthen this divinely-inspired principle. As the fruit of the Spirit, let it be our fervent prayer to him without whom "nothing is strong, nothing is holy," "Lord, increase our faith." Let us resort to every means of its increase, and give full scope to its operation. How exalted, how divine the character it would thus impart—what support and consolation it would bring to the laboring spirit in every struggle, even in death itself! What a radiance it would shed on our every path—what light it would shed on the dark valley—what triumph impart even at the foot of the judgment-seat—what meetness

for fellowship with God and the Saviour, in the glories of his kingdom !

Let us then labor more, and pray more for increased power of faith. Let us give it that most full and comprehensive exercise as it becomes redeemed sinners, even faith in the great atonement of the Son of God. In the contemplation of the cross of Christ, all the great truths of the gospel are presented to us. Here it is that the character of God in its brightest glories is unfolded—here it is that our own character and state also are presented, the evil of sin and its just condemnation—here, the matchless love of Jesus and the full purchase of his atoning death—here, the motives to holy obedience—here, the doom from which we hope to be delivered, and the joys to which we hope to be brought, are all placed before us in their clearest light and most impressive power. Here, then, let us give new vigor to our faith. Come and let us cast away our sins and our solicitude, and again trust the truth of the living God. To-day, let us believe the record which he hath given us of his Son—to-day, let us bring our souls under the influence of eternal realities. Let us look beyond the materialism that surrounds us. Let us give to faith the power which is her own—even to open the celestial gate—to pierce the veil that conceals the paradise of God, and to look in on its glories. Then wherever we are, in this or in other worlds, shall God, and Christ, and the things of heaven be with us and all around us—then shall we live under their holy, sanctifying power, and shall be pressing toward the mark for the prize of our high calling, and then, in a little while, receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.

I ought not to conclude without calling these churches to that faith in their covenant God, which this season of revival demands. God is in the midst of us, by his Spirit. God is here, to accomplish the greatest of his exceeding great and unfulfilled promises to lost men. God is here, multiplying the trophies of his mercy and the heirs of eternal glory. God is here, with that sacred influence, that silent, pervading power

of his Spirit, which alone reaches and softens and subdues the rebellious will of man, and restores to his soul God's image in righteousness and true holiness. God is here, to convert, to bless, to save, with an everlasting salvation, parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers, sisters, friends and neighbors. Souls dead in sin!—oh, what death so strong!—are made to live! Oh for that faith in God which takes hold of God's counsels and God's promises! Oh for that faith which shall give fellowship with a suffering, dying Saviour—faith which shall realize that the power of the Holy Ghost is on the minds of this community! Who is the Christian that will not believe it, and will not act as if he believed it? Who, as if amid the scenes of an apostolic day, will not, with a true heart and a whole heart—will not now, enter into fellowship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost in the work of saving the souls of men? Who will stand back from this work at such a time, and so become a blot and disgrace to the cause he professes to espouse, and a judgment and a curse on the community in which he dwells?

IX.

GOD JUDGES BETTER THAN MAN.

JOB xxxiv. 38.

“Should it be according to thy mind?”

WHEN we consider that there is a God of infinite perfection at the head of the universe, extending his providence to every event, and making it the expression of his will, it seems to be the plainest of all truths that such creatures as we are, ought to be cheerfully subject to his disposal. When we reflect still farther, that he left not the world he made to perish in its own wilful apostasy, but purchased again his own creation by the blood of his Son, that he has taught us to regard this unspeakable gift as the measure of his love and the pledge of all things, and that he has revealed himself as a covenant—God giving security to this charter of blessings, not merely by the attributes of Godhead and the immutability of promise, but also by the confirmation of an oath—duty seems too cold a term to express the glad submission and grateful confidence due to this wise, and gracious, this insulted, and yet indulgent God.

Time was, when submission to God on the part of man was not deemed grievous. In Eden, that happy residence of purity and love, neither marred by defilement of sin, nor darkened by the clouds of death, our first parents walked with their Maker in all that filial submission of unwavering confidence which a continual sense of his perfections and love inspired. The will of man and the will of his God were one. But man would be wiser than his Maker; and vainly imagined that, in consulting his own will, higher satisfaction was to be found than in according with the holy will of a perfect God. In the

same path of miserable adventure have gone, ever since, his blind and unhappy offspring.

To be convinced of this truth, suppose instead of the course of disappointment and trial and sorrow which, in the providence of God, is the appointed lot of man, they were permitted to choose for themselves—suppose the direction of events were to be so committed to them that every pang and sorrow, to which they are now liable, could be avoided, and every blessing and joy, which can be the object of their wishes, could be secured, how many would show any practical regard for the glory of God and their own spiritual good as connected with the present course of his providence? What evil has been endured by most men which they would not have prevented, if they could, even at such a sacrifice? And with a prospect so bright as to be shaded by no cloud of calamity, how many, that it might be realized, would not be willing to take the government from the hands of God into their own, and rejoice to be at their own disposal? The consciousness of thousands answers that, in many cases, *our will* is better than *God's*, and, were we on the throne, it should be according to our mind.

To develop this form of human selfishness, and to show how unbecoming it is in such a creature as man, let us consider it;

I. As highly presumptuous. Look at the lesson of experience. In all their estimates, men are not merely liable to mistakes, but they constantly fall into them. What scheme of earthly happiness was ever fully realized? The very events to which men are chiefly indebted for their happiness are not of their own contriving. The results of their own plans are brought about in a manner utterly unthought of, and in a course totally unlike any they would have adopted had they thought of it. Just when we have laid the plan of life, formed those friendships and ties, and begun to enjoy the circle in which we would wish to live and die, an unexpected stroke disappoints our hopes, and lays all our schemes in the dust.

With whatever toil, and care, and wisdom we have reared the goodly structure—whatever security we may fondly imagine we have given it from every storm that blows, an unseen hand interposes and overturns it from the foundation. So universally is this the experience of man, that as he advances in life, the lesson becomes more and more impressive; he grows distrustful of himself, tired of weaving plots which a single cross accident may entangle, or which unravel of themselves, and end in nothing. It is, then, the testimony of experience, that we neither understand well how to choose events, nor how to control them. Is it not presumption palpable that refuses, under such lessons from our own experience, to resign ourselves cheerfully to the disposal of a beneficent God, for the sake of being the arbiters of our own destiny?

But the presumption is still more strikingly apparent, if we reflect on our own incompetence to govern. That we may direct wisely, or wish wisely, it is necessary to know the events in their connections, relations and results, both as they may affect our own interests and the greater interests of a world, and even of the universe. But can we even look through time? Can we cast an eye over immensity and through eternity? Do we know so much; do we so approximate omniscience that we can survey, with prophetic vision, the darkness of futurity, and unfold in luminous delineation the connections and results of even a single occurrence? A providential event, afflicting to us, portending, according to our best means of judging, the sorest calamities, occurs. But what do we know of the reasons which have led to it, in the mind of him, who rules the universe? Whatever may be proper for us to do for the purpose of preventing beforehand certain probable, and in our view, calamitous events, what have we to do at explanation when they have come to pass? Can we unfold the whole design; can we be sure that what we regard as an end, is not merely the means, or what we suppose to be the whole, is only part; that what we lament may be a blessing, and what we desire only a curse; that

what appears to be confusion and calamity may be the bright progress of order and joy; and that what appears to be the woes of Jehovah's wrath, may only be the prelude to the richest triumphs of his love? It may be dark, mysterious, unfathomable! Does it therefore become us to object, to dictate? The providence may be deeply afflictive and grievous, but, Christian, thy God hath done it;—should it be according to thy mind or his?

The presumption of this form of human selfishness is still more striking, when we reflect on our inability, by comparison or contrast. The reasonableness of submission is, in the nature of things, proportional to the infirmities of him who is called on to submit and the competence of him who claims his submission. All agree that in early childhood, implicit submission to parental government *must* be exacted. What, then, is man—and what is God? Man—how ignorant, how erring, how powerless, how depraved and perverse—a creature of yesterday, whose foundation is in the dust, who is crushed before the moth, who knows nothing—a worm of the earth. Where is he? In a dark spot in the creation, placed in a vale whose high surrounding mountains bound every prospect save only that of the heavens above him—this is the being who sets himself forth a candidate for Jehovah's dominion. What is God? He is the eternal, self-existent, independent Creator, of whom, and to whom, and through whom are all things. He is the Almighty. His understanding is infinite; with him is light and no darkness at all. He it is whom heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain; God is love, whose glory is above the heavens, the joy of angels, whose song makes all its pillars tremble as they sing, "Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come; blessing and honor to him that sitteth on the throne." This is the Being whom vain man would displace, that he might be his successor in empire! Weak, erring, helpless man, leave dominion with thy God. What presumption in the thought that "it should be according to thy mind!"

II. This desire, if accomplished, would be fatal to the highest and best interests. The glory of God, that full expression of his perfections in the highest good of the universe, what would become of that? What an utter failure of that consummation of all things, were man to be the disposer of events? To say nothing of his utter incompetence, it would be taking from the helm of the universe the benevolence of a God, and placing in its stead that selfish mind which is enmity against him.

The effects would not be less fatal to the interests of any community. View man in any social relation under the influence of that individuality of interest which appropriates every thing to self. The power in one, would create all the horrors of tyranny. The privilege in all, would awaken all to war upon each other's peace and happiness without cessation. When would the rains of heaven descend?—when would the sun shine in his strength?—when would wars cease?—when would peace be perpetuated?—when would any providential event, that is necessary to the subsistence of the world, take place, if the concurrent will of men were to be waited for?

It would be equally fatal to the individual interests of men. Who, with the privilege of choosing all things for himself, would not choose unwisely, through rashness and inconsideration; amid the embarrassments, and difficulties, and calamities connected with any course he might propose, who would be able to choose at all—who would have resolution to incur a present loss, or present pain, for future good—who would not be governed more by imaginary evils and wants than by his real interests? How would men change their conditions; the poor, their poverty for wealth; the low, their obscurity for fame; the busy, their ceaseless occupation for leisure; in short, how would the burdens, the cares, the toils, the trials and pains of one condition prompt all to an eager exchange for another, and still each remain as dissatisfied as ever, and go on complaining as before? Each would embark on the enterprise of mending his earthly condition, and hasten away from his present state, elated with the hopes of paradise. Each would

still find the world the same tedious wilderness, every path of which is filled with thorns and briars, and overhung with darkness and gloom.

But to have things according to our mind would be still more fatal to our spiritual interests. In this case, how differently should we order events from the manner in which God orders them! How many of the trials and afflictions of life should we refuse to bear! How different our whole path through it! As it is, God who is rich in mercy; God, whose peculiar attribute it is to educe good from evil, directs all—directs all in that manner which is best adapted to promote our highest, even our spiritual and eternal good. Our earthly parents correct us after their pleasure. The Father of spirits for our profit, that we might be partakers of *his holiness*. Oh, how imperfectly we estimate the value of things! If we duly considered what it is to be partakers of God's holiness, and that each and every event that befalls us is appointed by his wisdom to promote this end, could we even wish one providential event to be other than it is? To be a partaker of the holiness of God is the highest point of exaltation—imagination can ascend no higher. If we are partakers of God's holiness, we shall also be partakers of God's happiness. For holiness and happiness are one. It is sin that separates these sister seraphs on earth. God would unite them here, and by his providential appointments would perfect that union for its final consummation in the heavens. Oh, how little do we think of this! God speaks plainly, audibly, but man will not hear. One mourns the loss of the partner of his bosom, who gave to life its sweetest joys; and he is ready to ask why are his desires crossed and his prospects blasted? God does it to humble and to prove thee, to make thee a partaker of his holiness. Another has laid wise and promising schemes of wealth and prosperity; but unforeseen events occur and defeat them. He blames this or that person, and wonders that he should be thus doomed to misfortune. God has done it, to make him a partaker of his holiness. Another sets out with high expecta-

tion of fame and eminence, to be reached by scientific acquirements. Disease interposes and blasts all his prospects. How cruel!—he is ready to exclaim. But God has done it—how kind and gracious!—that he might be a partaker of his holiness. How many thousands had never learned the vanity of the world, but persisted in the path of death, and gone over the precipice of hell, had not God defeated their counsels and their schemes! It is well that God does not consult us. Like undutiful children we welcome not correction. Stupid and insensible, careless of our own interests, and still more unconcerned for the great designs of God, we lament our hardships, and labor only to forget or avoid them. It is the hand and the heart of paternal love. It is the God of mercy aiming to make thee like himself in holiness and blessedness. Repining child, “should it be according to thy mind?”

III. This state of mind is highly offensive to God. It betrays almost every evil temper and disposition. It shows a sordid attachment to our own selfish interests. Who in the heyday of health and prosperity, of the enjoyment of friends and earthly good, is heard to complain of a mysterious Providence—who, then dissatisfied with God’s government, is wishing to govern himself? Who is especially disturbed by the progress of events in other countries, or those which befall other men? Oh, no; it is when these events affect us—when they interfere with our schemes and defeat our wishes—it is then only that all is dark and calamitous—then only that God is incompetent to govern. And what does this prove?—that our schemes and plans, our interests, are all-important in our estimation; and that what becomes of our spiritual good—what becomes of the kingdom and the glory of God—is no concern of ours.

This desire betrays also dissatisfaction with God. If we were not dissatisfied with what he does, why should we wish for the privilege of doing better? If it were enough for us that under God’s administration every event, no matter what, falls into its proper place, that each and all are arranged in

luminous order, to subserve the purposes of God, and that to change one would be the subversion of the end of his goodness; and if what satisfies God were satisfactory to us, why should we wish to alter even the fall of a sparrow?

It bespeaks ingratitude to God. What are these providential events which we so often wish to change? The appointments of God—the expressions of his kindness to us—“angels sent on errands full of love;” and yet we complain, and wish that something better than angels might be sent. All is not right, for “it is not according to our mind.” God should gratify us, though to our ruin; God should not thwart and disappoint us, even to secure to us a participation of his nature and his blessedness. What more ungrateful than thus to complain of the kindness of our heavenly parent? The wisdom, the power, the goodness of Jehovah are employed for our good, and we are dissatisfied and thankless!

This state of mind is direct rebellion against God. To govern the world is the prerogative of God. To wish to change the administration at all is an invasion of that prerogative, and high treason against the King of kings. The place of man is the footstool, not the throne of the Eternal. To submit, not to reign—to acquiesce, not to direct, is his duty. The spirit that refuses compliance is a spirit of revolt. The spirit that would change one event of Providence, by changing God’s administration, is a spirit of war on God. It is prepared to rear the standard, and carry the triumphant shout of rebellion up to the throne of the Almighty.

It is distrust of God. When the day is bright, and every scene delightful, then we confess and adore and trust the bountiful Giver of our blessings. For then we see, or think we see him concerned for our well-being. But let God retire behind a cloud—let his dispensations become trying and mysterious, and we feel that all these things are against us—the specific design, the ultimate results, are not understood—the reasons are beyond our discovery—God is no longer seen, and therefore is no longer trusted. Now we long for the prerogative of

government, and disdain that repose and quiet which spring from confidence in a reigning God. But what more vile than such a state of mind in a being so blind, so helpless, so dependent, so *sinful*, as man? Think of the God whom he distrusts—a God not angry even when he chastens, but whose frowns are but the graver countenance of love—a God to whom he is invited to look up, in the midst of affliction, as to a tender Father—a God who, by promise and by privilege, has done all that can be needed—more than can be asked or conceived—for his support and consolation. His is the promise, if he confide in him who makes it, that all things shall work together for good. His is the promise, if he be like his Saviour in suffering in this world, that he shall be like him, too, in glory and happiness in a better. His the privilege, amid all the changes of this life, to lift an eye of joy and confidence upward, and to be led ever by the hand of heaven; his the privilege to find in God an almighty refuge, an unfailing friend, and all-sufficient portion. It is not enough that God is everywhere, that God does it—not enough to know that God's glory and his happiness may be one—not enough that he is everywhere surrounded by the visible form of God's perfection—man would have it according to his mind; and now because he cannot, and because he cannot see the reasons and utility of the event, because he has none but God to trust, he feels himself undone. I need not say how offensive to God it is to be willing to trust him no further than we see him. What if he veils his glories, conceals his reasons—what if he wraps himself in clouds? Who does not hear his voice, “Be still, and know that I am God?” And who shall not obey?

REMARKS.

1. Submission to the divine will is necessary to secure the blessings which we need. We may indeed desire the enjoyment of blessings or the removal of calamities, and at the same time submissively leave the event with God. It is our

privilege to make known our wishes to God, with confidence in his wisdom and goodness to give or withhold what seemeth good in his sight. But far removed is such a state of mind from that which demands the blessing, and which insists upon having it—that comes to the Almighty with “I will not take *no* for an answer.” It is these rash, unqualified desires—these enforcing claims that will not bear a refusal, which God abhors for their presumption and their guilt. These are desires the gratification of which would be a curse to us. If God in such cases would bless us, he will be sure to refuse what we desire. As a wise and faithful parent, he will see our willfulness subdued, before he gives us the blessing. He will delay till he sees our impetuous fondness, our eager desires, subside into confidence in him, and submission to his will; he will wait till we can think of the Giver as well as the gift. This is the wise and gracious economy of God’s procedure. And if we would be blessed of him, we must cease to order—cease to prefer our unqualified claims—cease to be engrossed with any gift or any blessing which we judge needful. We must come to the temper of the Saviour, and when we say, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,” we must be careful, yes, as careful as if the judgment-day were at hand, to add, “*Nevertheless, not MY will, but THINE be done.*”

2. Acquiescence in the divine will is a duty which respects *all* events. We are not to feel that while some events are to be acquiesced in as the expression of the will of God, others should be according to our mind. This is no uncommon feeling, not even with good men, in reference to two classes of events—those which affect their spiritual interests and those which take place as the consequence of human agency or conduct. Here we are apt to feel that we are privileged to choose for ourselves, and to complain if we are not gratified. True it is, that the promotion of our spiritual interests always accords with the will of God; we may desire it unqualifiedly. But then, to order the ways and means of promoting these interests, as they are affected by providential

events, is a prerogative which our covenant-God reserves to himself. Whether, as his children, we shall be allowed to unite in the ordinances of public worship, or be confined to the bed of languishing, or be prevented from attendance by domestic duties—whether we shall be placed where the gospel is seldom or imperfectly, or unskillfully preached, or where its instructions are heard every Sabbath, as dispensed by an angel from heaven—whether, in a word, our providential circumstances shall be such as we might deem most desirable or not, God appoints them; and whatever they are, if we are his children, they are the best for us.

Under trying events, brought about by the will and agency of men, submission is equally called for. Here we are apt to forget that God governs; to feel that it is as right that our will should be gratified as the will of those who oppose us, and to be so dissatisfied if we are thwarted and defeated, as perversely to abandon even the plainest subsequent duties. My brethren, what if the apostles had felt and done thus—what if, under the opposition, and reproaches, and sufferings, and deaths they met, from the hands of men, they had forgotten God, and renounced the service of their divine Master? What had been their consolation, what had been their guilt, and what had become of that gospel which we enjoy and which has carried salvation to all the nations? What if they had said: If we cannot, through the perverseness and hostility of men, have it according to our mind, we will murmur and retreat, and do nothing? Yes; and what if the Son of God had felt and done thus when the cross was in prospect? The light of salvation would never have dawned on this guilty world—the message of pardon from God never greeted a human ear; and if Christians should feel and act thus, that light, bright and glorious as it is, would be extinguished within half a century, and the world be shrouded in all the gloom of despairing guilt. God forbid, brethren, that we should have thoughts like these! The God with whom we have to do hath the hearts of all men in his hands, and though he is never the

author of their sins, all their doings are under his providential government; and whatever they are, whatever interest of ours they may defeat, whatever costly sacrifice they oblige us to make, they are as truly a ground for submission as an express command from the voice of God himself.

3. Let this subject support us under the trials of this world, and animate us in our way to a better. If, under the defeats and disappointments, the crosses and the trials of life, we would, with a full conviction of the presumption, folly, and guilt of the desire, ask ourselves—"Should it be according to our mind?"—how much the burden of earthly calamity would be lightened! How it would smooth the troubled sea, would we yield ourselves to be borne peacefully on its waves, instead of entering into contest with its surges! It is our self-will, our controversy with events, or rather with God, that is the grand source of our unhappiness under the trials that befall us. Let us, then, under every adverse event, every cross, however trivial, and every affliction, however calamitous, check our feelings of revolt, by asking, "Should it be according to my mind? or according to the mind of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will?" Oh! could we set God always before us; could we live, as it were, surrounded by the visible forms of his perfections, and make our will one with his, how it would soothe and cheer this weary pilgrimage on earth! In the darkest hour, and amid all the terrors and dismay of the heaviest tempest, light would beam upon us from the eternal throne; and that voice be heard: "It is I, be not afraid!" Trusting in God, I can stand on a falling universe and triumph there.

True it is, we are now in a world of trials; it is the place of discipline, of correction; we need the rod, we shall often feel even severity in its strokes. They will be for our profit; and shall not the heir of glory submit—shall he mourn and be sad, and murmur under the means of preparation for his inheritance? "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet." Beyond

this vale of tears is a better country, even an heavenly. Soon the toils and troubles of the way will be over; and there, on those hills of salvation, you shall look back on the path of your ascent, and round on the glories of your abode, and praise him who brought you thither. In his light you shall see light, and the works of providence, the works of grace, and the works of glory will be the theme of one eternal song—"Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and right are all thy ways, O thou King of saints!"

X.

THE RULE AND THE TEST OF MORALITY.

MATTHEW vii. 12.

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

THE light and warmth of the sun no more clearly bespeak the hand that formed it, than the excellence of this rule of conduct declare it to be from God. Human wisdom, by actual experiment, has proved itself incapable of discovering a rule adequate to the regulation of human conduct and the security of human happiness. But, that contained in our text is no sooner presented to the mind of man than its excellence and its obligation are seen and confessed. A single glance shows us that the cause of all the misery in this world which results from our intercourse with one another, is disobedience to this divine precept; and that so far as our happiness depends on one another, that perfect obedience to this rule would bless every child of Adam.

Although no rule is perhaps so universally admired, yet none is more universally broken. It is easily understood as a rule by which others should regulate their conduct toward us, but little known, in its true import, as a rule by which we should regulate our conduct toward them.

My design is—

First, To explain the rule;

Second, To show its obligation.

I. In explaining the rule, let us examine the different parts of it.

"*All things whatsoever.*" This clause declares its universal

extent. It is not a rule which is to regulate merely some parts of our conduct toward our fellow-men, but all parts of it. We may do some things, perhaps many things, to others which we would wish them to do to us, and yet in many other things be wholly and habitually selfish. A man, for example, may give food to the hungry, but habitually overreach and defraud. In such a case it is plain not only that he breaks the rule in the latter instance, but that he has not a spirit of conformity to it in the former. The language of our Lord is *all things*—all things *whatsoever*. Let it be settled in any one thing whatever, that you would that men should do it to you, and you are required so to do to them. There is no exception. “All things whatsoever ye would that **MEN** should do to you, do ye even so to *them*”—not some men, not your families, your friends, your acquaintances, but men. No matter who he is, whether friend or enemy, if he is a fellow-creature, one of your own species, a man, you must be governed by this rule in all that you do toward him.

“*Do ye even so.*” In this clause we are directed not only to do the things themselves which we would that others should do to us, but also to the utmost exactness in doing so. Do ye even so. Do exactly these things; nothing less than this is allowed; all this is required.

“*Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you.*” This clause is of especial importance, because it is by what we would that others should do to us, that we are to determine what we are to do to them. Before we act we must in every instance inquire what would we that another should do to us. What, then, are we to understand by the clause, *whatsoever ye would that men should do to you?*

It has commonly been supposed, by commentators, that a literal interpretation of this text is inconsistent with other plain scriptural duties, and that therefore the rule is to be explained by certain qualifications or restrictions not expressed in it; for our desires of good from others may be selfish and extravagant, and to make such desires the measure of what we

are to do to others, would in many cases be doing what is not required, as well as what is forbidden. For example, a rich man may feel and say, "If I were in that poor man's place and he in mine, I should wish him to give me his estate; and now, if I am to do as I would be done by, I am to show him the same kindness, and give him my estate." This difficulty evidently arises from inadequate views of the text. The rule contains its own explanation and limitation. If I am to do to others as I would that they should do to me, then I am to love them as I love myself; not them more than myself, nor myself more than them. If, therefore, I were to give my estate, if I were rich, to a poor man, I should do that which in this respect would imply that I loved him *more* than myself, which would be a palpable violation of the rule. Besides, how can I, putting myself in the poor man's place, wish another to give me his estate—wish that he should impoverish himself to enrich me, without violating the rule. In this very wish I am desiring my own happiness more than my neighbor's, and thus I counteract the very spirit and letter of the rule itself. I am cherishing a selfish desire when I imagine myself in the poor man's place. I am saying, if I were that poor man I would be as selfish as I well could be. In deciding what we would that others should do to us—*i. e.* in forming our desires of good from others—we are to remember that we are to cherish the same desires to impart good to them. Thus one desire is to check and regulate and define the other. Thus the rule aims directly at the utter extinction of all selfish inordinate desires of good, and requires simply that what we would on disinterested principles desire from others, were we in their circumstances and they in ours, we are to do to them.

Let us examine this a little further. We are to do to others what we would on truly benevolent principles desire from them. The existence of the happiness of one man, other things being equal, is of equal value with that of another. The simple fact that the happiness of one of the two is mine, gives it no additional value. It has precisely the same value

as when it is the happiness of another. All the value which I can reasonably attach to my happiness, because it is mine, he can as reasonably attach to his, because it is his. All that I am to myself he is to himself, and all that I am as it respects him he is as it respects me. The reason why I should regard his happiness as much as my own, circumstances being the same, is as plain and conclusive as that things of equal value ought to be equally loved or desired. If therefore, I have a right to any given treatment from my neighbor—to any act of kindness from him—he, in the same circumstances, has the same right to the same treatment or acts of kindness from me. If my right lays him under obligation to me, his right lays me under the same obligation to him.

There is a great diversity in the character and stations of men. It is very desirable there should be, and as it is not in our power so it is not our duty, on principles of true benevolence, to wish to alter them. There is, therefore, a consequent variety of duties owed to men. But we can easily determine, by the rule before us, what these duties are. We can easily imagine ourselves in the place of others and others in our place; we can then easily look into our minds and ascertain what treatment we should wish on truly disinterested principles from them, in such change of circumstances. When this is ascertained the question of duty is settled.

Thus a ruler is to treat his subjects as he would wish to be treated were he a subject. But he is not bound to yield that submission to his subjects, which as a ruler, he justly demands of them. This he could not do without sacrificing the public good to private interest—*i. e.*, he could not do it on disinterested principles. For, if he were a subject, he could not on such principles wish for the submission and obedience of a ruler to himself. A judge is not required to acquit, though he might on selfish principles wish, were he the criminal, to be acquitted, because he could not on benevolent principles wish the laws of justice to be abandoned, and the guilty to go unpunished. Thus, too, a parent or head of a family is not required

to neglect to promote the welfare of his own household, to promote the welfare of his neighbors, because on truly disinterested principles he could not wish his neighbor to do so by him. So, also, an individual is not required to sacrifice his own happiness to promote an equal degree of happiness in another individual, because it is as right that the former should enjoy it, if but one can enjoy it, as that the latter should; and therefore the former could not, on truly disinterested principles, desire that the latter should do so by him. On the same principle we are not required to put our property into common stock for the equal benefit of all. This would tend, as a general rule, to promote so many evils, that if we were poor we could not on benevolent principles desire it.

The amount of this rule of our Lord is, that in determining what our duty is to others, and in performing it, our selfishness is to have no voice and no influence. We are required to make the case of another our own, to put ourselves into his place, and thus absolutely to divest ourselves of every particle of selfishness—thus absolutely to escape its influence in the judgment we form of our duty, and in the actual performance of it. It is as if our Lord had said: Regard your neighbor in his wants, his rights, his happiness, as another self. Ask, then, how, as a reasonable, disinterested man, you would be treated by him; and treat him exactly in that manner.

I proceed—

II. To enforce the duty.

1. God has commanded it. The duty is enjoined in the form of a command in the text. It were easy to show that every command in the sacred table of the law is only a branch of this precept. If, then, we owe any duty to our fellow-creatures it is this; we, in fact, know no other; and if this is not performed none is performed.

The only question, then, is: has God enjoined on us any duty toward man; and, if he has, is that duty binding?

2. The duty is obviously reasonable and right. Let any man consult his own reason and conscience, let him only hear the

precept, and he needs no other counselor nor casuist; he knows and feels its binding power, and is self-condemned if he breaks it. It is written indelibly on his conscience, and he can no more escape a sense of its obligation than he can annihilate his sense of accountability. Every man desires his neighbor to rejoice in his welfare, to sympathize with him in his afflictions, to relieve his distresses, to promote his happiness, to be tender of his reputation and not to slander his good name, to put a kind and not a harsh construction on his conduct, to be kindly affectioned toward him and not angry or malicious, to be forgiving and not revengeful toward him, to be just and honest toward him in his dealing, not to overreach or take advantage of his weakness or unwariness. If he be a servant or a subject, he would not wish his master or the magistrate to treat him as a tyrant. If a master or magistrate, he would wish his servant or subject to be faithful and obedient. Let the appeal, made to any one: have you not these desires and wishes with regard to the conduct of others toward you? Do you not know and feel that such is the conduct which others ought to show to you? Then, while legislating for others, you have passed a law for yourself. For who and what are you, that you are to be treated thus by your fellow-men, and yet are allowed to treat them as you please? Are not you of the same species—have you rights which others have not? Are not their rights as sacred and inviolable as yours? Are they not as dear and as important to them as yours are to you? How, then, can they be under this sacred obligation to respect yours, and yet you be entitled to an exemption from mutual obligation to them? My hearers, we know we are not. We may as well persuade ourselves that it is lawful to murder, as that it is lawful to depart from this precept in a single instance.

3. This rule has a most direct and effectual tendency to promote the happiness of men. The greatest, far the greatest portion of misery suffered by men is produced by themselves, and that, by disobeying the precept before us. For if men

were actuated universally by this principle there would be no wars, no tumults among nations, no jealousies and contentions in families, no animosities in neighborhoods, no oppression, fraud, or injustice, or overreaching, no drunkenness, lewdness, gambling, no avarice, pride, ambition. And, brethren, annihilate the miseries produced by these things in the world, and how would its dismal surface be cheered and brightened! All men would be friends; universal justice, truth, goodness, gentleness, kindness, compassion, candor, forgiveness, attended and surrounded with the brighter train of deeds of beneficence, would reign and fill the world. At the same time, the very obedience to the precept itself would, in itself, constitute a sum of happiness far greater than would be communicated by it. For it is more blessed, more happy to give than to receive. By such a change, how would the sufferings that would remain, shrink to an atom, and the curse of God, that lies so heavily on the world of sin, be lightened and forgotten! And is not such a rule of conduct binding? Is there an individual, whatever others may do, who may venture safely to break the precept and thus to prevent, so far as in him lies, this amount of good; yea, an individual who can safely incur the guilt of putting his hand to the work of thus augmenting the miseries of man?

4. Obedience to this rule is the most ennobling character of man. The spirit inculcated is the very opposite of selfishness; and selfishness is the very substance of moral degradation. No man is so distinguished for meanness in every age, as he who is prominently and in every thing marked with sordid selfishness. We are often beguiled by an external semblance of disinterestedness: but remove the garb—let the selfish heart be unmasked—let it be seen in its desires, affections, purposes, wishes, plans and actions, its envy, its unmercifulness, its oppressions, its insensibility to others' wants and woes, its frauds and deceptions, its prostration of all that is or can be approved or loved at the feet of self, and we contemn and abhor it. No object beheld by mortal eye can be so contemptible

and so deformed. But behold the man who loves his neighbor as himself! Behold him raised, as it were to heaven, by the principles just described; behold his heart fixed on the good of his fellow-men, his friends, his enemies, his neighbor, and the stranger, as on his own happiness! What is there lovely, what of good report, what of moral beauty, that does not shine in such a character? How mean are the proudest heroes of this world compared with that obscure and, perhaps, despised man who loves his neighbor as himself—compared with her who deposited her last mite in the treasury of the Lord! How like an angel of mercy does that woman appear compared with that man or woman who, surrounded with wealth, lives only in self-indulgence!

Here is true dignity, the dignity of apostles, the dignity of angels; shall I say, the dignity of Jehovah! Yes, it is the self-same principle of doing to others as he would that they should do to him, that moves all the energies of the eternal God. Is it not real greatness to be like him?

5. We can neither be fit for, nor admitted into heaven without this character. The word of God no less decisively denounces exclusion from heaven for sins against our fellow-men, than for those committed against himself. "Be not deceived," saith the apostle, repeating the very acts of selfishness, "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners" (and, as he says in another place, after giving nearly the same catalogue), "nor they that do such things, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

At the same time, it is impossible not to see in every page of the Scriptures the necessity of a fitness for heaven which consists in the subjugation of selfish to benevolent principles, and which are all summed up in one expressive term, "*Holiness*, without which no man shall see the Lord." Whatever be our state of mind, or the nature of our principles here on earth, it cannot but go with us into eternity. The character of man at

death will become unchangeable. He will go with a heart to relish the joys of heaven, or with a conscience to inflict the eternal pangs of conscious guilt. The spirit of benevolence is the spirit of heaven—the feeling which warms and blesses the highest angel and the lowest saint. The temper of selfishness is the corroding fire of the eternal pit: the soul, under its dominion, stung by its insatiable desires, whose present food is wholly withdrawn, has no parallel in this world. “Within him hell he brings, and round about him.” Selfishness here, is hell hereafter. How striking the contrast, how deep and broad the gulf between this and the happy lot of a soul that bears the spirit of heaven, and dwells in that world of love! And is not the rule which enjoins this spirit binding on man? Say not, no one ever kept it; no one does to others as he would that they should do to him. Disobedience ever so constant, ever so bold, will not repeal the eternal law of the eternal God, nor abate its eternal penalty.

REMARKS.

1. We see that many things which are deemed consistent with this rule of Christ's are direct violations of it. Of this class many things might be enumerated, did time permit. I can only mention a few. The duelist, who enters the field to take the life of a fellow-creature, pretends to plead that he consents that his antagonist should take his life, if by superior skill or fortune he can do it, and asks, where is the crime of doing to others as we are willing they should do to us? The gambler too, vindicates his sloth and fraud by the same plea. He consents that his fellow should take his property if by skill or luck, or even fraud, he can do it; and when he takes the property of his neighbor, beggars his family, and ruins his reputation and perhaps his soul, he also asks, where is the harm of doing as I am willing to be done by? The artful, wily tradesman, who by undue commendations of his own

goods, and, in a case of barter, by depreciation of his neighbors' by partial statements, or if not, by falsehood and concealment of truth respecting the qualities, the cost, the current price, the rise and fall of markets, imposes on the credulity, flatters the vanity, overreaches the ignorance, and decoys the unweariness of customers, tells you he is willing to be treated in the same manner; if others can get the advantage of him in these ways, let them; he has no objection; and where is the harm of doing as you are willing to be done by? Doing as you would be done by! Is this doing as you would be done by? Why does the duelist consent that his antagonist should take his life if he can do it? That he may have an opportunity to take that of a fellow-creature. Is this being willing to give up his life to another from motives of disinterested love? Must one or the other die; and rather than that his neighbor should die, does he consent to die himself? Why, too, is the gambler, or the man who takes undue advantage of his neighbor in trade, willing that others should do to him as he does to them? For the same reason substantially, as it respects the morality of the act, that governs the duelist. They are willing that others should treat them thus, that they may obtain, or at least have the opportunity of obtaining, their neighbors' property without an equivalent. For, if they are really willing their neighbors should have their property without an equivalent, why not give it to them directly? My hearers, such is the deception which men practice on themselves, in these and a thousand other cases. They are not willing to do as they pretend; the proof is, that they do not do it. They are at most willing to run the hazard of being injured themselves, for the privilege of injuring their neighbor. Their own selfish desires of good are the standard by which they act. Only bring this conduct to the rule in the text, and how easily its obliquity is detected—how easily it is seen that all such practice arises from downright selfishness, tends to injure others, yea, is designed to please and benefit themselves at the expense of a neighbor's ruin. For the principle that takes a cent from him

without an equivalent, would take his estate or his life. Let us then, my hearers, be undeceived on this subject. Let us remember that much which is supposed to be consistent with this golden rule of our Lord Jesus Christ is a direct violation of that rule and a contempt of his authority; that "much which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

2. We remark that there is very little genuine morality in the world. By morality, we generally mean right conduct toward our fellow-men in all respects. But what is true morality—what is right conduct toward our fellow-men? Is it the offspring of selfishness—is it just that, and no more than what our own self-interest allows or demands? Is it to be measured by what the world deems sufficient—is it that which will pass well in point of respectability—is it that which distinguishes the decent and sober part of the community from the grossly vicious and abandoned? No. What, then, is the true standard of morality, of right conduct toward our fellow-man? *Our text.* What is its true nature? It consists in doing to others as we would that they should do to us. This is morality—morality such as God commands and God approves. It proceeds from right principles. It governs the man; it blesses its object. And now, where is it? Which feature is most prominent in the human character—doing as we *would* be done by, or doing as we *are* done by? Where is the idol SELF not worshiped? Who does not feel the necessity of watching his own concerns, by guarding against the encroachments of others—who finds no collision of interest or pursuit with his fellow-man? How audibly does the practice of the great bulk of our race say, let each one take care of himself! How extensive in trade is the maxim adopted, "Keep what you have gotten, and get what you can;" in beneficence, "Charity begins at home!" And under the influence of such axioms, where is the justice, the honesty, the charity which the Lord Jesus Christ enjoins? Let us compare, for a moment, the character and state of men, the ignorance, the sin,

the sorrow which prevail in the world, with what we know would be the effect of the holy principle before us, did it exert an influence only within moderate limits, and we shall have an answer which should make us blush and tremble.

3. How it would commend the religion of the gospel to all, if there were more of the spirit of the text manifested by its professors. I need not say how much reproach is brought on the gospel by these unholy lives. When a heathen could say, with truth, to a missionary of the cross, "If your religion be so much better than ours why are you yourselves no better than we?"—what reply would be made? And when the world around us see professors making no more conscience of justice, honesty or charity than other men—as deceitful, as over-reaching, as slanderous, as unforgiving, as sordid, as covetous as they—what will they think of religion? I know they reproach us often unjustly; I know there is more of hatred than of truth in their censures, and that often the best men are reviled the most. But can nothing be done to commend the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ? Yes, one thing will do it; the spirit and practice of doing to others as we would that they should do to us. Let this be seen, and it will command the homage, if it does not stop the mouth, of a gainsaying world. Stand at a visible distance from the meanness of a selfish spirit, from all deceit and covetousness. Stand aloof from an unkind and unforgiving temper. Let it be obvious that you do make some sacrifices of private interest for others' good by a largeness of liberality, and an extent of beneficence proportioned to your known ability; leave no ground for the suspicion that you have not another and a better spirit than the world around you. Who then could doubt the reality or the excellence of the religion of Christ? Your devotional acts may be construed into formality and hypocrisy, and be denounced as making no difference between you and them; but the practice, which evinces the spirit of our text, will form a broad and visible line of distinction. And if it does not bring them to the feet of your Master with cordial submission, it

will lay them there in silent respect. Let us, then, study the import, and imbibe the spirit of this divine rule. Let us open our hearts to its high and holy sanctions. My brethren, as you regard the authority of God, the rights and happiness of your fellow-men, a resemblance to the Lord Jesus Christ; as you would recommend his gospel, and save souls from death; as you would escape the present infamy, and the eternal torments of insatiate selfishness; as you would become fitted for the presence of the holy and benevolent God—“*All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.*”

4. I cannot close without remarking, how much we *all* need a Saviour! I say *all*; for, let it be noticed, that to condemn what is wrong in the professors of religion, does not justify what is wrong in those who are not. If the former are so imperfect—even those who have something of true disinterestedness toward men—what shall be said of those who have none of it? And now, I appeal to each and to all of you—can you lay your hand on your heart, and before God, who sees it, say that you have, in every instance of conduct toward man, “done to others as ye would that they should do to you?” If not, you are condemned; for this is the law and the prophets, and “cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”

May I not ask many, if you have done this in one instance; have you ever been rescued from that spirit which, in all its desires and all its acts, makes self its center? Tried, then, only by the second table of the law, what are your hopes? If you love not your brethren whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you have not seen? What will all your morality, your honesty, uprightness, charity amount to with a heart that has no love to God or man? It is a mere covering, a thin veil, which hides that heart from yourself and from others. But how will it dissolve by a look from the omniscient eye! Oh, depend not on it for acceptance at his bar—build not on this rotten foundation! *Morality, morality, morality—*

with a hollow heart—will not commend you to God. You must, fellow-sinner, have another dependence to save you from the pit. You must be washed in the blood of Jesus; you must, if you stand at all before a holy God, stand in *his righteousness*.

XI.

SINGLENES OF HEART.

MATT. vi. 22, 23.

"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

THE object of our Lord in this figurative declaration is to illustrate the influence of practical principles. The point of comparison is this, that what the eye is to the body, the commanding principle of the heart is to the whole moral man.

The eye is the light of the body. It is that by which all its motions and actions are guided and directed. If the eye be single, clear, unclouded, and properly directed, the whole body is full of light; all its motions are made with safety, precision, and certainty. But if the eye be evil, diseased, and, by consequence, its vision dim and obscured, the whole body will be full of darkness; all its motions will bespeak the want of light; the feet will stumble, the step be uncertain, the hands will miss their aim, and every attempt at motion result in confusion and disappointment. If, then, the light that is in thee be darkness, if the eye of the body be thus blind, how great is the darkness—how will every member of the body, thus dependent on the eye, be lost and useless to all the purposes of life!

Such is the literal import of the text. Its application is this: our Lord, to enforce the warning against amassing treasure upon earth, gives this important reason, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Whatever a

man regards as his chief good, on that, his heart—his supreme affections—will be fixed; and by that will all his specific opinions, affections, desires, purposes, and actions be regulated and controlled. What, then, the eye is to the body, the practical estimate and regard which a man forms of his chief good is to the whole moral character. If the eye be incapable of vision, the whole body is doomed to all the evils of utter darkness. So, if the practical estimate which men form of their good be not according to the truth and reality of things, the whole moral man is doomed to error, to sin, and to ruin.

To illustrate and confirm this truth I remark—

I. That the practical estimate which every man forms of his chief good respects either God or the world as its object. These are the only sources of good, of any kind or degree, which are opened to man. If we look at his capacities of enjoyment, as he is constituted by his Maker, we see that he is utterly incapable of any other happiness. Take God and the world away, and the universe, in point of enjoyment, would be to man an absolute desert. Experience tells us this. From what other source, beside one of these, did man ever attempt to find, or ever dream of finding, happiness? If you look into the Scriptures no third source of enjoyment is named. Here all departures from God are ascribed to the temptations which the world presents; all men are represented as taking their portion in the good things the world affords, or as finding their happiness in God as their portion. The impossibility of serving two masters is expressly asserted, and the whole race classified as the servants of God or the servants of Mammon. Every human being, then, practically esteems God or the world as his chief good.

II. This practical estimate determines on which of the two objects the heart is fixed. Here, it is necessary to distinguish carefully between a speculative estimate or judgment, and that which is practical. A speculative judgment is a mere act of the intellect without any regard to a practical end. It is the

same thing employed respecting practical objects, as when employed respecting those which are not practical. Thus, it is the same employment of the mind which judges of the comparative beauty of different landscapes or the comparative intellectual greatness of two men, as that, considered as an act of speculation, which judges of the comparative excellence of God and the world as the portion of the soul. Accordingly, thousands form this judgment correctly, on whom it has no practical influence. Where is the man that would not say that the living God is a better portion for an immortal being than this vain and transitory world? Now a practical estimate differs essentially from this. It is an estimate or judgment which respects practical things, formed for the very purpose of practice. It implies a state of mind prepared to render a practical submission to the judgment formed; and, accordingly, a judgment thus formed by an irreversible law of our nature is sure to carry the heart along with it. The heart is the great practical principle of the soul; and when the judgment is made for practical purposes—that is, with a state of mind prepared to follow the judgment in actual practice, the judgment and the heart always accord. “Where a man’s treasure is, there his heart will be also.”

Now, the great moral calamity of our race is, that they never, when left to themselves, put the mind into this attitude; they never come to the question whether God or the world is the proper portion of the soul, with a state of mind prepared practically to submit to the judgment which they shall form. Their practical estimate is already made. They regard the world as their chief good, and are resolved to take it as their portion. A supreme regard to the world in some form, or in many forms, as it appeals to ambition, to covetousness, to the love of ease or of pleasure, this supreme regard to the world becomes their predominating principle, their commanding purpose, which controls and characterizes the whole man. This is that “evil eye” which makes “the whole body full of darkness.”

On the contrary, when one truly has come to the question whether God or the world is the portion of the soul, with a state of mind prepared practically to submit to the judgment that shall be formed, the judgment formed is, that God is the proper portion of the soul; and the heart according with the judgment, fixes on this object. In his commanding purpose he takes God as the portion of his soul. Here he sees that his chief good, his highest happiness lies; and his main object, his grand aim is, by obedience to the will of God, by actively glorifying God, to secure this great end of his being. This is that "single eye" which makes "the whole body full of light."

By this supreme regard to God as the portion of the soul I do not intend to exclude all regard to our temporal interests. This is not to be expected, nor is it required. The thing required is that desire to please and serve God as our chief good, which possesses a controlling influence, which refuses to make no sacrifice which God demands, nor to perform any duty which God enjoins.

Nor is it pretended that the strength of this principle, always, in this world comes up to the divine requisition. There is a distinction between the *sincerity* of a principle and its *strength*. The principle of life is as real in infancy as in mature age, though its vigor is weakness in one compared with its vigor in the other. So the principle in the Christian may be weak, and yet be real; it may essentially differ from the commanding principle of all other men, although it be imperfect in strength. It may be often overpowered by remaining internal corruption, and external temptation. Still it will ultimately prevail, and triumph over all opposition. It will bring every thought into obedience to the will of God, and prepare its subject for a celestial throne.

I proceed now to consider the influence of this state of mind. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness."

Let us consider the influence of this state of mind ;

1. On a man's knowledge and belief of the truth. No one can have attentively considered human nature, without seeing how much the opinions of men are affected by the state of the heart ; and how much more perfectly they understand those subjects which it is for their interest to understand, than any others. If a man's heart, then, be right with God, the great truths which God has revealed to influence man to act up to this end of his being, will be truths which he will especially wish to understand. It is on this principle that our Saviour has declared that if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine. The doctrines of the Bible, as distinguished from its precepts, are those truths which supply the motives to holy obedience. Of course, when the heart is fixed on rendering holy obedience, there is not only a willingness, but a desire to understand those doctrines which furnish the motives to such obedience. On the contrary, while the heart is fixed upon the world, and opposed to the humbling, self-denying plan of salvation which the gospel reveals, it is to be expected that it will cherish an aversion to the truths which disclose that plan, and be peculiarly disposed to error. Such a man would be apt, we should say—almost with the assurance of prophecy—very apt to raise objections, invent evasions and cavils, and refuse to see and understand those truths which directly tend to disquiet and harass him in his state of determined worldliness and sin. Indeed, how is it possible, that a man who is determined to live in sin, and to cherish hopes of impunity, should at the same time be willing to see and understand those truths—and thus to place himself under their power—which tend to demolish all his hopes, and make him tremble as on the brink of damnation ?

When the heart is right, there will also be a correspondence between the doctrines of the gospel and such a state of mind, which will enable a man to perceive the truth and force of many doctrines of which he had otherwise remained ignorant. His own experience, the accordance of feeling with these

truths, will lead him to understand what a man without such experience would never discover. He whose commanding purpose and supreme desire is to glorify God by obedience to his will, will be apt to see the high standard of obedience which God has given. Of course, he will the more clearly perceive how far short he falls of the perfect obedience required. This will prepare him to understand the strength of depravity within, to appreciate the value of atoning blood, to welcome the revealed necessity of divine grace, and to give all the glory to a God of sovereign mercy. While the man who has had no such experience, though he may be orthodox on many points, will be sure to embrace error enough to turn from his conscience the power and presence of these great truths of the gospel.

Nor do these effects of a right state of the heart respect merely the doctrines of the gospel; they respect, also, the preceptive parts of Christianity. In the interpretation of the precepts, and in determining the duties of religion, there is much room for perversion—even in the plainest cases—when the heart is not right. Thus a man whose worldly interests seem to demand the violation of the Sabbath, can easily persuade himself that the declaration of the Saviour—"The Sabbath was made for man"—warrants him to travel by land or by sea, to labor in the field, to examine his accounts, and so on. Another can easily persuade himself that the precept—"to provide for his own,"—warrants, and even requires him to forget God, and to disobey all his other commandments. Indeed, the drunkard often persuades himself that no command of God is broken, unless all sense and power of motion are destroyed by strong drink, though he drinks barrels per annum. In a thousand cases less palpable, but equally decisive, duty is perverted through the same influence—a wrong state of the heart. Indeed, no inconsiderable part of the questions of duty are not provided for by express precept, but are left to be determined by general principles in the exercise of an upright judgment. Without a right state of heart—that single eye—yea, rather

with a wrong state of heart—that evil eye—what is to be expected but error? What is to be expected but that such a man will misunderstand, will pervert the truths of his salvation, and stumble on in darkness to final perdition? On the contrary, if this book be the book of God—if in plainness and clearness, it is worthy of its author (and who shall say that God has mocked our wretchedness by giving us an obscure revelation); I say, if the Bible be plain, nothing can be wanting but a right state of heart to lead a man to understand it. This will lead him to read it and study it; it will secure to its declarations the authority and the submission due to the voice of the living God; it will wake up an anxiety to know and receive the truth, and furnish every advantage to understand it through a holy correspondence of feeling. In every point of view, therefore, a right state of heart tends to produce a right system of faith, and a wrong state of heart a wrong system of faith; so much so, that—amid all the absurdities and contradictions, and cavils, and misrepresentations, which thicken in the path of the ungodly, and over which they stumble into perdition—a man with a right heart, and the Bible in his hand, will be surrounded with a light from heaven all the way to its blissful abodes.

2. This state of mind, described in the text, decides the nature of all specific and subordinate affections. “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things.” It is the very nature and tendency of the predominant affection, the governing aim of the soul, to spread its influence over all the particular and subordinate affections, desires, and purposes of man. To all these the predominant affection gives existence, and to all these it imparts moral quality. All the specific affections, purposes, and desires of a man, whose heart is fixed supremely on the world, will be worldly. And all these in a man whose heart is fixed on God, except so far as the weakness of the principle may prevent, will be godly. The commanding purpose, the governing aim,

of every man is the treasure of the heart—the source of all moral acts. It is the tree which produces the fruit, and decides its properties; the fountain from which the streams proceed. As the fountain is, so is the stream; and as the tree is, so must be the fruit.

More particularly, let a man supremely delight in God—let it be his governing aim to please him, and he will not only frequently contemplate the character of God, but every contemplation of him, whose attributes are infinitely glorious, will awaken love in the soul. The same state of mind must produce gratitude to God; for while it delights in his perfections, it must especially delight in the display of those perfections in acts of personal kindness. It will lead to the exercise of submission and confidence; for, as it delights supremely in the character of God, it will cheerfully commit all things to his disposal. It will prompt to humility; for, as it delights in God, it will delight to give him his high supremacy in the system of being. It will exercise repentance; for sin is dishonorable and offensive to God, whom it loves. It will exercise forgiveness; for it will delight to imitate God, whom it loves. It will exercise benevolence; for it supremely delights in God's glory, and to do good is to glorify God. In a word, as this state of mind supremely delights in God, and in his glory, and as obedience to the divine will is the means of pleasing and glorifying God, it tends to produce obedience to every command of God. It will choose to do what God has required, because in this way God is glorified, and the great end on which the heart is fixed is thus obtained. It will, therefore, make its subject alike the true worshiper of God before his throne, and the real almoner of his bounty in this world of sin and sorrow. Thus the whole assemblage of the Christian graces and virtues, as they adorn the soul and fill up the character of the good man, proceed from supreme love to God—from that single eye which is the governing aim of the man.

On the contrary, let the heart be supremely fixed on the

world—let the governing aim be to derive happiness from it, and all the affections, purposes and desires of man will be in exact accordance with his main purpose. It may manifest itself in the form of ambition or covetousness, or the love of ease and of pleasure—in any or in all those purposes, passions and desires which the love of the world occasions. It will produce, as the occasion of their excitement occurs, all those criminal feelings toward God and toward men which a selfish heart can cherish. What is distrust of God, but that selfish attachment to our own interests that refuses to commit them to his disposal? What is ingratitude to God, but to value his gifts as the means of our own gratification, to the exclusion of all desire to honor our benefactor? What is enmity to God, but hostility to the perfections of God as arrayed against our selfish interests? What is unkindness, envy and revenge as manifested toward our fellow-men, but the operations of a selfish desire to engross and secure worldly good? Thus, look through the whole catalogue of those affections and passions which debase and deform human character, you will find their source in a worldly heart—a supreme desire of happiness from the world—*selfishness*—the source, sum and substance of all sin. True it is, that selfishness in one form may restrain selfishness in another. A selfish regard to reputation may restrain a selfish regard to wealth from open fraud or violence to acquire it. Still it is selfishness—be the form of its operation what it may. Ambition, unchecked by any other selfish passion, would wade through seas of blood to reach a throne, or rebel in heaven for the gloomy satisfaction of reigning in hell. Be the selfish affection what it may, unrestrained, it determines on its own gratification at every sacrifice. Be it sensuality, it would not relinquish a thrill of pleasure; be it sloth, it would not move a finger to save a falling universe. Thus does the evil eye, the love of the world as the commanding principle, corrupt and degrade the whole inner man.

But in the case we have supposed, where the heart is right with God—where it is supremely fixed on doing his will and

glorifying his name—there, the affections can have no low and unworthy aims. When such an object engrosses the heart—an object so transcendently great and glorious—it inspires the soul with its own greatness and glory; it assimilates it to itself and its likeness to God; it rises above all that is sordid and groveling. Light and darkness cannot be in the same place at the same instant. God and mammon cannot reign in the same heart. And when the glory of God is the light of the soul, like the splendors of the sun, it extinguishes the lesser lights which glitter before a worldly mind. The Lord and Creator of the heart there fixes his throne, and all the affections of the inner man bow to him as their supreme Lord.

3. This state of heart will have the same influence on the external conduct. The man who has not the love of God in him may indeed be faultless in many points, but his conduct will be greatly deficient and erroneous in externals. He will do and he will neglect to do many things which it were impossible should be done or neglected, did he carry with him a continual sense of God's presence. By his pleasures and amusements—by his worldly pursuits and eagerness in them—by neglecting his closet and other ordinances which bring him into contact with God—by his treatment of enemies—by habitually retaining some besetting sin—by the manner of yielding to temptation—by shunning the society of the godly, he will betray his real character. Though circumstances may occasion in the visible deportment an imposing semblance of religion, yet let circumstances change, and out of such a "heart will proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Many a heart which can now so smother its enmity to God as to appear with saintly devotion in his house, will, in a future world, speak out in blasphemy through eternity.

But where the heart—the governing aim—is right, there is a principle which tends to bring every thing right. There may indeed be some occasional deviation; but deviation will be an interruption in the general course of conduct. There will be

a principle of correction within, which will discover, regret, and reform what is amiss. For the principle is a *universal* principle; a supreme regard to God will lead to one duty as well as to another—to acts of kindness as well as to acts of devotion. It will resist and correct little sins as well as great sins; for the same authority reaches to one as to the other, and that authority is God's. It is also a uniform principle. It allows of no intermission of duty—sanctions no neglect of duty—admits of no indulgence of a beloved sin. For the authority which controls the man is God's authority, and it is ceaseless and eternal like himself. It is a pure and holy principle. It tolerates no iniquity—no moral imperfections. It points to the highest purity; it aims at God's perfect likeness. It will thus operate with a force ever right, and produce greater and greater measures of holiness in every part of the conduct. Conscience will become an active guardian, and control the man, by the smile or the frown of the Eternal. The soul will pant more and more after the purity and holiness of the regions of immortality, and the growing results will present the most interesting spectacle which earth affords—the progress of a corrupt, depraved soul rising toward its perfection in the image of God—the transformation of an heir of hell into meetness for a celestial throne, at God's right hand.

REMARKS.

1. Those whose hearts are supremely devoted to the world, have reason to suspect that they embrace some serious practical error.

So painful is the light of divine truth to a worldly mind, when brought to pour its full luster on the conscience; it so invades the internal quiet of the sinner, that he never suffers himself to come under its full power and pressure. He may be correct in faith, except in one single particular, and yet that single error effectually subserve the purpose of quieting him in his sins. He may admit the doctrine of atonement,

and yet deny the depravity of the heart and the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit; or he may admit these, and deny the sovereignty of God in the work; or he may admit this, and yet hold it with such qualifications and conditions as to impair all its power on the conscience; and thus the very truth which he denies may be that, without the belief of which he never will be awakened, and with the belief of which he could not rest in sin another moment. "Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." With the heart fixed on the world, still determined to live in sin, they are tempted to misrepresent to their own minds the truths of the gospel; they are not willing to understand the plainest explanations of them, but are disposed to pervert them, to explain away their pungency, and to cavil and object against them. They know that they must do this, or yield to their power. They cannot bear to see their character and state, as God's revelation shows them.

And, my hearers, let me now ask whether you have that evidence of the soundness of your views of divine truth which our subject presents? Have you that single eye, that commanding purpose to glorify God, which is so essential to just views of the truths of the gospel? Can you lay your hand on your heart and say, that with an honest purpose to renounce the world and to devote yourself to God, you have sought to know the truth as it is in Jesus? One grand design of the gospel is to disquiet and alarm the sinner, to make his heart meditate terror while he goes on in his iniquity. Now, can you say that you have been willing that these truths should come in and lie on your conscience, and give you that anxiety and distress which they ought to give you? Can you say, that you thus bared your guilty bosom to these arrows of the Almighty? Can you say, that you are willing to see your situation as one on the very brink of damnation, and that you have welcomed and courted the influence of that truth of God which made you feel it? If not, you are the man from whom

cavils and objections are to be expected. Your heart is not right. You are not willing to see and to understand. You have that evil eye—that perverted and obscured vision which conducts thousands in darkness, to blackness of darkness forever. You are not willing to receive the truth in the love of it that you might be saved ; and for this cause God shall send you strong delusion, that you should believe a lie—that you may be damned.

2. Our subject shows us the substantial difference between the saint and the sinner, and how great that difference.

This difference does not consist in this, that the saint never sins, while the sinner does nothing but sin. The saint does sin. It does not consist in this, that the sinner does not as well as the saint perform some actions which in their external form are right. He does. The difference lies in moral character—in their different practical estimate of things and governing aim. One has that single eye, that practical estimate of God and the world, which fixes his heart on God as his portion, and which in its true tendency governs the general course of his affections and conduct, and consecrates the whole man to his service. The other has that evil eye, that practical estimate of things which fixes his heart on the world as his portion, and gives him over to the complete dominion of selfishness, in all his affections and conduct. Notwithstanding, therefore, the imperfections of the saints, there is in moral character a substantial difference between saints and sinners. This difference is in fact great, like the difference in the object of their supreme affection. Through time and through eternity this difference will increase. The sins and imperfections of the one will diminish and disappear ; the commanding purpose of the soul will form and mold it into the perfect likeness of God, and he shall stand in glory in the heavens. The depravity and guilt of the other will augment and heighten—the controlling purpose will seal him an heir of hell, and break out in the rage and blasphemy of the damned.

This difference of character carries a dividing line through

this assembly. It as truly exists, in this house, between those who are here before God's mercy-seat, as between Paul in glory and Judas in the pit. It will widen, and still widen, till one will sit down a glorified celestial by the throne of God, and another enter into fellowship with the devil and his angels. As your heart is supremely fixed on God or on the world, you will be admitted into heaven or turned into hell. Which, then, do you love most—God or the world? Decide the question now at the bar of conscience, for it will soon come up at that dread tribunal that will award to you your everlasting habitation.

3. Our subject shows the necessity of maintaining a right state of heart.

How many, it is to be feared, who pay some attention to religion, perhaps profess it, and express a high respect for it, who, after all, are strangers to its vital energy. They dread a judgment to come, they are afraid of God's indignation, they would appease his displeasure by outward forms, and by abstinence from gross vice. But where is the heart? Alas! it is as worldly as ever. Theirs is a religion of constraint—they are alive to the world—they are cold and lifeless for God and his glory. The influence of religion is occasional, transitory, imperfect, painful—the influence of worldly affections, constant, uniform, powerful, pleasant. And, my brethren, how plain is it, that here can be no religion—how plain is it, that the heart must be right! If we do not keep up a just practical estimate of God and the world as our portion—if, to secure and make safe our interests here, be our commanding object—if our greatest concern be not to glorify God, we had better bid farewell to our religion, and begin anew. There can be no religion without this commanding, controlling purpose in the soul—none acceptable to God—none profitable to ourselves. "As a man thinketh in his *heart*, so is he." If the heart be right, all is right; if the heart be wrong, all is wrong. As we value the religion we profess—as we prize its hopes, its consolations, its joys, its prospects, its

rewards—let us keep our hearts in the love of God. Let us often bring up in contrast the love, and favor and glory of God as the portion of the soul, with what this ensnaring, tempting, soul-destroying world can give us—let us judge of the worth of each, with an eternal purpose to act as we judge—let the question be settled once for all, which is the best portion for the immortal spirit within—let the eye be single, that thus we may see things as they are, as God sees them—let the world fade away into its true insignificance, and God and eternal realities occupy our vision. Then shall we live under the light of God's countenance—then shall this sure word of God be a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path—then shall we not stumble on the dark mountains; but, guided by a pillar of fire, shall tread our cheerful way to that better country, even an heavenly. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

4. Our subject shows those who are destitute of true religion, what they must do to obtain it.

They must settle it with themselves that their false views of the world must be corrected, and their hearts taken from it and be fixed on God. Cost what it may, this must be done. Religion consists in becoming a servant of God. You are now living for yourself, for the world. You walk in darkness, and are stumbling at noonday—you are hazarding your eternal banishment from God, amid all the entreaties of his love, and quietly speeding your infatuated way to the fires of the pit—for what? For what this world can give you. In this state, religion is impracticable. You must open your eyes upon such madness; you must put God, and heaven, and Christ, and eternal life, by the side of the world, and guilt, and death, and hell, and look at them till you can see the difference; and thus you must resolve to renounce one, and take the other for your portion. You must resolve to obey God, and to glorify him, let the sacrifice be what it may; interest, ease, honor, wealth, pleasure, all must be given up to this object. Will you make

the resolve? Will you part with all for Christ, your Redeemer? Will you thus enthrone a sovereign God in your heart? Do this, and the work is done. Will you do it? It is not a vain thing—it is for your life. Your all is at stake. God requires it. The Saviour calls you to do it. The Holy Ghost urges you to do it. Conscience forces you to do it. Heaven, with its raptures and songs, invites you to do it. Hell, with its smoke and torments, warns you to do it; and you must, you must be decided.

“Your way is dark and leads to hell;
Why will you persevere?
Can you in endless torments dwell,
Shut up in black despair?”

XII.

PRACTICAL ATHEISM.

PSALM xiv. 1.

“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.”

THIS is God's world; and yet how godless! God made it, and the men in it, and yet “in all their thoughts, God is not.” Thus saith the context: “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek after God. They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

The origin of this awful alienation from God, this practical denial of his being and perfections, is traced to the heart, and the subject of it pronounced a fool. “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” That is, the language of his heart, its moral state and feelings, are substantially what they would be were there no God. Such he wishes the fact to be, and such, so far as any practical influence of the fact is concerned, the fact to him actually is.

I propose—

First, To inquire to whom this charge may be applied;

Second, To show their folly.

I. To whom does this charge apply?

1. To the avowed atheist.

He who can overlook the proofs of the divine existence which are scattered throughout the visible creation—who can ascribe all he beholds to accident or chance—who can look up with complacency to a vacant heaven and down to the grave

of annihilation, can neither love nor fear the Being whose existence he denies. His heart denies it.

2. The charge applies to those who entertain false views of the character of God.

It is one thing to profess to believe there is a God, and another to believe that he is what he is. Many there are who would not deny the divine existence, who yet do deny the divine character. They deny that he is the righteous governor of the moral world. Their language is, either that he is indifferent to the actions of men, or that he is too merciful to punish any of his creatures. But to believe in a God who will make no discrimination between characters—who regards the holy and unholy with equal approbation—who will dispense no future rewards or punishments, is substantially the same thing as to say, *There is no God*. The belief in such a being is no more a belief in God than the belief in a heathen idol would be. The character of God, as the holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty—that character which constitutes his glory and the only ground of love, reverence, or confidence, is denied—denied because it is disliked—because the control of such a God is hated, and his inspection dreaded. Instead of the just Sovereign maintaining law, the Being who reigns, is the friend and patron of iniquity. *There is*, what the heart desires, *no God*.

3. The charge applies to those who deny or disregard the providential government of God.

The Scriptures clearly teach—what is, indeed, the dictate of sound philosophy—that God is everywhere present to superintend and control all the events of this, and of all worlds. From this government of God result many of the duties of man—gratitude, submission, confidence, prayer. He, therefore, who under the constant reception of blessings is ungrateful—he who under trials is unsubmitive—he who, under all the varying dispensations of divine Providence, refuses to commit himself, his all, to the control of the supreme Disposer of events—lives without God in the world. His heart would

not be more entirely unoccupied with those affections and emotions, which are due to God, than it is, were the gifts of his bounty and the dispensations of his providence the result of some well constructed machinery, or of mere accident.

4. This charge applies to those who supremely love the world.

What does sound reason pronounce concerning the man who is surrounded by the presence of the supreme Jehovah, and invited and urged to choose him as the portion of his soul; who can suffer his thoughts to wander to every other object except that great Being; who, when called to love the Being whose glories absorb the spirits of heaven, and stand in the very sanctuary of his presence, can yield his thoughts and affections only to an endless series of trifles? Is this treating God as he ought to be treated; or is it saying in the heart, "*There is no God!*"

5. This charge applies to the man who has no delight in the worship of God.

Were there any thing to suit our tastes, we would love his presence. Were we at all sensible of his majesty and glory, we would delight to adore him. Were we grateful for his favors, we would gladly render our tribute of thanksgiving. Were we conscious of our dependence for every blessing, in time and eternity, we would rejoice to commit ourselves—our all—to his care and disposal. They, therefore, who neglect these duties, who shun every place where God appoints to meet them, who never approach his mercy-seat, in his house, in the family, or in the closet, act the part of atheism. They act precisely the part which all men would act, under the persuasion that there is no invisible being on whom they are dependent, and from whom they have any thing to hope or to fear. They say in their heart, "*There is no God:*" nor could they say it in plainer language.

6. The same charge lies against those who live in disobedience to any of God's commandments.

Throughout the intelligent creation, God ought to be ac-

known and treated as God. But to treat him, as God, implies that we honor him with a supreme regard—that his authority is decisive with us, and that his will is our only law. He, therefore, who refuses unqualified obedience, acts upon a principle which subverts the sovereignty of God, impugns his right of legislation, and which would introduce into the world all anarchy and woe, which the supreme dominion of God only can prevent. In what way, let me ask, can any man show that he wishes there were no God, or that he feels that there is none, more decisively, than by thus rebelling against him upon principle? They may profess to know God, but in works they deny him. They virtually exclude God from his moral kingdom—disclaim his sovereign power—explode his laws, by denying his existence, and contemptuously demand, “Who is Lord over us?”

7. This charge applies to all who reject the gospel.

Here, the character of God is displayed in its glory. In the cross of Christ, he reveals alike his justice and his mercy. Here, he appears the determined avenger of sin. Here, he makes known the way of salvation. Here, he reveals his promises, and here, denounces the terrors of his wrath. Here, he unfolds the rich provision made for the souls of men, and by commands, entreaties, and warnings urges their acceptance. And what is the effect of it all upon the unbeliever? By his stupidity in sin, he despises alike the justice and the mercy of God. By his unbelief, he makes God a liar. By his perseverance in sin, he sets at naught the whole work of redemption, renounces God’s authority over him, tramples under feet the Son of God, counts “the blood of the covenant an unholy thing,” and does “despite unto the Spirit of grace.” What more could the avowed atheist do? What more, than to disregard this whole gospel—its displays of Deity, its miracles, its Messiah, its authority of moral legislation, its regions of immortality and retribution? Plainly, every such man practically says, there is no gospel—no Saviour—no heaven—no hell—no God.

I might proceed to specify other characteristics of those to whom the charge in the text applies. These, however, which I have specified, are sufficiently comprehensive to include all whose feelings and conduct do not accord with the character of the living God, and the relation which he sustains to man—all who are justly accounted practical atheists.

I proceed—

II. To show their folly, which appears from the following considerations:

1. There may be a God.

No human mind can know that there is not. No man, unless he himself is omnipresent and omniscient, can know that there is not some other being to whom these attributes belong. If he does not know every being in the universe, that being may be God. If he does not know all truth, that truth, which he does not know, may be, that there is a God. If he does not know the cause of all existence—if he cannot, with perfect knowledge, assign the cause of his own existence, or of the world around him, that cause may be God. If there is no God, no danger is encountered—no loss sustained—by believing that there is one; there is real gain. But, if there *may be* a God, who can measure the folly of firmly denying his being, and all that system of truth which it involves, and acting accordingly? The speculative and practical atheist is undone. There *may be* such a God as the Bible reveals. The bare statement of the case makes the reflective mind shrink back with horror from the thought. To deny the being of a God, when there *may be* one; to live in this world as if there were no God; and enter eternity, there to have, for the first time, the full conviction, by meeting the awful reality!

2. The folly of such a person is still greater, because his belief is contrary to the fullest evidence.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handy work.” “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood

by the things that are made, even his eternal power and God-head." But he who lives as if there were no God, shuts his eyes and stops his ears. He will neither see displays of the glory, nor hear the voice of the Most High. He lives in the midst of God's works, but will not notice the effects of his power. He is sustained by his bounty, but will not regard his gifts. In every work of human art, he knows an artificer has been employed; but in the infinitely greater and more wonderful works of God, he sees no trace of wisdom or of power. When he beholds a fellow-being performing rational actions, he doubts not that that being possesses a rational soul. But when God displays his wisdom, his goodness and his power, in the rolling systems above him, and in every blade of grass beneath his feet—in the wonderful structure not less than the wonderful functions of his body; when his soul, in its faculties and operations, bespeaks itself an emanation of Deity—when God pervades the universe by an energy which can be none but God's, still man can shut his eyes on God and ascribe all that he beholds to chance or fate. Yea, he can confess with his mouth, there is a God, and say in his heart, there is none. Thousands do confess, that they live every moment in the presence and under the eye of that infinite Being—that they have no less proof of his existence and character than of those of their fellow-men, or even of their own—that they live, and move, and have their being in God, and yet are as free from all marks or traces of his influence on their hearts as if that God were a fiction. If to act contrary to evidence in the smallest matters is folly, what is it to be surrounded with the proofs of God's existence—to acknowledge that there is an almighty Being pervading all things by his presence, and yet live and act as if heaven, and earth, and hell were little else than empty space?

3. They who thus practically live without God in the world, deprive themselves of all real good.

Without faith—practical faith—in God, there can be no rational enjoyment of the world—no true excellence of character

—no comfort in affliction—no peace in death—no happiness in eternity.

There can be no rational enjoyment of the world. Take God away, and every thing around us is the effect of the coercion of fate or the sport of chance. All, which now gives the highest value to earthly happiness and renders it chiefly worthy of the enjoyment of rational beings, is at an end. True, man may enjoy food, and raiment, and rest, as an animal, but to enjoy earthly good with thanksgiving to a divine Benefactor—to enjoy it, with the hope of its continuance, because he is the object of the kindness of one able to provide for his wants—to enjoy it, as the means to an end of still greater value—the means of increasing conformity to the will of God, of glorifying his name and advancing in meetness for his eternal presence—were truly preposterous, to one who lives without God. Though blest with the richest earthly joys, he is a stranger to every emotion which elevates these pleasures above the sensations of the brute. What, to him, is accidental or necessary, comes and goes he knows not how, and therefore, cheerless and hopeless, is, to the real Christian, directed by the infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, of the Creator, and therefore full of expectation, of gratitude, and of comfort. With every gift, there is a giver, ready still to befriend, protect, and bless. To the one, there is nothing but animal sensation; to the other—besides his comforts and with his comforts—*there is a God.*

Without the *practical* belief that there is a God, there can be no true excellence of character. Every such man places himself beyond the reach of every motive which ennoble the human character, and raises man to the end of his being.

God originally made man in his own image. To restore him to that image, he revealed himself, as the model for imitation and the reward for conformity to his will. In God is all that can produce in man this transformation and dignity. Without God there is no rule of action, no accountability, no futurity, no retribution, no influence to operate on man—to

rescue him from the thralldom of sense, and elevate him above one whose origin and whose end is dust. All that influence which gives angels their dignity, makes saints their meet companions, and prepares both for fellowship with the God of eternity, must be unfelt. What, then, is the infatuation of one who voluntarily places himself beyond an influence so divine; who, qualified to rise to the dignity and joys of angels, invited and urged to become like his God, by all his own glories and all his capacity to bless, sinks himself to a level with the beasts that perish, by a willful practical denial that there is a God!

But such a man not only sinks to the lowest point of meanness, but to the lowest degradation of guilt. Uninfluenced by what there is in God, in his character, his law, or his government, he is, and must be, a supremely selfish being. To seek and to obtain, at any sacrifice, what is desired, is the very nature of selfishness. In this world, it is true, the spirit is often concealed in its true nature and tendency. But take off the garb; let the real selfish heart be uncovered; let it be seen in its desires, its affections, wishes, purposes, plans, and actions—its insensibility to others' wants and others' woes—its deceptions, frauds—its prostration of all good—its production of all evil—and we abhor it. It arms its subject with the spirit of an infernal, against God and man, and is the legitimate cause of all the groans, and miseries, and blood, of earth—yea, of all the agonies of the pit. It is the very character of the damned, and the fire which inflicts their torments. It is true meetness for that place of blasphemy, lamentation, and woe. Yet such is the real character of all who live without God. Originally destined to the high and refined enjoyment of conscious rectitude—to the purity and dignity of angels—to bear the image of God, he is sunk to the moral level of the devil and his associates. Oh, how fallen—how fallen is the man who disclaims the dominion of his God!

Such a man has no support under affliction—no peace in death. Amid all the changes, and disappointments, and sor-

rows around us, the idea of a God on whom we rest, and to whom we may look with hope, is so welcome, that it would seem as if we should be constrained to admit it, from the necessity of something to comfort and sustain us, under our calamities and our weakness. For such a support we look in vain to our fellow-beings, or to the created universe. The wounded spirit can only be consoled by him who made it. Take but God away, and where—ye who are sorrowful and afflicted—where—under the loss of friends, and property, and health—where is your refuge? Forsaken of its God, what a scene does this world present! The mighty vision around us is converted into a feverish dream—a dark, troubled, confused theater of tears and wailing, where chance sports with our joys, and unfeeling fate crushes us under calamities. In a fatherless world man must sit down in the desolation of grief, with no arm to sustain, no ray of hope to comfort him.

But how is the darkness dispelled and the region cheered, by the visible presence of an all-perfect God—a God who offers himself to us as our reconciled Father, pledging all his attributes for our security, our support, and our happiness! What can measure the folly of the man who voluntarily foregoes this blessed relation to his Maker—who, to be happy in this world, says “in his heart, *There is no God?*”

And what is his support on the bed of death? Does he meet it with no misgivings of unbelief—with no unquiet suspicions, that there is a God? Be it so. He is dying. Physicians have given him over. The tears and sighs of friends are useless. He feels the shivering of death's cold hand. And what is his relief? What his prospects? Does he rest on the bosom of mercy? There is none to show mercy. Does he look to heaven with hope? There is no heaven. His consolation is, that his body is sinking into the grave, to become the food of worms, and that his soul is trembling into the eternal night of annihilation. Oh, give me the delusion—if it be a delusion—of hope in God, of an anticipated heaven, when I die!

But even this hope of impunity from non-existence, after

death, is seldom realized by the *avowed* atheist. He may have *lived* an infidel, but, for the most part, he dies a terrified believer. How must he feel, when death comes, who admits that there is a God, and yet that he has lived as if there were none? He has been content to forego every connection with the Almighty, except that of danger; and now the moment of danger is come. No sooner shall that dying body expire, than his soul—he knows its destiny—shall meet an angry God on the throne of final judgment. Heaven, that immortal mansion of glory, he sees shut against him. Hell is already opening under his feet; and with some foretaste of its horrors, he dies. And where is he? Oh, who can think of the triumphant death of the believer, exclaiming, “O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?”—“But thanks *be* to God, who giveth us the victory.”—“For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”—and not see the folly, the madness, of living without God, and without hope in the world?

But their measure of folly is not yet unfolded; nor can it be. Eternity will soon open, with all its dread realities. A God they would not have on earth; but a God they now must have to all eternity. A God, in the riches of his mercy, they would not have. A God, in the greatness of his wrath, they now must have. A God whom they could contemn, amid all that he displayed to excite their fear and love, shall now appear in the overwhelming storms of his vengeance. A God—the view of whose love and mercy, a few particles of dust could intercept,—shall ever be present with them, in the fierceness of his anger. On earth, they could say, “*There is no God.*” Now, in the torments of hell, they learn, and feel, and confess *there is a God.* How, then, must appear the folly of having lived as if there were no God! How, when they shall comprehend the whole measure and depth of this calamity, in feeling the unabated wrath of an unchangeable God!

To conclude, my dear hearers, how many, as you reflect on

this discourse, are constrained to confess, that you have lived, to this hour, without God? True, it may be—I trust it is—that there are none who openly deny the divine existence. True, it may be, that your speculative belief in God has imposed some restraints upon your depravity. But, is it not equally true, that, as it respects every right feeling toward God—as it respects that general course of conduct, which decides character, that you have lived to this hour, substantially as you would have done, had you known that there were no God? Is it not true, and must you not confess, that you are as clear from this influence: as far from being what a true practical belief, in the being of a God, would have made you, as if you had no suspicion of his existence? Ah, my hearers, your unfounded hopes of his mercy—your ingratitude and discontent under the dispensations of his providence—your love of the world—your aversion to his worship—your contempt of his authority, and rejection of his Son—answer these questions. They must answer them to your own conviction.

And, unless it be true, either that there is no God—or no glory in being assimilated to his excellence—no happiness in friendship with the Almighty—no eternal rewards for his devoted servants—no danger in meeting a God, whose being and character you have practically disowned, what madness marks your course! You live only for the pleasures of a worldly life. The thought of God would have disturbed your peace, and poisoned your pleasures; and, therefore, you have excluded it. You knew, indeed, that you were in the hands of him, from whose power there is no escape; but you have sought no acquaintance with his nature, and inquired not what conduct should be observed toward him, or what expectations be entertained from him. Surely, you would have been alarmed, to have been placed thus, in the power of a mysterious stranger of your own species. But let that stranger be the almighty God, and you cared no more. For such a being, you have had neither fear nor love. With him, you

have desired no intercourse—with him, you have had no concern. As it respects your feelings, your conduct, and your character, there has been no God in heaven, earth, or hell.

But, if there *may be* a God—if there *is* a God—what are you now? What are your expectations from that world, where you must shortly meet him? Oh, my dear hearers, is it nothing to you, that you voluntarily renounce your own interests, for time and eternity? Nothing, that you degrade yourselves to the lowest point of meanness and guilt in the sight of all holy beings? Is it nothing to you, that you may rise and dwell forever with angels and the redeemed, in the blissful presence of God and the Lamb? Is it nothing, that under all the trials and afflictions of this life, you have no refuge, no support—that in death, you have no relief from the anticipated horrors of hell—that you have no certain respite, no, not for a moment, from the full experience of its woes—that you stand on that fearful brink, where the slightest agitation will plunge you beyond the reach of mercy—that eternity is ready to open upon you, and the God of eternity to become the avenger of your contempt of himself and of his Son?

XIII.

SINNERS HATE THE LIGHT.

JOHN iii. 20.

“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.”

WERE men willing to see, the works of God would afford a clear manifestation of his character. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.” Doubtless our first parents, before the apostasy, beheld a present God in every thing around them; nor could they open their eyes on the displays of his eternal power and Godhead without being constrained to love and adore. The very heathen are pronounced by the apostle to be “without excuse; because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God.” The same light still shines through the whole system of nature as at the beginning. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy work.”

Notwithstanding all this light, there was no just and profitable knowledge of God; the world was still enveloped in moral darkness. “The world by wisdom knew not God.”

Hence, for the instruction of an ignorant and degraded race, the goodness of God hath bestowed a special revelation on the world.

As the author of this revelation, Jesus Christ saith of himself, “I am the light of the world;” and again, “I am come a light into the world.” The term light is often applied to the

source of light. Thus God is said to have "made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night." In this sense Jesus Christ is said to be the light of the world; the sun, that greater light, whence proceeds all that light which surrounds us.

By the light referred to in the text, we are to understand the instruction imparted to us by the Lord Jesus Christ through his gospel—all that truth which by this revelation is made known to man. This revelation unfolds to us the glory of God, the beauty of holiness, the evil of sin, and the reality and weight of eternal and invisible things. This is the light which reveals the secrets of the heart, and discovers man to himself as a guilty, condemned, lost sinner. It is this that makes known the method in which rebels may be reconciled to their offended sovereign, and which exhibits an all-sufficient Saviour to perishing sinners. This is that day-spring from on high which hath visited us—that light from heaven which beams on our every path; and if any of us are ignorant of the discoveries which it makes to us, it is because we love darkness rather than light.

"Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light." By coming to the light, we are to understand that steady, fixed attention to the truths of the gospel, which shall give them their proper influence on the mind. So long as there is not that clear and correct and fixed apprehension of the truths of the gospel which is necessary to give effect to those truths—so long as the mind either disbelieves or doubts them—so long as the mind is fixed exclusively on other objects—so long as they are perverted, or in any degree misapprehended—in a word, so long as a combined whole, the direct bearing of the truths of God upon himself is not seen—so long as man refuses thus to look at them with solemn and fixed attention, so long he refuses to come to the light.

It may be true, that by instruction and study, men may have an extensive acquaintance with the Scriptures, and on all speculative points of doctrine they may be thoroughly orthodox;

they may even feel, in some degree, the power of divine truth on the conscience, and, at times, find it difficult to resist its fullest energy, and yet not come to the light in the sense of the text. Notwithstanding the full conviction of the understanding, they are not willing so to look at the truths which they believe as to give them a chance to operate upon the mind and conscience, in their full and unresisted power. They are not willing to come and stand naked, unshielded and unprotected, before those truths of God, which show them their real character and condition as sinners against him. Some are willing to go further than others. When the sinner is awakened in some degree to a sense of his danger, he is willing to look at some truths; but when the light, as he opens the avenues of the mind to its approach, begins to penetrate the dark recesses of sin, when it beams in upon all his refuges of lies, and shows him how vain they are, when the whole truth begins to tell on his conscience, and he sees that it will break down all his self-dependence, and scatter all his hopes to the winds, then he resists, then he strives to shut out the hated light; then he refuses to know the worst of his case; then he cannot bear to look at himself, at his character and condition, as seen in the light of eternal truth.

The reason is assigned in the text, "lest his deeds should be reproved"—i. e. lest they be convinced of their guilt—lest, by seeing their condition as sinners, they should feel it. Whatever high conceits they may have of themselves—whatever hopes they may indulge of the favor of God—whatever schemes they may form of future repentance to quiet them in sin, they ever have a secret suspicion that the light would make some terrible discoveries. They dare not, therefore, trust themselves in the light, lest this secret suspicion should rise into an overwhelming conviction. It is so palpably evident that they are transgressors of the law of God, and are under its righteous condemnation—that they are unholy and unfit for heaven; their conscience gives such decisive testimony to these facts, that they dare not come to a fair and open trial by the light of

God's truth, lest sentence should go against them. They may be willing to hear some truth ; but to look at the whole truth—to admit that humbling, alarming exhibition which would lay open all their guilt and all their danger—would be more than they could withstand. Hence they shut their eyes upon the light that would flash the painful conviction upon them. How can they bear to open their eyes and see nothing but the fearful curse of almighty God upon them? "They hate the light, neither come to the light, lest their deeds should be re-proved."

Having thus explained the truth in the text, I shall attempt to make it manifest to your consciences. We cannot, indeed, make the assertion in the text stronger than God has made it; but we may lead you, my hearers, to view more closely and distinctly the state of your own minds than you have ever done, and to find that there is an exact agreement between what God says of it and what you yourselves find it to be.

For this purpose, I remark—

I. That the truths of God, which respect the sinner, are, so far as the nature and circumstances of them are concerned, as easily seen and felt as any other. It is as easy to believe that there is a God, as to believe in the existence of a fellow-creature. The body is not the man, but the soul. And there is not a thousandth part of the evidence, that there is a spirit—a thinking, voluntary, active spirit—which animates the body of a fellow-creature, which there is, that there is an Almighty intelligent spirit which pervades, and sustains, and moves the universe around you. The evidence in the one case is as much greater than it is in the other, as the acts of God, which fall under your inspection, are more numerous than those of an individual fellow-man. Do the acts of the speaker evince, to your full apprehension, *his* being? And did you never hear God in the thunder, or see him in the lightning? Were you now to feel the tremblings of an earthquake, were the earth now reeling to and fro like a drunken man, were these walls,

these pillars shaking—would you not realize that there is a God? Oh, how you would cry for his mercy!

Again: why do you expect injury from a fellow-man, who is your avowed and determined enemy, and threatens to injure you? Is it because he avows his purpose to injure, and because he has by direct action injured others in the same circumstances. But have you any such evidence in this case, as you have that God is angry with the wicked—that he will pour out his wrath upon his impenitent enemies? Have you not the acknowledged declarations of the immutable God? Declarations, too, confirmed by the very acts of God, not only in every age, but every day? Can the declarations and acts of a weak, changeable worm of the dust furnish stronger proof of what he will do, than the declarations and acts of the inflexible, almighty, and unchangeable God furnish of what he will do? But let a fellow-man prove to you that he is determined to take your life, would you not think of it, would you not feel it, would not this come home to your mind, and fix your thoughts? Why, then, is the sentence of death and present condemnation pronounced by the infinite God unthought of and unfelt? Why does not truth, like this, arrest and chain your thoughts? Why do you not come to the light? Because you hate the light; because this truth would alarm your fears, dampen your pleasures, and check your pursuits; because it would at once overturn and demolish all your towering hopes of earthly bliss, and set the terrors of guilt, and of God, in array against you. To this it is too painful to submit. I appeal to your own conscience—is it not even so?

I remark—

II. The mind cannot turn away from divine truth without choosing to do it. The mind is voluntary in fixing its thoughts, and fixes the thoughts on what objects it pleases. It is true, indeed, that thoughts occur to the mind without choice, but the mind does not fix and dwell on objects of thought, or turn away from them without choosing to do so. For example, you set before the mind of the drunkard the fatal and inevit-

able consequences of his habits, to himself and to his family. He sees and knows that what you say is truth; but it is utterly ineffectual to divert him from this way to hell. Why? Because he does not keep his thoughts steadily fixed on the ruin that awaits him. And why does he not? Because he does not choose to do it. So, precisely, does "every one who doeth evil, refuse to come to the light." When the truths of God, which respect him as a sinner, are presented, he turns away from them. He may reason about them, understand them intellectually, admit them into his creed; but he does not look at them in their direct and awful bearing upon himself. And why?—why, when truths so momentous, truths so certain, truths as easily made the object of fixed meditation as any other—why are they not looked at with fixed attention? Why are the thoughts turned away to the trifles of sight and sense? Yea, how can he turn away his thoughts from things like these unless he chooses to do it? Is there any thing in the light which beams on the senses from the objects of sense, which *must*, of necessity, absolutely overpower and extinguish the light which shines upon him from heaven? Here—to bring the question to the tribunal of your own conscience—here, we present to your mind, the living God angry with the wicked, denouncing death eternal against you—we show you yourself under condemnation—we offer a Saviour able to save to the uttermost; and now can you turn your thoughts from these things, without choosing to do it? Will not your thoughts actually fix and fasten upon these things, unless you choose to fix them on something else? Why do you turn away from these truths of God—why refuse to come to the light? Because you know your deeds will be reprov'd; because you know that if you look at them steadily, you will be under conviction.

III. The artifices often resorted to, to hide the truth—to turn its force and resist its pressure—evince the same thing. Here is an extended list; probably there is not an individual present who has not resorted to some one or more of them. Let us examine some of them.

One is infidelity. Now, in respect to the infidel, there are two points to be decided. Is his conviction real? and if so, is it the result of patient and candid inquiry? Whether there was ever an enlightened and yet an honest infidel, is easily decided. The confessions, and groans, and agonies of Voltaire, and Hume, and Paine—their cries for the mercy of that Saviour whom they denied—on the bed of death, settle this question, and tell us why they denied the Son of God. If there then be any such creature as a real infidel, it is because he has not examined the truth. And why has he not? Why has he refused to search and see whether these things are so? The only answer is, he hates the light; and therefore, with the laugh, and sneers, and raileries, and sophisms, which malicious ingenuity can invent, he refuses to give a fair hearing to a message from his God.

Another artifice is found in the excuses offered for disobedience to the commands of God, and neglecting the concerns of the soul. It is not our purpose to enumerate these excuses. It is enough to ask, is it actually so? Is there a single real substantial excuse for disobeying the known commands of the living God for a moment? Is there really a good reason for leaving the interests of eternity unprovided for, another hour? Why, then, are these excuses made? Why, except to resist the obligations you are under to the living God, and the light of that truth which shows you your present dying necessity of a Saviour? The reason is plain; sinners wrap themselves up in the darkness and fogs of excuses and apologies, lest the light of conviction should flash its painful glare upon the guilty soul.

Another expedient is the indulgence of false hopes and false expectations. How common, how universal, is the hope of sinners that they shall repent hereafter at a more convenient season! How common is the hope and expectation that they shall do something to secure the converting grace of God! How common, even for awakened sinners, to flatter themselves that they shall do something to make themselves better and

more fit to come to Christ! Now, whence the indulgence of hopes like these? Are they authorized by the word of God, or by facts? Can any reason be assigned why they should be held with such an almost relentless grasp—and that, in face of the multiplied warnings of God—except to shut out the light of God's truth? Is not this the precise and only reason that, stripped of these hopes, a sense of guilt and danger would rush in upon the soul, and spoil all present quiet in sin?

Another method of hiding the truth and averting its force is, to reproach religion and its ministers. How often have we heard the very religion which the Son of God came from heaven to teach, reviled and condemned as enthusiasm and fanaticism, and even as the work of the devil! Especially, during a season of religious revival, how clamorous are many in heaping obloquy and reproaches upon that religion and its ministers! And when they dare stigmatize a revival by no harsher epithets, then it is only the fear and alarm occasioned by terrific preaching—at most mere sympathy. Now, why is all this—why all this zeal against, to say the least, harmless men and harmless things? “If this work be of men, it will come to naught.” Why, then, not let it alone? Ah, my hearers, the truths of God have, at such seasons, peculiar power; they are seen in visible operation. The citadel of sin is stormed, and not by weapons carnal, but mighty through God. An ungodly world does homage to their power by summoning every recruit to resist, which impiety and profanity, and often blasphemy itself, can furnish. It would not be difficult to enlarge this enumeration. How common the expedient of diverting the mind by attention to worldly things! One will immerse himself in business, another mingle in gay company and unite in trivial and mirthful conversation, another break away from retirement and from religious society, and resort to scenes of folly, of pleasure and dissipation—and all this to scatter the gloom of conviction, and to silence the clamors of an angry conscience. “Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds

should be reprov'd." And I make the appeal to every individual in this house—have you not adopted some one of the expedients now specified, to avoid the conviction of your guilt and danger as the truth of God has unfolded them?

IV. I will only appeal to two other sources of proof: the influence of religious conversation, and that of the faithful preaching of the gospel.

Zealous, communicative and faithful Christians carry light—the light of divine truth—with them wherever they go. When they talk of what is nearest to their hearts—their religion, their Saviour and their God—when they expostulate faithfully with sinners, and when what they say is enforced by a blameless example, they give a weight to the sentence of God's condemnation which few things, short of the solemnities of the final day, can give. Now, let the inquiry be put to any impenitent sinner who has had intercourse with persons of this character who have dealt faithfully with him, if he has not found it trying and painful—if he has not endeavored to avoid their company and their conversation—if he does not prefer that company where the things of religion are not introduced? Has not the hour when you have been obliged to listen to faithful expostulation, been irksome and tedious? Are there not many of you who would tremble at the thought of such an interview with that faithful servant of God who has been among us? And why is it so? Would he tell you any thing which God has not told you? No; he would only bring the truths of God so near that you are afraid you would feel them. "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd."

And now let me ask you, how you have felt under the faithful, pungent preaching of the gospel? I know, indeed, there may be much of the gospel which you are willing to hear—even many of its more prominent and distinguishing doctrines; but when the preacher has torn away, root and branch, all your self-righteousness—when he has exhibited, in their combined energy, those truths of the gospel which showed you on

the one hand that you were guilty, and which on the other cast you wholly upon the sovereign grace of God, and there left you, and made you feel that "thou art the man,"—have you not felt uneasy, and hardly known how to find rest in your present condition? Have you not hated him, and hated his doctrine? I ask you again, have you not often refused to fix in your thoughts the truths which you have heard, lest you should come to a realizing discovery of your condition? Have you not often suppressed both truth and evidence at the bar of conscience, when they were against you? When the glass of divine truth has been held up before you and shown you to yourself, have you not gone away determined to forget what manner of men ye were? Do you not know, in your own hearts, that the hopes you now entertain of future happiness have not the least foundation; that they are the result of that blind infatuation which tempts you to believe that things are as you would have them to be—the result, not of evidence, not of examination, not founded in the truth, but in direct disregard and contempt of every truth of God, and, to speak plain, mere refuge of lies, where the light of eternal truth is wholly excluded, and where nothing but the darkness you love reigns? My dear hearers, you may think me too plain, too direct and too personal; but I judge no man. I disregard every judgment but that of God and your own conscience. In his presence and at that tribunal, I lodge the appeal. The decisions of the judgment-day will be personal; and if your own hearts condemn you, God is greater than your hearts, and knoweth all things.

REMARKS.

1. Our subject will enable us to see how unfounded and impious is a very common complaint of sinners.

There are many such who admit the importance of religion, who flatter themselves, too, that they are willing to attend to the subject; but they complain that they do not and cannot

feel it. Here they rest, waiting for the Spirit of God to make them feel it. My dear hearers, this is delusion—fatal delusion. You admit, but you do not feel, the importance of providing for the salvation of your soul! Why do you not? Is it because there is nothing in God—nothing in Christ—nothing in your character as a lost sinner, doomed to endless death, which is sufficient to make you feel? No. It is because you hate the light—it is because you come not to the light—lest you should feel. You know that, if you were to look at yourself, even for one hour, in the light of God's truth, you *would* feel. You know that, if you were to let the truths of God, which show you your guilt, your helplessness, as one exposed—and justly exposed—to an immediate and an eternal damnation, you would feel. Make the experiment. Try it. Go alone with God. And now, will you charge your stupidity and hardness of heart upon the Spirit of God? Let conscience speak, and give it a fair hearing, and that moment you will be an awakened sinner. But so long as you do it not, you never will feel.

The Spirit of God is the spirit of truth. He operates on the conscience and the heart through the truth, and in no other way. And, my dear hearers, if you do not come to the light of God's truth—if you do not turn and fix your attention on the horrors of your state as a rebel against God, you never will feel till the fires of hell shall make you feel.

2. Sinners who are only partially awakened, are doing nothing to any purpose in the matter of their conversion.

Every such sinner, though he sees some truth, and feels it too, still sees but little as he must see it. He does not come out into the full light of God's word. He cherishes false hopes and false expectations, which break the force of truth on the conscience; he refuses to see the worst of his case. He must see this. Unless he sees and feels the justice of his condemnation—unless he has just views of himself, as his character and condition are disclosed in the Bible—unless he comes to the light—he never will be converted. Now, if

there are any of you, my hearers, who are in some slight degree convinced of sin, partly awakened, occasionally taking some transient glimpse of yourself as a lost man, we say to you, you are doing nothing to any purpose in this great concern. You may go on in this way, and only increase your guilt, and perish at last under an aggravated doom. We say to you, therefore, "Come to the light; come into that light which shall show you to yourself as you are; come where you can see yourself as God sees you." Look, and ponder that idol of your heart, on which God has kindled the fires of his indignation, that the affections of your heart may recoil from it. Look solemnly down the precipice where you stand, into that abyss of woe into which the slightest agitation may plunge you—look within on thy heart of cold alienation from God; and proud contempt of thy Saviour; and still look, and still ponder thyself—thy condition as a ruined, self-ruined sinner, till you can feel—I do not say how much—but enough to lead you to fall a penitent at the feet of mercy, of abused and injured mercy. Think of thyself, ponder thy condition as a sinner, till, with cheerful, affectionate, fearless trust, thou canst commit thy soul to that almighty Saviour, and of choice, with unqualified preference, and unfaltering purpose, yield thyself to his service.

8. Ministers must not be afraid of alarming and distressing sinners.

Sinners are not ordinarily converted till they see and feel that there is great danger that they never will be converted. Sinners, if converted, are converted through the truth; and one truth respecting them is, that there is very little hope in himself, for the sinner, that he ever shall be converted; and it is a truth which is ordinarily not felt. When the sinner first begins to attend to the concerns of his soul, he flatters himself that it is an easy work. But during the progress of awakening and conviction, he finds one prop of self-righteousness and self-dependence giving way, after another; he sees that his prayers, and his seeking, and his tears all pass for nothing; he

resorts to meetings, to Christians, and to ministers, and though he hears many instructions that are necessary, yet it all avails nothing toward subduing his hard and reckless heart. Thus he sees himself naked and defenseless—unprotected from the coming wrath; and that his guilt deserves perdition, and that the law and attributes of God all threaten its speedy approach. Here, he well nigh gives up all hope, and feels that he can wait, can defer his reconciliation to God, no longer. And now, for the first time, he has come to the light. Now the fire and hammer of eternal truth are applied; and now, if ever, the heart of rock breaks. Let not the minister of Christ be afraid of bringing home the whole truth to the conscience of the sinner. Christ, the prophets, and the apostles, by their preaching, stung sinners to the quick; they pricked them in their hearts, until they exclaimed, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They opened to their view a hastening destruction, roused them from their slumbers, and forced them to feel that they merited eternal death, and were momentarily exposed to it. And if ministers would preach the truth, they must thunder an alarm in the ears of sleeping guilt, and rouse the stupid to a sense of a judgment and a damnation that lingereth not. And, my dear hearers, you will not reproach us for laboring to demolish your delusive confidence and hopes, when sudden destruction shall once come upon you. You will not wonder that we labor so much to draw you from your refuges of lies. No; you will wonder that you did not believe us. You will reproach yourself in anguish, that you did not believe that this Sabbath was the day, and perhaps the only day, of salvation; and that you did not resolve to give up all hope from to-morrow, and secure an interest in Christ before that sun shall set.

4. There is fearful reason to believe that many in this congregation will never be even truly convicted.

What is conviction? It is a deep sense of guilt, without palliation and without excuse, and of danger so great and so threatening that the soul cannot rest while out of Christ. And

now, my hearers, how many of you are utter strangers to such conviction? And what hope is there, that you will not continue thus? What means of conviction, that ever did or ever will produce the effect, have not been used with you in all their power? God has given you his gospel, has unveiled his glories, has come to you in the full promulgation of his law, with all its requirements and sanctions. He has made known to you the Saviour in the fullness of his love and compassion, and his all-sufficiency to save. He has opened, in bright display, the rewards of his favor in the purity, and bliss, and joys of the world above. He has told you of the darkness and despair, and the wailing and the woes of the pit. All the moral influence which the universe affords by mercy, by terror, by entreaty, by love, by the richest gift of benevolence, he has concentrated to a point, and poured it burning and blazing on your heart. And where are you? You have felt it—you could not help that. But, instead of yielding to it, and welcoming it into your heart and conscience, you have resisted it to the utmost. You are still resisting it. If slightly moved, still you maintain the firm posture of resistance, carrying still in your own bosom the sentence of condemnation. And now, if all this has been in vain—yea, if, in addition to all this, you have once and again passed through a revival of religion, and are even now living, and have for months lived, amid the displays of the power and glory of a present God—if he has here, before your eyes, been walking in these streets, and on every side of you multiplying the trophies of his love—if the dead, on your right hand and on your left, have heard the voice of God and lived, and you are yet unmoved, yet unconcerned in your rebellion against that God whose glories you behold—why, fellow-sinner, how can you ever expect to be awakened?

And now, my dear hearers, have you not long enough hated and resisted, and shut out the light of truth? Remember, you cannot always do thus. Soon will these days of hope be passed and gone forever. Soon will that light, which now

shines to reveal a God of mercy, and to allure you to his friendship and love—that light, which discloses to the eye of guilt and crime, a Saviour entreating reconciliation, and proffering everlasting life—that light, which beams upon you from the eternal throne, softened and tempered by the cheering rays of love, to draw you to the bosom of God; soon, ah soon, will this light of everlasting truth, show you to yourself, to the Judge, and the Judge to you, when there will be none to pity—none to save. Oh, if this light of these days of mercy be insupportable to thy guilty soul—how will you bear the light of that day which shall show you an incensed God, and thyself under the just desert, and the hopeless doom of his wrath? If you are not willing to see and feel enough of your guilt and ruin as a sinner, to relent with contrition, and accept of mercy from thy offended God—oh, how can you endure the light that shall reveal a God that will never forgive—that shall reveal heaven as thy lost inheritance, and hell as thy final doom? How can you bear the light of that day, when the sentence of thy God shall echo, in responsive thunder, the solemn “Amen. It is FINISHED;” “Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints;” “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments?”

XIV.

ON HEAVEN.

REV. vii. 9-17.

ADMITTED for the consolation of the Church on earth to behold and to record, as an eye-witness, the happiness of the saints in heaven, the Apostle John gives us perhaps the fullest and liveliest descriptions of that blessed world, which God has revealed.

From the manner in which the inspired writers describe the happiness of the saved, it would seem impossible, that in this world, we could bear a full communication of its nature. What John saw, laid him *as dead* at the feet of him who walketh amidst the golden candlesticks. Accordingly the descriptions of that world are highly figurative; and though not fully unfolding the happiness there enjoyed, serve to raise in us the most exalted conceptions of its nature and degree. At the same time, so much is said, either in terms exactly literal, or by comparisons and contrasts so nearly approaching literal description, as adequately to answer the purposes of making known to us such a world. The latter mode of description chiefly prevails in our text.

“After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor and

power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

What a different scene, what a different world, separated only by a slight veil, from that which we inhabit, is here presented to our view—a world into which any child of God may enter by a single step, and in a moment of time!

The description of the apostle leads us to consider—

I. The number of its inhabitants. "I beheld, and lo, a great multitude which no man could number."

If we reflect on the power of God, we see that it is as easy to create a million, even a million of millions, of the brightest spirits, as to create one. He has but to speak and it is done. If we survey the magnificence and profusion of his works which fall under our observation, we behold every part of the visible universe filled with beings, from the immeasurable system of worlds to the minutest atom. If we consider the end of God's creation, his own glory, and remember that heaven is the perfection of his works, the grand scene of his glory, the place of his immediate residence, we shall at once feel that the multitudes who are to dwell there must be innumerable. There, God is to reveal himself—there, he is to be known, and adored, and glorified. And shall that world be thinly inhabited? Shall those realms, which God has thus made for himself, be but as empty space? shall heaven be a blank, a desert? True it is, our Lord has declared that "Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life and few there be that find it." But he speaks comparatively, and of those periods in which the success of the gospel is small. The number of those who have been, and who will be saved, compared with the multitude who have

been, and who will, perhaps for centuries to come, be lost, is indeed overwhelming. Still from this world there shall be a bright host of witnesses to the glory of its Redeemer. The world will stand long enough for this purpose. He made this world the scene of his humiliation, and it will yet be the scene of his triumph. Let the gospel extend; let the Holy Ghost accompany it, as prophets foretell, and redeemed sinners shall one day fill and crowd the realms of everlasting light and glory. Nor is this an unimportant circumstance in the happiness of the world of bliss. In this world, to augment members, often tends to multiply evils. But in heaven, where there will be no conflicting interests—where the wants of one will not be supplied at the expense of another—where every bosom glows with the pure flame of divine love—the social feelings will operate unclogged and unalloyed. There, every heart will beat high with desire to promote the general happiness, and the multiplication of objects will only extend, and warm, and quicken the mutual affection, and cause each to feel what is felt by every other, and heighten the universal joy of the innumerable throng.

II. The multitude of the redeemed is represented as made up “of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues.”

In this world, men are the subjects of countless local and circumstantial prejudices and even antipathies. National and family distinctions and interests, are a perpetual source of jealousy, rivalry, and hatred. Difference of education, manners, customs, and even of complexion, separate one from another at a wide remove; and diversity of religious sentiment on points of no greater moment than forms and ceremonies, alienate from one another the very members of the family of God. In heaven all these petty distinctions, and a thousand similar causes of alienation, contempt, and enmity, among men, will be completely annihilated. One affection will move every heart, one object command all the activity in that world. There will be no distinctions but those which, like the beautiful variety in the works of God, will add to the beauty of the

whole. One star will differ from another star in glory, only to augment the splendor.

In this world religion—oh, shame on man!—religion, sacred name, is prostituted to sanction discord, to justify hatred, and to consecrate bigotry. But it is a perversion. Religion acknowledges nothing as her work but union and peace. In heaven no odious denominations shall parcel out the redeemed of the Lord; no frivolous distinctions break the unity of the members of Christ; but people of every nation and kindred, and tribe, and tongue, with one heart, shall bow and worship before the throne of the Eternal. There, the song of the redeemed company shall be one. The righteous Abel—the earliest victim of mortality—shall join in the same notes of praise with the last child of Adam that shall fall asleep in Jesus. All having washed their robes white in the same blood, shall sing together, without a feeling or a note of discord, “Salvation to our God and the Lamb.”

III. The apostle describes the society in that world as composed of “angels” and “saints”—those who have never sinned, and those who were redeemed, and “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

The former were created and have continued in the highest rank of bright and glorious spirits. The latter were once “dead in trespasses and sins;” “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience;” but they have been quickened together with Christ, and raised up together with him, and made to sit with angels and the Lord of angels, “in heavenly places.” Angels scorn not their society; they welcome them as partakers of their joy, and delight in their happiness. The interest which they take in man they have already manifested. When man was created, “these morning stars sang together; these sons of God shouted for joy.” When he was redeemed, their bright hosts flew to earth, and sang, “Glory to God in the highest.” When a sinner repents, there is joy in the presence of the

angels; and in the midst of all the sorrows and trials and temptations here below, they are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. They conveyed the departed Lazarus to Abraham's bosom. With warmth of affection will these holy beings welcome us to their blissful society above. With what transport will they lead us up to the throne of God and the Lamb, and point us to the surrounding glories of our eternal abode; with what joy will they relate, and we hear, the account of their embassies of love to us, while we were here training for heaven! And while we celebrate the grace that brought us through, and dwell on the wonders of redeeming love, though they sing not our song, yet with a voice as the sound of many waters and the voice of mighty thunderings, they will strike the chorus to our praises.

There too we shall unite with all good men. The Scriptures clearly imply that we shall know all these saints in the kingdom of glory. Unspeakably delightful is this anticipation! There we shall meet those with whom we have prayed and suffered and taken sweet counsel together, while we have gone in company to the house of God here below. We shall be reunited to the pious husband, wife, parent, child and friend, who have gone to the enjoyment of the Saviour, leaving us desolate and afflicted. There, as ministers, we shall meet the seals of our ministry and the crowns of our rejoicing, in those converted by our instrumentality, and there, too, hail those who, under God, brought us back from sin and ruin, and gave us this blessedness. There we shall see those whom the narrow span of life permits us not to see on earth; patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs—those pious Baxters and Newtons and Edwardses, who have instructed us by their writings, and animated us by their example. We shall see *Paul* on his throne; and, though we shall not hear him preach, we shall hear him, who once breathed out threatenings and slaughter, shout the praises of redeeming grace. All those who are separated from us by distance, those of whose devotion to the

cause of Christ we hear, and who, as laborers together with God, are carrying on to their fulfillment his purposes of mercy in this guilty world—these, if like them we are faithful unto death, we shall meet as our friends and companions in heaven,—all united in love to that God, in gratitude to that Saviour, whose throne they encircle—all united to each other in spotless purity in the most tender benignity and active love. What has this selfish world to compare with intercourse like this, where every mind thus shines with light, and every heart thus glows with love?

IV. The apostle describes the employment of the innumerable multitude, as praise “to God and the Lamb.”

In other parts of the inspired volume, where the employments of heaven are also described, worship and praise are described as the chief occupation. We are not, however, to infer that this is the exclusive employment of its inhabitants. Angels, we know, are frequently engaged in active commissions of executing the will of God in doing good to others. Analogy would teach us that the saints also have similar employment; and our text, that “they serve God day and night.” But of the precise nature of the occupations of the spirits of just men made perfect, we are ignorant; nor could we, probably, comprehend them. It is no unreasonable conjecture, that the field of active beneficence will be hereafter enlarged in proportion as its spirit and powers are magnified. This is in kind the highest happiness; and that God will perpetuate that kingdom of instrumentality, by which he will forever bless the holy universe in the communication of good, we cannot doubt. How this good is to be done, who are to be its subjects, we cannot know, till we shall know more of that system of worlds and beings which his Almighty hand has profusely scattered throughout the regions of space. To fly on angels’ wings from world to world, from system to system, on errands of beneficence and mercy, may be no small part of their daily and delightful employment. It is sufficient, however, for us to rest in the assurance that they will be occupied in that

work for which they are best qualified; that their employments will be assigned by their God and Redeemer, and be such as to produce the greatest happiness, and to excite to new and continual praise. In every description of the world above, it is the voice of praise and thanksgiving which we hear—the overflowing of thankfulness for a state of exquisite enjoyment; it is the universal burst of gratitude in songs of joy, extending from one boundary of heaven to the other, and making all its pillars tremble.

V. The apostle next describes the happiness of the innumerable company.

In one part of the description, they are represented as those “who came out of great tribulation;” and again, “they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.” “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” The description is highly figurative, but it conveys to us the clearest conception of unqualified good, and the total absence of all evil. In this world we are born to trouble. Fear and terror, danger and calamity, pain and suffering, grief and misery, poverty and labor, shame and reproach, sin and remorse, the curse and the frown of justice have fixed their abode. Those before the throne, came out of great tribulation; and so shall it be of all, for it is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom of God. Various, indeed, are the trials of the saints below. Some, like Lot, have their righteous souls vexed with the ungodly around them; some, like Job, are plunged from the height of prosperity to the lowest depths of adversity; some, like David, are harassed by the most severe persecutions, both from enemies and friends; some, like Eli, are cursed with wicked children; some, like Lazarus, are afflicted by poverty and disease; some, like Peter, are shut up in prison; some, like Manasseh, feel the keenest anguish of remorse; some, like the apostles and martyrs, are afflicted, tormented, stoned and sawn asunder, and all are borne down with the body of sin and death, and distressed more or less with fears and doubts and heart-break-

ings for sin, crying, "O wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us!"

And, oh, how changed their state above! The last struggle of death, is the last pang they shall feel forever. There shall be no wicked men to vex by their unrighteous deeds—no revilers to scoff at the disciple of Jesus—no slanderer to wound reputation—no oppressor to afflict and crush the feeble—no distresses of poverty, hunger or thirst, cold or heat to be encountered—no faithless friend, nor ungrateful child, to grieve and torture the tenderest sensibilities of the heart—no sick bed of an expiring relative—no graves to weep over with anguish—no widow or orphan as objects of unavailing sympathy—no hardened sinner to be warned, and warned in vain—no falls of the pious, and apostasies of the self-deceived, to be lamented—no pincers, nor chaldrons, nor racks, nor fires to be dreaded. There, and above all, *sin* shall be no more; there nothing that defiles shall enter. Every cause of sin will be removed: no enticing companions to seduce, nor carnal body to corrupt, nor deceitful heart to ensnare; no evil world to tempt, no Satan to deceive, no cessation of divine influence on the soul; no David will there lament with anguish his fall, no Peter his denial of his Lord; no Christian exclaim, "O wretched man," nor pray, "Lead us not into temptation." But each shall stand up, in humble triumph, that he has now reached the consummation of all his wishes, his prayers, and his labors, in freedom from sin, and the purity of perfect holiness. All sufferings are forgotten, or remembered only to bless God, who counted them worthy to suffer for his name. From these hills of salvation, they shall look back on their passage through this troubled life—and the winds and waves having ceased—shall enjoy the everlasting calm of heaven. Every thing is done by infinite wisdom and goodness to banish the very elements of evil, to dispel the slightest shade of misery. With his own hand of mercy, their *Father*, God, hath wiped away all tears from their eyes.

The remaining part of the description exhibits the nature

and the source of their happiness. "They are clothed with white robes and palms in their hands." "They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." "For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water." This is not the happiness of Mohammed's paradise, not the happiness which the world can give. It is refined and holy, such as is suited to spiritual beings who are holy. It is the happiness founded on, or rather consisting in holiness, and a near and intimate access to the God of holiness. Let not its nature be judged of by those who, far from having tasted of pleasure arising from such a source, have, on the contrary, experienced from it nothing but pain and restraint. They know not what religion is in this world, much less what it is in heaven. To those who do know what it is by experience, there is no plainer truth than that religion is happiness. Religion is not merely a restraint, not merely external acts of self-denial; it is the union of the soul with God, the conformity of the will with his will, the enjoyment of communion with him, and the transformation of every faculty of the soul to his image and likeness. Now, happiness arises from a frame of mind harmonizing with the nature of those objects which can produce it; and is great, in proportion to the capacity to receive and the excellence of the object which imparts it. When the soul, therefore, in its most exalted state, becomes perfect in those natural faculties and moral qualities which constitute in creatures the perfect image of God—when every faculty, affection, and sensibility are put in perfect tune, and all in unison with the infinite and uncreated source of all good, there must be happiness, the most pure and perfect which creatures can enjoy. It is the happiness of God himself. God—the ever-blessed God—the source of all happiness, knows no other than the happiness of holiness. It is a state in which that gives pleasure to the creature, which gives pleasure to God—in which the soul drinks at the pure and in-

exhaustible fountain—in which the bliss of the Almighty becomes the bliss of his creatures. Thus perfect holiness and perfect happiness are one and the same thing. It is not more impossible that God should be unhappy, than that perfectly holy beings, who serve God day and night, should be. The spirits of the just, thus made perfect, will be placed where the causes of their happiness shall operate with full effect, the sources of their bliss pour a full and unfailing stream. They are before the throne of God, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. The grossness of corporeal senses will no longer form the medium of perception. The mind, freed from the disorders and obstructions which earth and sin now occasion, will be attracted at once by pure and spiritual objects, and with steadfast vision contemplate the perfection of all that is holy, vast, and excellent. All within and without will unite to facilitate the acquisition of divine knowledge, and the exercise of devout affections. The perfections of God, displayed on every side, in all their brightness and glory, will demand instant and ceaseless wonder, gratitude, love, and joy. Here, we are illuminated by the light of the sun, or we grope in darkness. “That city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” The purpose and works of God shall be traced from the ages of eternity, and followed down through that dispensation of providence, grace, and glory, through the eternity opening before us. The rays of Deity, filling every part of the eternal temple, will be softened to the sight of every beholder; we shall “behold him face to face, we shall see him as he is!” Oh, with what distinctness shall we see, with what energy shall we feel, then, that “we live and move, and have our being in God!” The capacity of every holy being must be filled. There, surrounded with his glory, their every desire will expire in the bosom of their God, and triumphs of joy and rapture—God’s own blessedness—be the portion of the soul.

As no small ingredient in the happiness of the saved, we are:

referred to the means by which they attain this exaltation. "They washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They are clothed in white robes, to denote their moral purity, and bear palms in their hands as emblems of victory in the good fight of faith. The first point to which our attention is directed is, that the "blood of the Lamb" was that in which they washed their robes, and made them white. In the efficacy of the death of Christ they trusted, as the atonement for their sins. Their robes were defiled and stained with sin; yea, as scarlet, as crimson. Hell was their desert; and they stood on its brink. But "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." *Here*, they rested all their hopes of glory. Here, amidst the fires and terrors of the last day, they expected to triumph. "*In the Lord have I righteousness.*" And they were washed, they were justified, they were sanctified and glorified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. It was Christ whom they trusted, and it was Christ who delivered from the horrible pit and the miry clay, and set their feet on the *rock* of ages. Behold, then, the cause, the whole cause of the wonderful change in the redeemed host—this grand translation from earth to heaven, from ruin to glory! "They washed their robes, and made them *white* in the blood of the Lamb." Where he is there are they also, to behold his glory, and to be one with him as he is one with the Father. They shall see that glorified body which he hath taken into union with his divinity—him who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and whose identity with the Father is so perfect, "that whoso hath seen the Son, hath seen the Father also"—him, who was once a man of sorrows, afflicted, buffeted, crowned with thorns and crucified, exalted to the glory which he had with the Father before the world was; they shall behold those arms, once stretched on the cross for their salvation, opened to embrace them; those hands that were nailed to the tree, placing the crown of life on their head; and that heart which was pierced for their offenses, glowing still with love stronger than death. Oh, with what joy, will they behold

their once crucified, but now reigning Saviour! What joy, after having loved and served him here below, to be admitted into his immediate presence; to receive from him the fullness of that gift, life everlasting; to be led by him to those fountains of living waters which proceed from the throne of God; to hear from his lips the agonies he felt, when he cried, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—of all the scenes of woe and distress through which he passed, to pluck them from everlasting burnings; to learn, while enjoying the bliss of heaven, what he did by his word, his providence, his Spirit, and his blood, to confer that bliss upon them! And, while duration rolls away its ages, to find him the same yesterday, to-day, and forever! Oh, Christians, do you wish for heaven, if *Jesus* may not give it to you? Has it any charms without the Lamb on the throne? But, saved by the blood, cheered by the presence, consoled by the love, blessed with the gifts, and enlightened with the glory of *Jesus*, is not such a heaven enough? "Worthy," cry the mingled voices of saints and angels; "worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." "Worthy," again cry his redeemed, in a song which angels may not sing, but in which, with holy ecstasy, we will join, "worthy art thou; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."

REMARKS.

1. Our subject furnishes great support under present afflictions.

Once the redeemed host were men of like passions with ourselves. They came out of great tribulation. Once they sighed and groaned under sorrows and sufferings as deep and grievous as those by which any of you are afflicted. But to what a height of happiness and glory are they now advanced, with what a glorious society do they now associate, in what exalted employments are they now engaged, in what refined bliss do

they now partake! They will suffer distress and death no more. Their minds are cleansed from every taint of sin—their breasts are the everlasting abode of peace and joy. The wisdom and goodness of God are employed to pour around them that profusion of good, which shall bespeak the infinite power of the Giver, and the rich treasures of his boundless benevolence. Blessed spirits! your lot is fixed, your happiness permanent and eternal! Oh, what consolation to the suffering pilgrim on earth, to lift his contemplations to those who have gone before him! Standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and holding up their palms of victory, they say to him, “We were once as you are, assaulted by the same temptations, and the same enemies; stricken by the same arrows, we drank of the same cup, and felt all the sharpness and bitterness of the Christian warfare. Often were we ready to faint—often we cried to God in the agony of grief; we felt all the weakness of your faith, and trembled under all the infirmities and sins of our common nature, and were on the very point of being swallowed up in despair. But thanks be unto God, who always caused us to triumph in Christ Jesus!” Faint not, therefore, in your course. Behold this cloud of witnesses! With one voice they bid you lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees. Be strong—fear not—for your God will come—he will come with a recompense, and save you. With angels you shall unite. One spirit shall reign through heaven; one song employ every tongue. From glory to glory shall all be changed. You shall be like Jesus, for you shall see him as he is, and God shall be all, and in all, forever and *ever*. One moment in heaven, will efface forever the afflictions of earth.

2. This subject should animate Christians in the work of preparation for heaven.

Is there, my brethren, such a world—that glorious state—of which so delightful a picture is presented us? How different from that which we now inhabit! Here, we see a busy world, eager in vain pursuits, agitated by trifles, contending about

objects of no moment, and immersed in things which perish with the using. All is noise, confusion, vanity, sorrow, and evil. But, behold another world, where all things are substantial, as here they are vain; where all things are momentous, as here they are trifling; where all things are durable and eternal, as here they are changeable and transitory! Survey its inhabitants, the innumerable multitude of the blessed, and you see the population of this world is but a petty tribe; its employments—compared with them—all the concerns of this life, are but as the dust; its pleasures, they are pure and spotless, holy and divine. There, perfect holiness and happiness reign without measure and without end. There, God unveils his glories—there dwells the Lamb in the midst of the throne—there are the eternal songs. Ah, what a contrast to earth! And is this blessed scene near us? May we be called into it in a moment? With what anxious solicitude, then, should we endeavor to realize it! How ardently should we desire, how strenuously should we labor, to be prepared for it! Let us draw aside the vail, and look at that eternal weight of glory. Let us look at it by that faith which “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Let us thus go and stand on the threshold of heaven, listen to its songs, and look in on its joys and glories. Brethren, could we then sleep? We do not imagine; we do not dream. Heaven is near to the Christian. At the longest, a few more suns shall rise and set, before he shall stand on Mount Zion. His salvation is nearer than when he believed; and it is time, high time, to awake out of sleep. If more tears, and trials, and labors, and toils are necessary, let him cheerfully acquiesce; yea, let him earnestly strive. Heaven will make him ample amends. Every sacrifice will be trifling, when the hand of God shall wipe away all your tears. Oh, my brethren in Christ, my flock whom I long to present to God meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, “*labor to enter into that rest.*”

3. How precious should Christ be to the Christian on earth!
How precious he is to the redeemed host in heaven! “They

washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." It was Jesus who raised them from sin and hell to thrones of glory. It is Jesus whose presence fills heaven with transport. And what other hope have you than Christ, the hope of glory? What other heaven do you desire than that where Jesus is? Whose love hath raised you, Christian, from the pit, but the love of Jesus? Whose arm will guide and strengthen and conduct you to that bright world, but the arm of Jesus? Whose hand put the unfading crown on your head, but the hand of Jesus? Whose glory shall be the portion, the unchangeable, eternal, satisfying portion of your soul, but the glory of Jesus? Oh, how precious will Jesus be to the redeemed sinner, when this work is done, and when in heaven he surveys its wonders! Let him be precious now. It is the blood of Jesus which is to wash *your* robes and make them white—that blood in which the myriads of the saved shall all be washed and presented faultless. Here, then, put all your trust. Here, leave all your glory. Here, direct all your praise. Here, by singing now, prepare for the songs of heaven—"salvation to God and the Lamb." "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

4. How unfit for heaven is an impenitent sinner!

All the employments and delights of heaven consist in worshiping, loving and serving God. Saints and angels have no other occupation, no other joys. The sinner has not the love of God in him. Admitted into heaven, there is no delightful employment for him. Its delights all flow from the taste and feelings of its blessed inhabitants. They love God and the Lamb, and therefore they spontaneously unite in one eternal song of praise. They love God and the Lamb, therefore they drink deep of pleasure. They swell the notes of praise with raptures which make the breasts of angels glow, but which the tongue of angels cannot describe. And what has an enemy of God to do with such employments and such joys?

He must stand aghast and amazed, while angels and blessed spirits shout the praises of Jesus around the throne of God. There is not a single note in the songs of that world which he could sound—not a single sentiment which he could adopt—not a single ecstasy which he could enjoy. Love, and love only, can do this; and he is an enemy! Miserable being!—a wretch in heaven! Surrounded by millions of blessed spirits, and not able to taste one drop of all that bliss with which their cup overflows! A solitary, forsaken being, in the midst of these glories! Angels fly from thee; for sin they must abhor. Redeemed spirits fly from thee; for thou art the enemy of Jesus. Oh, who shall be thy companions—what thy pleasures! The presence of an omnipotent God, of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who cannot look upon iniquity, thou canst not bear, even on earth. Fly, then, from his throne. Heaven overwhelms thee with unutterable agonies. Hell is your fit, your eternal abode.

9*

XV.

HOLINESS ALONE FITS FOR HEAVEN.

HEB. xii. 14.

"Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

WHEN a person is about to remove and fix his abode in a distant country, he usually feels an anxiety to ascertain whether his future situation will accord with his wishes and secure his happiness. The solicitude in such cases is commonly so great that one seldom changes his residence without having first not only acquired all the information he can from books and travelers, but actually been on the spot himself and obtained personal knowledge of the place and its advantages. Thus we act in respect to our condition in this world. Nor should we be esteemed as possessing a common share of prudence, in such a case, if we neglected such wise and precautionary measures, to make provision for our temporal well-being.

Not so, when we think of our removal into eternity. That heaven is a place of great and permanent happiness, is not denied by any who admit its reality. At that world we all hope to arrive when death calls us away from this; and, be its happiness what it may, we fondly expect to enjoy it. Few, however, it is to be feared, have seriously examined the foundation of this hope. That heaven is not a place of misery but of happiness, to all who dwell there, seems to limit the research of multitudes; and that it is possible that they may be of the number who shall partake of its joys, seems to justify their confident hopes and expectations of its bliss. What heaven is, what its happiness is, what is necessary to qualify us to

enjoy it, are inquiries seldom made with that deep interest and persevering investigation which the subject demands.

While God has clearly revealed a world of future happiness, and urged us, by every consideration, to prepare for it, he has no less clearly taught us what is necessary to such preparation.

In our text this important truth is fully presented: "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Heaven is the special residence of God, the scene of his glories, where he unveils himself to the view of angels and redeemed spirits. It is this full vision of God which is the source of all their joys, and which, in the text, denotes that happiness which springs from the presence of God—the visible display of all his glories.

We have, then, this truth presented for our present meditations, that—

Holiness in this world is indispensable to our happiness in another.

I propose to consider—

First, What holiness is.

Second, To show its necessity to our future happiness.

I. Holiness may be considered as obedience to the law of God, or as conformity to his moral character.

It is, however, quite immaterial which definition we adopt. As "love is the fulfilling of the law," and as "God is love," to obey the law, is to be like God in moral character.

It is in this light that the Scriptures most frequently present to us the nature of holiness. "Be ye holy, for I am holy." And hence Christians are said to be "partakers of his holiness"—"partakers of the divine nature,"—"after God created in righteousness and true holiness,"—and "to be changed into the same image from glory to glory."

As this image of God in man consists in the likeness of moral character, it follows that holiness in man consists in loving the same things which God loves—in desiring the same things which God desires; in a word, in possessing the same

moral affections and dispositions, and in acting them out in corresponding conduct. Now, God supremely loves himself. He is the all-perfect God. All excellence, compared with the excellence of God, is nothing. In loving himself, therefore, he loves that which is most worthy to be loved. From the same disposition, he delights in every manifestation of his own perfections—that is, in his own glory. He delights in his law, as the transcript of his nature; he delights in his Son, as the express image of his person; in the whole plan of salvation, as unfolding the riches of his goodness and wisdom; in the holiness of his intelligent universe, as reflecting his own moral character; in their happiness, as the effect of his power, his grace, and his mercy. For the same reason he delights in all his purposes and all his works—in his providential government—in the God-exalting truths of his word—in the enlargement, purity, and final perfection of his church, and the fulfillment of all the designs of infinite love and mercy. As God thus delights in the manifestation of himself—that is, in his own glory, so all his acts, guided by his infinite wisdom and performed by his almighty power, are directed to this end. It is easy, then, to see, that holiness in man—being conformity of moral character to God—consists in loving God and delighting in his glory.

It is only necessary to add, that while the infinite wisdom of God regulates his mighty acts to their ultimate end, so in his law and its particular precepts, he has prescribed the same end to us, and given us specific rules of action, by obedience to which we are to promote that end. This, then, is the character which man must possess. This is what God means, when he says, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.”

II. Holiness in this world is indispensable to our happiness in another.

1. It is so by the unalterable appointment of God.

Our text is unequivocal on this point: “Holiness, without which *no man* shall see the Lord.” *No man*, be he who he may, whether high or low, rich or poor, learned or ignorant,

honorable or mean ;—*no man*, whatever religion, or virtue, or profession, or creed, or works, or prayers he may boast of, without holiness, shall be admitted into the presence of God. Into the celestial city “there shall in nowise enter any thing that defileth.” “Except a man be born again,” except he be, in the language of the apostle, “after God created in righteousness and true holiness,” “he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This is the decision of him who holdeth “the keys of death and hell”—who “openeth, and no man shutteth ; and shutteth, and no man openeth.”

2. It appears from the character of God.

As a holy being, God delights in holiness, and abhors sin ; as the God of truth and justice, he must hate all moral defilement in his creatures, and be inflexibly determined to punish it. Actions are the surest interpreters of character. Were God to admit the unholy into his blissful presence, it would be a full and decided declaration, that sin and holiness were things without a difference ; that his moral government in its tremendous sanctions, was intended only to excite groundless alarm in his rebellious subjects, and that the whole work of redemption—solemn, awful and sublime as it is—the very astonishment of heaven and earth—was without an object, at most only a mighty farce. But will the great Eternal thus tarnish his glory, and demolish the foundations of his throne ? Or, must the unholy in this world be unhappy in the next ?

3. The same thing appears from the fact that none of the sources or means of happiness, which the wicked possess in this world, will exist in heaven.

The happiness which they enjoy here, springs from the gratification of sensual, ambitious and covetous desires, and from those natural affections which pertain to the present mode of existence. In heaven, all these sources and means of enjoyment will utterly fail. We are expressly told that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” and that “in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” Most of these appe-

tites, passions and affections pertain to men as corporeal beings, or arise from the relations which are peculiar to this world. These will of course no longer exist when the spirit leaves the body. True it may be, that the recollections of these relations will hereafter be sources of happiness or misery; but the relations will cease, and of course the duties and pleasures arising from them will also cease. All the happiness of which man will be capable in another world must be adapted to his nature, not as a corporeal but as a spiritual being. As such a being, and destitute of holiness, what will be his capacity for happiness? Will he then be capable of happiness from the gratification of avarice, or pride, or ambition, or lust, or from the indulgence of any appetite or passion which he now possesses, and which can possibly remain when the body molds into dust? On the supposition that all the appetites and passions from which he has derived happiness here, may go with man into another world, what *objects* can there be found to administer the least gratification? Plainly, nothing from which the unholy derive pleasure in this world will be found in heaven. The avaricious will not find in heaven his bags of gold; the ambitious will not find the applauses of his fellow-worms; nor the glutton his luxuries; nor the drunkard his cups; nor the unclean the objects of his lusts; nor the profane reveler his blasphemous associates; nor the oppressor his slaves. That world contains not objects like these. And yet from these objects only, is the man destitute of holiness capable of deriving the least enjoyment. In God he has no delight. The moment, therefore, he enters eternity, he is stripped of every particle of enjoyment. In all heaven, there is not a single thing to please his taste or gratify his wishes. Eternity to him is an absolute waste.

4. From the fact that the character of man becomes unchangeable at death.

A mere separation of the soul from the body cannot alter the moral state of the soul, or change its views, affections or character. This is abundantly decided in the inspired oracles.

“There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest.” “The night cometh, when no man can work.” “Where the tree falleth, there shall it be.” Especially does the solemn decision in the last chapter of Revelation settle this point: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.” The present state is the only state of probation to man. All beyond is unchangeable character and eternal retribution. If, therefore, the character be unholy, formed by objects pertaining exclusively to this world, there will be no change to correspond with the causes of happiness in another. Vain, then, is the expectation that we may, while in a state of preparation for eternal allotments, seek our chief good in the things of this life, and at death undergo a transformation which will qualify us to derive happiness from the things of another. Brethren, if we make this world our portion, we must carry it with us into eternity; we must at least be able to extinguish the last fires which the Almighty will kindle upon it, or we cannot be happy. God will not change; heaven will not change; man will not change; the world will be burnt up; and where, then, will be the resource for the unholy?

5. From the nature of the soul.

The soul of man is formed with natural capacities for happiness. As intellectual, voluntary and immortal, it is destined by its Maker to enjoy that happiness which corresponds with its nature. Its desires are large, like its capacities, and will forever aspire after that immeasurable good which alone can fill them. It cannot submit to total deprivation with indifference; it cannot be satisfied with mere vanity; it cannot be happy by being freed from positive suffering. The mere absence of good will leave the soul in want. With quenchless desires, it will still thirst for happiness till it be filled with that for which its Creator constructed its capacities. God himself only can fill and satisfy it.

Happiness does not depend on mere locality; it depends on the natural constitution of the immortal spirit, and on the

objects which are adapted to that constitution. God and his glory, and nothing beside, are adapted to the nature of intelligent and moral beings. Look through the universe, and there is nothing on which the soul of man can fix as an object of contemplation or love which can satisfy it but God. Fix on what else it may—ushered into eternity, and there unoccupied—unblessed with God, as an object of delight, the soul will still stretch its desires into immortality, and remain poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked, and in want of all things. It will be the immortal spirit—with all those capacities, desires and energies, which point out its original destiny to be high in the realms of bliss, and to be filled with all the fullness of God—still in want! Destitute, poor, having nothing!

6. If we consider what heaven is.

All the inhabitants, employments and joys of that world are holy. Hence it is called “the high and holy place;” and from the manifestations of God there made, it is called “the habitation of his holiness.” The unholy can find no happiness in the society of heaven. It is the residence of God. There God appears “glorious in holiness.” His holiness is his glory—that glory which is above the heavens—on which angels cannot look with steadfast vision, and before which they veil their faces. How could the unholy bear such displays of the Deity as these? When the glories of God’s holiness should thus blaze upon them, how would their eyes fail, and their hearts die within them!

Every being in that world reflects the image of God. There is not one who is not admitted there for the very purpose of glorifying God by thus reflecting his image; not one whose feelings, whose affections, pursuits and joys do not result from perfect holiness. Where, in heaven itself, could the unholy find a friend or an associate? They abhor the fellowship of the holy on earth, unless their specific character be concealed. This substantial dissimilarity of character in the righteous, of tastes and pursuits, cannot result in harmonious and delightful intercourse. In heaven, that character will not be con-

eealed, but shine in unblemished luster. Angels or saints cannot love, or welcome to their society, one who is an enemy to the God whom they serve. In all heaven, then, he can find no kindred spirit. Placed in the midst of its innumerable hosts, he must be, and feel himself to be, a solitary, forsaken outcast.

Nor can he find happiness in the employments of heaven. These consist in active beneficence, and in the pure and perfect worship of God. Angels are "ministering spirits;" and of saints it is said, "they serve God day and night." Of the precise nature of the acts of beneficence, we have no distinct information. The blessedness of doing good is the highest kind of happiness of which man is capable; and that God will perpetuate that kind of instrumentality by which He now blesses the holy universe, there can be no doubt. Heaven is a world of active beneficence—a practical comment on the great rule of righteousness—"It is more blessed to give than to receive." God is the great fountain of this blessedness; and the united efforts of all holy beings are streams of good, universal, unceasing, and immortal. No selfish affection is known. Every mind is expanded with affections, embracing universal good. On this object every eye is turned. With this every heart thrills; to this every hand is devoted. To fly on angels' wings to execute God's commandments in imparting good, is no small part of the delightful service of the saved.

But for work so divine the sinner has no heart. His affections are all selfish; his designs, and plans, and efforts all center in self. His only scheme of happiness is to gain good from others. For that happiness which consists in doing good, he has no taste—of its nature or degree, he has no conception. In this great and commanding pursuit of heaven, he could not engage. Every wish of his heart must be opposed to the one great end for which heaven was formed. This employment of heaven to him must be a tedious drudgery—a cruel bondage; and its rewards, instead of the inherent blessedness of doing good, a sort of damnation.

Another principal employment in heaven is the worship of God. In almost every glimpse afforded of that world, we find the angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, bowing with adoration and transport before the throne of God. When Isaiah, in his vision, saw the seraphim standing before the throne of God, and covering their faces from the glory of his presence, he heard them crying, one to another, with voices that shook the pillars of the eternal temple: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts." So, when Daniel saw the "Ancient of days" on his throne, which was "like a fiery flame," "thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him." And in later times, when John saw heaven opened, he heard again and again the voice of many angels, and of the redeemed multitude, "saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." And he tells us, "they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

Every thing we hear in that world is the voice of praise and thanksgiving—the universal burst of gratitude, and wonder, and love, in songs of joy and transport, filling all its arches, and making all its pillars tremble.

Now, what meetness for heaven can he have who has no taste for the service and worship of God on earth? To the house of God he comes with a thoughtless, wandering mind, and with no delight in its sacred duties. To secret prayer he is a stranger; or, if forced upon it by conscience, he only finds the more certainly how much he dislikes it. How much at a loss must he be to join in the notes of heaven, who has no taste for contemplating the glory of God, no eye for beholding him in his works, no delight in meditating on his perfections! He has never seen his need of a Saviour, never sought redemption by the blood of Christ, nor felt his obligations to him. How, then, can he fall at the feet of Jesus, and adore him in the songs of the redeemed? What has an enemy of

God to do with employments and joys like these? Alas! he knows not the meaning of the eternal song: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." There is not a single note in that song which he can sing, not a single sentiment which he can adopt, not a single ecstasy which he can feel. Love, and love only, produces all this; and love he hath not. Admitted into that world, what has he gained? An entrance into that temple which is filled with the presence and glory of God. What has he gained? Consummate felicity—the perfection of happiness—all that the immortal spirit can desire—all that God can give? No; he has obtained the liberty of serving God, day and night, with adoration, and love, and joy, and transport. But that God he hates, that employment he loathes; and, in the midst of all that ocean of blessedness, there is not one drop for him. On him, heaven were a gift bestowed in vain.

REMARKS.

1. Every impenitent sinner may be convinced, from his own experience, of the necessity of a new heart to fit him for heaven.

Our blessed Lord has said: "Marvel not, that I say unto you, ye must be born again;" "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit:" as if he had said, it is no cause for wonder that your moral character must be changed to fit you for heaven. If you reflect on the nature of that world, the character of God, of saints, and of angels, their employments, and the sources of their happiness; and then consider your own present disposition toward these objects, there is nothing to be wondered at in this doctrine. The simple fact that heaven is a holy place, and that the sinner is unholy, settles this point to the full conviction of every honest mind. The sinner cannot look at himself, without the fullest testimony to the necessity of a new heart. He carries it in his own bosom. He knows that there

is no peculiar transcendent sweetness in the name of Jesus to his soul—nothing in that beloved name, which makes heaven resound with gratulation and joy, in which he, with his present feelings, could find unmingled and endless bliss. He knows that, in this theme, he has never found delight, that his thoughts have moved in another channel, that his affections have been fixed on other objects. He knows what constant constraint he feels in the company of the pious on earth, what desire to quit their society, and what liberty, the moment he is permitted to rejoin those friends whose tastes and conversation are as carnal as his own. He knows that it is not his daily study, endeavor, and delight to draw near to God, to live to his glory, and to advance in fitness for his eternal presence. He knows that the nearer religious service brings him to God, the more clearly divine truth exhibits the necessity of renouncing the world, and exposes his guilt the more he dislikes them. He knows that to attain the holy character and holy happiness of heaven, is not the consummation of his wishes—the chief desire of his heart; and he knows, by plain and inevitable consequence, that “except he be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

My dear hearers, let me bring this subject home to each one of you, whose conscience tells him that he is yet unholy, without love to God, without delight in his being and perfections. You may indulge strong hopes of heaven—doubtless you do; you could not remain at ease without it. But God forbid that you should take up on slight grounds such a hope as this. And if you are unholy—seeing and knowing, as you must, that you are a stranger to the love of God—how can you indulge it? That God who cannot lie has declared, that you *cannot* see his kingdom. All his attributes are pledged to exclude you from his blissful presence. We have seen that you cannot derive happiness from this world, when removed into that eternity which is just before you; that, in all that eternity, not a single object can be found to satisfy any one desire which you have ever known; that your soul, stretching with

desire into immortality, must suffer eternal want. You have seen that, even were you admitted into heaven, there would be no happiness for you ; that all its joys spring from love to God, from the delight which is taken in the pleasures of its holy society, holy employments, and holy joys. No, fellow-sinner ; admitted into heaven, there is no song which you can sing. Love, and love only, sounds the notes of that world. You have no love. You could not sing. God, you do not love—the Lamb on the throne, you do not love ; and while angels and blessed spirits are shouting the praises of Jesus around the throne of God, you would stand aghast and amazed in eternal silence, a forsaken, lonely being—deriving nothing from their sources of joy, but an awful sense of God's holy presence, and a tormenting sight of his glories ; and while, with endless and boundless raptures, the heavenly host should cry, "Worthy is the Lamb ;" you could only utter, in the language of real feeling, "Oh, what a weariness is it !" Miserable wretch ! Surrounded with all that blesses the bright hosts of glory, and unable to taste one particle of that bliss with which their cup overflows—a silent, solitary outcast in the midst of heaven ! Search the whole extent of heaven, from one end to the other, you could not find an associate. Those who on earth dissolved the ties of friendship to separate from you, could not welcome you to, nor could you endure their society. Prophets would turn indignant from you—apostles, and all the redeemed multitude, would behold you with terror, as still the enemy of their Saviour—angels and archangels, who never knew what sin was, would fly from you with consternation. The presence of an omnipotent God, "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," thou canst not bear. Fly, then, from his throne. Fly from his tremendous presence. Fly from heaven—it fills thee with unutterable agonies. Hell is your only refuge—your only relief from the torments with which heaven would overwhelm the unholy soul !

But now the day of mercy shines ; the voice of everlasting love is heard, calling you to life. God has no pleasure in

your death. Heaven now lifts up its everlasting doors, and throws open its everlasting gates. Jesus invites; angels wait to witness your purpose to-day. And, sinner, shall it again be told in the courts of heaven that you again refuse to regard the calls of mercy? Shall this day pass away, and no preparation for heaven be begun? With such unfitness for heaven, shall another hour—shall this bright hour of mercy—be wasted in increasing your fitness for hell—wasted in giving new power to every cause which ever did confirm the soul in sin, and plunge it into endless woe?

2. Christian brethren, “what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” When a sinner—exposed to wrath—a sovereign God began a work in you which he will carry on to the end, and which, when finished will perfect your fitness for his eternal presence. Behold the change! This heir of misery and slave of sin is redeemed, and the grace of God is preparing him for the society, the employment and the joys of heaven. All those obstacles which once excluded you from the beatific vision of God are taken away, and that conformity of affections and desires to God, to angels and redeemed spirits is preparing you to partake of their blessedness. You are now journeying through a vale of tears; you are now tempted and sorrowful. But your portion is not here; your treasures are not here; your home is not here; “you seek a heavenly,” and will soon be translated where there will be neither temptation nor pain, and where all tears will be wiped away. You shall soon be like the redeemed saints, like angels, like God, and near his throne. Your spiritual joys, now languid, partial and infrequent, shall soon be full, constant and eternal. One spirit shall reign through heaven; one song employ every tongue. From glory to glory you shall be changed. You shall be like Jesus, for you shall see him as he is. Your God shall be all and in all, forever and ever. Amen.

XVI.

GOD ANGRY WITH THE WICKED.

PSALMS vii. 2.

"God is angry with the wicked every day."

WERE any one of us to be placed completely in the power of some mysterious stranger, and especially did we know that our conduct had been such as naturally to awaken his displeasure, we should feel a deep concern to ascertain what were his actual dispositions and purposes toward us. With constant solicitude, we should watch for something that would indicate his designs, and help us to decide what expectations we might entertain from him. Not so, however, do most men feel, when the being, in whose power they know they are, and whose displeasure they know they have justly provoked, is the almighty God. No subject, perhaps, is more cursorily thought of, by multitudes, than the manner in which they are constantly regarded by this great Being. With every cause for anxiety, they are even without the feelings of common curiosity, and dismiss the inquiry, with a careless confidence that they are the objects of God's favor, and have no evil to expect from his hand.

Widely different is the view of God given us in the revelation of God. The text, in accordance with the whole tenor of the Scriptures, represents wicked men as the objects of God's constant and high displeasure. "God is angry with the wicked every day."

My design is—

First, To explain what is meant by the anger of God ; and

Second, To confirm the declaration in the text.

I. The word rendered *anger* in the Scriptures denotes a strong affection or emotion of mind, excited by injury or opposition from others, and which leads its subject to injure in return.

Whether this affection can be lawful, or morally right, in any case—a question much debated—depends entirely upon another; viz., whether there can be a fit and proper object of such an emotion? By this test, it is, indeed, sufficiently easy to decide that anger, as it commonly exists in the human bosom, and resulting, as it does, from a selfish regard to our own personal private interests, is wholly a selfish, malignant passion, and wholly sinful. Such an affection cannot, of course, pertain to the divine mind. Now, could anger be excited only by a regard to selfish interests, and were this the only meaning of the term, then we might be able to say what this language does *not* mean, but we would be unable to say, or even to conjecture, what it does mean.

But, if there be an object proper to awaken this emotion—if, in the very nature of things, there be the same moral fitness for dislike and hatred toward one object, which there is in other objects for approbation and love, then anger, in such a case, is not a sinful or unworthy emotion. Now, there is such a fitness in some objects. Fiends aiming with fell spirit at the destruction of the souls of men, are as fit objects of hatred, as angels ministering to the heirs of salvation are of love. Anger, then, may have a fit and proper object, and be a morally right affection.

God, as the moral governor of men, has interests to secure, and designs to accomplish, and this by their loyal, active co-operation, in obedience to his will. These interests and these designs are dictated by infinite wisdom and goodness, and are worthy of the God who formed them.

Now, against the designs and interests of a perfect God, the wicked are arrayed in direct and open hostility. In this character, they are the fit objects of God's anger. In other words,

they are fit objects of that emotion which abhors their character, and determines God to inflict punishment.

The anger of God is only that indignation which benevolence itself must feel toward the enemies of all good. It is of the very nature of benevolence to show itself in different emotions, as its objects vary. So when God looks on sinners simply in reference to their character as rebels against his government, and hostile to his perfect designs, his very benevolence regards them with that indignation which inflicts evil. He looks on them with anger—with the same emotion which now speaks in the terror of his threatenings, and will hereafter speak in the thunders of executed wrath.

I proceed, as I proposed—

II. To confirm the declaration in the text, “God is angry with the wicked every day.”

1. This truth is often affirmed in the Scriptures: “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil;” “Thou hatest all workers of iniquity;” “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”

When on the other hand, God forgives iniquity, he is represented as turning away his anger—as turning from the fierceness of his anger—as not retaining his wrath—as reconciled—as pacified toward the objects of his wrath. In these and similar declarations, it is the obvious design of God to exhibit himself not as an indifferent spectator, or as the friend and protector of the wicked, but as a God who looketh upon them with anger. Why else is this language used in God’s revelation of himself. Is it to convey no ideas to the minds of men, or none but the mere negative idea of exemption from the sinful passions of men? Or rather, is it not to make a distinct and strong impression of the actual feelings of God toward the wicked—real emotions of the infinite Being, that in view of them the wicked may tremble for fear of him? If not, the Bible is not a revelation.

2. From the holiness of God.

This attribute may be viewed in different ways, or under

different aspects; one as it leads God to approve of holiness in his creatures. "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness." It can no more be supposed that God can have an affection of one kind toward an object, and not have the opposite affection toward an opposite object, than it can be that he is as destitute of affections as a statue. Just so certain, then, as God, from the perfection of his nature, regards holiness with approbation that leads him to bless its subject, so certain is it that he regards sin with that affection or emotion of mind the proper expression of which is the infliction of evil on its subject; in other words, with ANGER.

But holiness also denotes contrast or separation in its original and primary application. The holiness of God may be viewed as the opposition of the divine nature to all moral impurity and moral deformity. If, then, we would form just views of God as a holy God, we must look at the moral perfection of God in its lofty separation from all moral defilement; at the nature of God in its irreconcilable variance with all sin—its eternal, immutable contrariety to it. And what must be the degree of this perfection when it exalts God to such an elevation, that "the heavens are not clean in his sight," and that "angels are charged with folly?" And what must that perfection be which so revolts all the sensibilities of the Godhead that, in the language of his prophet, he is shocked at the sight of it? How, in the sanctuary of his presence—how, under the pure eye of such a Being, must the sinner appear! How must the divinity recoil from him! How must the anger of God kindle into a fire of indignation, when one so vile offers to draw nigh! And yet, under his eye the sinner lives and acts every day. So sure, then, as there is an omniscient and a holy God, so sure are the wicked the constant objects of his anger.

3. From the justice of God and the tendency of sin.

By the justice of God we understand the moral perfection of God as directed to uphold his moral government, and to secure its results. It is in this character that the Lord our God is a

jealous God. Jealous for the glory of his name—jealous for the honor of his law—jealous for the accomplishment of his purposes. For the accomplishment of these designs—designs which give to God's dominion all its grandeur and worth—all the perfections of God stand committed. On this end—so worthy of a God—all the affections of God are fixed. It is the only object compared with others on which the perfect God places any value. At this end, sin aims destruction. If the purposes of sin succeed, the purposes of God fail. If the purposes of sin succeed, the authority of God is trampled in the dust, his throne subverted from the foundation, his kingdom desolated of every vestige of happiness; and instead of a universe blessed by a reigning God—blessed by the expressions of infinite benevolence in the communication of good—sin would reign, and fill with its unmitigated horrors and woes the expanse of God's creation. How, then, must the perpetrator of deeds like these appear to a just God? What must be the moral aspect of an enemy to all, that the infinite God values? With what other emotion but anger can God look upon him who is governed by a spirit like this?

4. That God is angry with the wicked is evident from their resemblance in character to those who experience the wrath of God in the world of punishment.

The wicked in this world, and the wicked in the world of perdition, possess substantially the same character. If, then, this character awakens the anger of God in that world, no reason can be given why it does not also awaken his anger in this. It cannot be said that the anger of God expressed in the torments of the damned is to be ascribed simply to their greater measure of guilt; for undoubtedly, there are multitudes under the light of the gospel, whose guilt is greater than that of multitudes on whom God now pours out his wrath, and who have abused no such blessings. It cannot be said that the moral deformity of sinners in this world is mitigated by certain amiable traits which pertain not to the character of the damned; and that therefore while God is angry with one

class, he is not with the other. There is no such mitigation of the moral deformity of the wicked here which exempts from an unqualified charge of sin in every voluntary action. Their moral character is made up of selfishness, and that is all that can be said of the prince of darkness. Nothing can be said in palliation or mitigation of their total depravity, which cannot be said with equal truth against *his* total depravity. If they speak truth, and show kindness to others, to subserve their selfish purposes, so does he. Otherwise his kingdom would be divided against itself, and could not stand. If they approve in their conscience of moral excellence, so does he. He confessed Christ to be "the holy one of God." If they in their conscience disapprove of what is selfish and sinful, so does he. He condemned Job as sustaining such a character. Satan does nothing but under the commanding principle of selfishness; neither do wicked men. In point of principle in its real nature—that is, in substantial character—there is no real difference between sinners in this world and the most depraved beings in the universe. There is no other sin but selfishness in any being. The wicked, then, cherish the essential principle of all rebellion against God—the very spirit that rebelled against his throne in the heavens—the very spirit that now reigns in hell—the very spirit that has exiled this world from the favor of its Maker, and brings down his curse upon it—the very spirit that, unrestrained, would carry desolation through the empire of Jehovah, and, should God himself obstruct its progress, would rise on him with the temper of an infernal. And if such a character awakens the anger of God in hell, why does it not also on earth? It does; and against thousands who live only to abuse that forbearance that prolongs their day of mercy, the anger of God rises as high as against many who feel its full expression in the torments of the damned.

5. That God is angry with the wicked, appears from many of God's dispensations toward them.

The difference between the state of the righteous and that

of the wicked in this life, strongly bespeaks the anger of God toward the latter. To the former, God has promised that all things shall work together for their good. To the latter, no real good is secured. To the former, every gift of divine bounty will prove a blessing; to the other, there is no security that every earthly good will not prove an ultimate curse. To the one, under a sense of sin and guilt, the blood of Christ speaks peace—to the other, the reproaches and stings of conscience are a fearful prelude to the gnawings of the worm that never dies. To the one, under the pressure of the ills and calamities of life, is secured the support of the everlasting arm; to the other, under the same afflictions, no refuge is provided—no security given that even divine chastisement will serve any purpose, but to harden his heart, and augment his final doom. To the one is vouchsafed in the covenant of God, the privilege of asking and receiving—to the other, is made known only present exclusion from the mercy-seat; no promise of grace to awaken, or to satisfy. To the one, death—the last enemy—is divested of his terrors by the bright visions of Christian promise; to the other, it is the day of darkness and despair—the termination of all good, the prelude of the horrors of the second death. To the one, the day of account is the day of triumph, the consummation of all that he had hoped, or prayed for, of all that, as an immortal being, he had expected, or can need—to the other, of meeting God in the terrors of an incensed Judge, to bear his anger in the inflicted woes of damnation. Such is the record. Can more decisive proof be given that the wicked are the objects of God's present displeasure? Why this amazing difference in all that is really substantial and important in his dispensations toward the righteous and the wicked, except that the one class are the objects of his love—the other of his anger?

REMARKS.

1. How false and dangerous to deny the reality of the divine anger.

With many it is a fashionable method of interpretation, to resolve all those texts in the Bible which speak of the anger of God, into a figure, and thus, in fact, to divest them of all definite meaning. Others adopt a still bolder expedient, and affirm that, to suppose a benevolent God, a God of love, exercises anger, or any emotion like anger, toward any of his creatures, is the height of absurdity. In reply to all this, and in view of what has been said, we ask, can there be a perfect God, without anger against sin, and against sinners? Do you say, it represents God as the subject of the selfish passions of men? God forbid! It ascribes to God an attribute far more dreadful to the sinner—an attribute not at all resembling the fitful, capricious passion of anger in sinful man—not an attribute to be bribed, or changed, or pacified, while its object is the same; but the righteous, immutable, holy anger of a God intent on his designs of infinite benevolence, an attribute resulting from the very perfections of the Godhead—an attribute which is sure to guard the empire of righteousness, and the stabilities of the eternal throne, though worlds sink under its just and full expressions against the wicked. And here the secret of this atheism is out. The wicked cannot bear to think of such a God. A God all kindness to them—a God who will regard rebels and loyal subjects with the same indiscriminating indulgence, is the God who is welcome to their imaginations, and in whom they are willing to believe. Let them persuade themselves that such an image is a reality. They may do it. They may disregard the reality that there is such a God as the Scriptures reveal—they may forget that God has proposed an end worthy of himself in creation—that he has placed men under the high responsibilities of acting as friends or enemies—they may deny that they are made in God's image—sink themselves to insects of a day; and throw all the responsibility of their eternal destiny upon their Maker, instead of acting under it. They may think or say God must take care of the interests of his own creatures, —God will not punish—God is not displeased; and this even

when living amid the shafts of his indignation falling thick and fast around them. Thus they may efface from their minds the dread of him—they may force away from them the convictions and the alarms of guilt—they may benumb the soul into the apathy of death, and sleep away these hours of their probation in the hope of meeting an indulgent God in eternity. But, oh! the reality is not changed. Still in those heavens there is a “God angry with the wicked every day.” There is a God looking out from the dark cloud of his vengeance upon them, who, in a moment can, and in a moment may, make them know, by making them feel his wrath, in all its tribulation and anguish in hell.

2. If God be angry with the wicked every day, how vain is the belief that they can secure his favor by any thing they do while continuing in sin!

There is no conceit of which the minds of sinners are more fond, none to which they cling with more unyielding tenacity, even under religious awakening, than this, that they can, and shall do, something to propitiate the favor of God without repentance. But here let such dreaming end. “God is angry with the wicked every day.” Not with the wicked of some particular character, but with the wicked of every character. The open, grossly wicked; the decently morally wicked; the stupidly wicked; the awakened, anxious, praying wicked;—the wicked, young or old, wise or ignorant, rich or poor, moral or immoral, stupid or awakened, up to the moment of his repentance, is still wicked, and still God is angry with him.

I know, my hearers, how hard it is to believe this; I know how reluctant the heart is to admit that nothing short of the surrendery of the heart to God can secure the favor of God. But so it is, and so it must be. Until you can change the essential nature of God himself—until you can effect such a transformation in his perfections that his holiness and justice and goodness shall approve of sin—until you can contrive some expedient by which you can remain under the curse of

God, and yet be the object of his complacency—until you can sustain the very character which draws down his wrath in hell, and yet be the object of his approbation—until every dispensation of God in his providence, which is dictated by his displeasure, shall become tokens of his favor—until all this can be done, or until you give God your heart, you will remain the object of his constant anger. Do what else you will—reform, seek, read, weep, pray—you are wicked, your character without one trait of alleviation, is that of an enemy of God and of all good, and yourself a fit object of abhorrence. And this I say not to discourage—not to prevent your efforts to repent, but to induce you to abandon every thing else and force you to such efforts, as affording all the hope there is for you. Do you say it will do no good? Try it. Do you say you cannot become a Christian in this way? Try it. Do you say you cannot give your heart to God so long as he is angry with you? Try it—try it; for except ye repent of your sins against an offended God, you must bear his anger to all eternity.

3. How changed is the condition of the righteous!

Once he was the object of God's anger, and all that is dark and appalling in such a relation to that infinite Being, filled his prospect for eternity. But how changed his state! By repentance for sin—so reasonable a service—he has become the object of his everlasting love. That throne of wrath is changed into a throne of grace and mercy; that frown of anger into the smile of reconciliation. The benevolence of God, kindling with indignation to destroy, is benevolence directing its intensest affections and pledging its richest gifts to bless. Omnipotence once committed to destroy, encircles with the everlasting arms of protection. No hour of weakness, but he may lean on that arm. Under no wants, but he may ask of him, who will freely give him all things. No day of darkness and distress but God is his refuge. Fearless, confiding, cheerful, happy, triumphant, in life, in death, his language is, "Lo, this is my God, I have waited for him, he will come and save me."

Oh, how unlike the man who has nothing to hope for from his God—who sustains no relation to him but that of danger! What prospects for eternity once were his! What prospects now open before him as eternity and its realities come near! Oh, Christian, you talk of *the love* of God; but you know nothing of it, till you know the wrath of God from which it delivers! Estimate that love as you will in the emotions of God toward you, when from your throne in the heavens you shall see its length, and breadth, and height, and depth, as you behold the wicked in the ascending smoke of their torment, and look around on the glories of your everlasting abode.

4. How awful is the situation of the stupid sinner!

God is angry with him every day, and he heeds it not. He is the fit object of God's anger—a fit object of abhorrence to the very benevolence of God. Jehovah could not be a holy and just God, and not regard the sinner with displeasure. Thus God does regard him every day—constantly. Here, fellow-sinners, you are. Your life is a vapor—you cannot prolong it a moment. That supporting, forgotten hand of an angry God withdrawn, and you sink to death and hell in a moment. You have no means of appeasing the divine anger, none of preventing its immediate and full expression in the lake of fire. You sustain the same character in the sight of God, which has drawn down his wrath upon thousands of your fellow-beings. You have no mediator to interpose in your behalf—no promise of God to plead—no expedient by which to prevail on God to defer deserved vengeance—not a reason can you give, why you should not sink under its fearful infliction this moment. You are living only to multiply your provocations, and to augment his anger. Thus is the storm of almighty wrath gathering over you, ready to burst upon your head; and you are asleep—yes, asleep, while God is angry with you every moment. You can turn away your thoughts from that awful Being—you can summon the preacher to the tribunal of criticism, and pronounce sentence upon the ser-

mon; or you can recur to other topics of thought, and go away to plan your business and your pleasures. But stop, sinner. God is angry with you. The fact—the awful fact, has been proved. You know it; your stupidity and unconcern will not alter it. You can forget God—but God will not forget you. Still, at each successive moment, he looks upon you with anger. You may flatter yourself with the delusion that life will be prolonged. But the reality in the heavens is a God angry with you—angry with you every day. Take, then, fellow-sinner, this truth away with you—think of it wherever you are—whatever you do—think of it, *God is angry with me*—God is angry with me.

And if you forget it—if you disregard it—remember you add another provocation to God to come out in the fierceness of his wrath against you. See what a bold and determined spirit of rebellion you have—that the known acknowledged reality of an angry God shakes not your purpose. And should this purpose continue, as we fear it will in many, till the day of God's executed wrath arrives—should you, as you may, before that declining sun shall rise again, know what the anger of God is, by feeling it in hell, then I am clear of your blood. I have told you—no, the voice of inspiration hath told you—that God is angry with you. This remembered hour of mercy—these remembered walls and seats—this desk—this voice—will witness to your memory; the white throne and the Judge upon it—the myriads of all nations—your own consciences—the rolling years and ages of tribulation and despair will witness—God, as he deals the strokes of his wrath without mitigation and without end, will witness that to-day you deliberately resolved still to defy an angry God.

Oh, then, will you not now make God your friend? By repenting of sin—by sorrow for the basest ingratitude—by hating and renouncing a character which God hates—you become the object of his everlasting love. That throne of wrath is changed into a throne of grace and mercy—that frown of anger into the smile of reconciliation. The benevolence of

God—now kindling with indignation to destroy—will direct its intensest affections, and pledge its richest gifts to bless you. Omnipotence—committed to destroy soul and body in hell—will encircle you with the everlasting arms of protection. No hour of weakness but you may lean on that arm; under no wants but you may ask of him, who freely giveth all things. No day of darkness and distress, but God is your refuge. Fearless, confident, cheerful, triumphant in life and in death, you shall say, “Lo, this is my God; I have waited for him; he will come and save me.” Oh, how unlike him who has nothing to hope for from his God—who sustains no relation to the Almighty but that of danger! Oh, what will you think of the friendship of thy God, when from a throne in the heavens you shall look downward on the wicked and see the ascending smoke of their torment! And oh, what will you think of it should you look upward and see your companions in the paradise of God, yourself the victim of the unchangeable wrath of the eternal God!

XVII.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD DESIGNED TO RECLAIM.

ROMANS ii. 4.

“Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”

THERE is no more striking and decisive proof of moral degradation, than to overlook and pervert the kindness of a benefactor. Unmerited favors create obligation on the part of him who receives them, not only to gratitude, but to that use of them intended by the giver. Have you ever bestowed your alms on a poor mendicant, to shelter him from the inclemency of the storm, or to relieve the pains and sufferings of hunger, and found him wasting your gifts in intemperate and brutal indulgence—how strongly has it evinced to you his extreme degradation of character! Has a parent, to reclaim a wayward son, lavished upon him his kindness—has he gone after him to the hovel of infamy, and brought him to his paternal dwelling, clothed his nakedness, anxiously studied the supply of his wants, and again put in his power the means of reputation, of competence, and of comfort; and has the only result been a perversion of all his beneficence, to purposes of crime and wretchedness, a father's broken heart can tell, how low, how lost his child has become!

It is to a similar perversion of the goodness of God, that the apostle calls our attention in the text. “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”

My object, in the present discourse, is simply to consider the tendency of the goodness of God to lead sinners to repentance.

It has this tendency—

I. As it enforces the commandments of God.

The commands of God are not merely the commands of a being who has the prerogative to govern by virtue of his power and supremacy—not merely the commands of one whom it is our interest to obey, and whom, if we would regard those interests, necessity obliges us to obey; they are not merely the commands of a being of absolute perfection, and who, by them, aims to produce in us the highest elevation of character, and the highest measure of happiness; but they are the commands of our benefactor—our benefactor, amid all our rebellion, and all our ingratitude. It is this God who commands us to repent. The God who, having made us of nothing, still keeps us—the God, in whom “we live, and move, and have our being”—the God, whose care and whose presence are ever surrounding us—the God who, from morning to night, and from night to morning, watches over us, attends us while we sleep, and guides us when awake—who goes with us in all the business of the world—returns us in safety to our homes—gives us our friends, our health, our raiment, our food, and never, for a single instant, withdraws the notice of that eye that never slumbers, and the protection of that hand that is never weary. It is this God who commands us to repent. Now, we require a fair estimate of his claims. Has he, as our almighty Sovereign, a right to govern—has he this right inalienable—ought we to obey; and do the blessings heaped upon us add nothing to our obligation? When he asks the affections of that alienated heart, which receives its every beat from the impulse of his power—when he asks the devotedness of that life, which owes its every hour, and every moment, to his sustaining right hand—when he draws around us such a circle of enjoyments—when he still multiplies his gifts of nature and providence, and when his

gifts steal away our hearts from the Giver, still keeps open the way, through the blood of his Son, for our return, and still invites and welcomes us back to his love, is there no weight added to our obligations? Has this all-providing God no claim on us by his mercies?

This tendency is seen—

II. As it appeals to the tenderest and strongest sensibilities of our nature.

There is no principle of human nature, fallen and degraded as it is, that is more obvious, none that is more commonly recognized in our intercourse with one another, or that remains in the descending progress of depravity longer with us, than that which leads us to requite kindness with kindness. If we would persuade a child to self-denial—if we would secure the faithfulness of a servant, or if we would command the co-operation of our equals, we know that we are never so sure of our object, as when we assail them by the influence of kindness. This principle lingers about our nature in the last and lowest stages of wickedness; and the celebrated Howard, who visited the prisons and dungeons of Europe, those habitations of vice and crime, has told us that there is a way of managing even the most hardened malefactors, and that way is, by treating them with tenderness, and showing them that you have humanity.

There is an anecdote related of a distinguished minister of the gospel, which furnishes so striking an illustration of this principle of our nature, that I may be justified in relating it. On a journey, he was stopped by a highwayman, and called on to deliver his purse, with the weapon of death presented at his breast. "Wait," said the man of God, "for one moment;" and instantly fell on his knees, and offered a fervent prayer for the unhappy man before him. The murderer stood silent, and listened. When the holy man had finished his supplication, he said to him for whom he had prayed: "Do you not wish for some better employment than this; some other means of a livelihood?" The answer was in the affirmative. "Come

then," said the minister, to such a place, naming his own residence, "and without ever divulging this act of yours while you live, such a provision shall be made for you." He confided in the assurance of one so intent on his welfare; became a member of his own family—an humble disciple of Christ; and, after a life of exemplary piety, died at the age of sixty, when, in his funeral sermon, the minister related these facts concerning him. Now, my hearers, you can see it. Precisely on this principle, and by this expedient, does God assail the hearts of sinners. To recall them to himself, he does not rely merely on his authority over us—he does not resort merely to his terrors to alarm us—he does not attempt to carry the human heart by storm. He, indeed, reveals enough of his terrors to make us tremble while going on in our iniquity; but here, so to speak, he does not place his reliance. He who searcheth the heart, well knows that, amid all its darkness and corruptions, there is yet another and a surer spring that can be touched. And, as if it were the only one, he seems to have intrusted the whole cause of our recovery to the manifestations of his loving-kindness to us. Here, he plies us with every proof and every expression of his love, as if no obduracy of heart, no sottishness, or hardihood of crime, could shut him away from access to us. The power of the remedy reaches to the utmost limits of hope, and even of possibility. If any species of moral influence can prevail—if hopeless degeneracy does not mock all that the wisdom and the mercy of God can do to persuade men to return—if there remains one solitary hold in the guilty bosom of man, which God can reach, he has adopted the effectual means of reaching it. God reveals himself. God in Christ, he unfolds himself in the decided and attractive aspect of the God of mercy; he comes to this world of rebellion, a beseeching suppliant for their return; he gives it the charter of their peace, sealed with the blood of his own Son. Every thing to touch sympathy, gratitude, and the secret place of tenderness and tears. Thus that softer part of our nature, which yields to the demonstrations of kind-

ness, that which is quickest to feel and last to become unfeeling, is assailed. Thus, the very influence that has tamed the vilest malefactor in his dungeon—aye, that would seem enough to make a devil's heart silent, is poured on these prisoners of hope—the mighty attraction of the love of a God, on the lost creatures of his power!

This tendency is seen—

III. As it discovers to us the true character of God.

God is love, and all the expressions of his kindness to us are only a manifestation, bringing that character before us, in the nearest and most impressive manner. We may contemplate moral excellence in another, and admire and love it, while the being who shall possess it, may never have been called to show kindness to us. But let us become the objects of that kindness—let it fix its care and tenderness on us, and lavish its blessings on us; and we find a new and stronger emotion rising in our hearts, and fixing our strongest affection on the object of so much excellence. And if we have to such a friend been unkind or unfaithful, how will the swellings of grief take hold on our heart, and the tears of repentance flow when we come again, under a sense of his excellence, manifested still and ever, in so much kindness to us! It is thus the goodness of God leadeth to repentance—it unveils in clearest, brightest manifestation the perfection of his character, directing all its cares, its solicitude, its tenderness *to us*. We—you and I—are ever its objects, as if he had no other creature to bless. True, we see not the glory of him who is invisible. But as if to make up for this, and more than to make up for this, he comes to us in a more impressive revelation of himself. He opens upon us the treasures of his goodness, and brings us to learn and to feel what he is, in our own experience. Did I say we do *not* see him? We *do* see him, as we see any other spirit; we see him, as we see any other benefactor; we see him, in his acts—in his doings—in his *gifts*. These tell us, what a friend to us our God is. These are but the tenderness, the smiles of love, beaming in the face of him

whom no man can see. These—these (ceaseless as our moments) open to our view—what? The heart of infinite goodness—the ardor, the strength, the whole dimensions of God's moral perfection concentrated upon us as its object—lavishing its gifts, falling warm from the hand of his bounty, upon our unworthy heads. So it is, my hearers, God fastens on us these cords of his love, and binds them on us at every step. He constrains us to feel all the attractions of his Godhead, in our own experience of his love. He obliges us, if we will persist in our alienation from him, to sunder these cords, and break away from that which binds heaven itself to his throne. We must shut our eyes and harden our hearts against that assemblage of attributes, which wakes the songs that echo through heaven's eternal arches, and makes all its pillars tremble—against that God, who longs to show his capacity to bless, in blessing us. Oh, who can, who *will* tear himself away from the embrace of eternal mercy, to plunge into everlasting burnings!

IV. The expressions of God's goodness show this tendency, in their number, their nature, and their adaptation to this end.

In the *number* of these blessings. What a decided expression is made of the goodness of God to us in the countless blessings he pours upon us, while we are evil and unthankful! The sufferings we feel, guilty as we are, are for the most part of our own procuring, and no more than are necessary to remind us of the folly and the miseries of sin; while, with paternal solicitude and indulgence, he heaps upon us his gifts of kindness, which we continually pervert, and prolongs the season of enjoyment and trial, which we waste. Would we count the number of our blessings? As the sands of the sea, they are without number. It is his sun that lights our every path; it is his earth on which we tread so firmly; it is his air that circulates freshness and health around our dwellings; it is his rain that feeds the luxuriance of our fields; it is his heavens that drop plenty and abundance into our hands to satisfy the wants of his dependent children. Count your

blessings. Count every thing you delight in, and every thing you hope for; go round the circle of enjoyments, and find what real want is unprovided for; count the daily gifts in infancy, in youth, in manhood, in old age. When have you been without blessings, rich and numerous blessings, from the hand of God? Count, then, your moments, count each breath, count each beating pulse, and the multitude of blessings which surround you, while each passing throb is felt, and then shall this sinner against God, and heir of hell, learn something of the loving-kindness of his Maker. And for what are all these blessings bestowed? Is it that we deserve them? No. Is it that God has complacency in our character, and regards us as fit objects of all this kindness? No. Is it that he cannot be glorious; and strip us of every good thing, and leave us naked before the storm of his wrath? No; it is that he may prove to us how able he is to bless—how intent he is to bless. It is that we may not, cannot mistake him, cannot doubt, cannot distrust his love; that thus with the cords of love and bands of a man, he may draw us to himself.

In the *nature* of these blessings—multifarious as they are—we see and know that there is not one of them, nor all of them, that can become a satisfying portion to man. Regarded as the means of complete happiness, the experience of the world for six thousand years pronounces them “vanity and vexation of spirit.” But with equal certainty we trace the fitness of all of them to the great end for which they are given—the end of our probation. In this pilgrimage to a better world, our divine Benefactor has thus furnished us with every accommodation, given us nothing, unless by our perversion of it, that can draw away the heart from him and render us indifferent to our eternal interests. Every blessing comes from his hand with this inscription: “Take not this for your portion, but receive it with thanksgiving, and use it with reference to your eternal well-being. Take it; take all these gifts as the pledge, the proofs of the love of the Creator, to his own creature—the proofs that the benevolence of thy God longs for thy love in

return, and to flow forth on thee, in a pure abundant stream of good, forever and ever." Look for a moment at this influence in another light; it is not a single insulated part of man's nature to which God appeals; it is the whole man—all that there is in him to feel—the entire sensibility of a mortal, and of an immortal being. Every capacity of good and of evil is appealed to; that capacity of good from food and drink; that capacity of joy, in all the tender relations of life and every organ of sense. The eye—what visions of beauty and grandeur meet us on every side to show us his handy-work; the ear—what melodies wake us in the morning, and cheer and gladden our hearts in all our ways; amid what fragrance we live, dropping from every leaf and every flower; what scenes of delighted activity we move in! Through every sense, through every inlet of gladness and joy, God is ever cheering, gladdening, delighting the heart of man, to draw forth its affections to himself. Pre-eminently in the work of our Redemption does God force upon our notice the longings, and open to us the fullness of a Father's heart. Here he comes to us, with every assurance of his love, even to an oath: "As I live," saith the Lord, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked;" with every entreaty of pity and of grief, even to the sorrows and anguish of parental bereavement and brokenness of heart: "My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Nor are these assurances empty and unmeaning; there is here no want of sincerity—no failure of ample provision for our acceptance—no mocking of our wretchedness. It is not God who says, "Be ye warmed and be ye filled; go in peace," and giveth nothing. His love is not in word, but in deed; and to prove it he sent his Son into the world. He declared that in him "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," and has let us see, in his tears, his agonies, and his love for us, what a God we have to deal with. Mark, my hearers, what has been done, and for what. Rather than lose forever fallen, ruined man, God has laid on the head of Jesus the full weight of an atonement for a world—rather than lose

forever fallen, ruined man, Jesus has travailed in the greatness of his strength, magnified the law, sustained the majesty of a reigning God, unbarred the everlasting doors, and leveled every obstacle to our return to life and to God. This he has done, by bearing the wrath due to this world of rebellion. And now, it is on this foundation that the overtures of forgiveness and the calls of entreaty are made to us—now it is that we hear the voice of a reconciling and beseeching God—now, from that cross, it breaks from the lips of Him who has the form, and countenance, and heart, and sympathies of God manifest in the flesh; and thus it is that the mighty attraction which binds the holy universe to the great Eternal, is brought, in all its sweetness, and charms, and energy, to bear on the heart of man.

V. Look at this tendency, as it is illustrated by *facts*.

We do not suppose that the attractive influence of divine goodness is the only means of leading sinners to repentance, nor that its influence is ever unaccompanied by a sense of obligation and of guilt. Still, no sinner probably ever would be converted unless God were manifested to the mind, as a God gracious and merciful. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." When God is shown to the sinner, reconciling the world unto himself; when he hears his entreaties of tenderness, then, if ever, he awakens—then he listens, and is won by love so great. What illustrations of this have we while the Saviour was on the earth. I need only turn you to his works of mercy among the lame and halt, the blind and deaf. In how many hearts did he plant the dominion of his love, by these acts of kindness! Behold the woman in the house of Simon. Look at the frowning Pharisee; but did Jesus frown on the sinner for whom he designed to die? did this sinner herself fear to approach the pure and spotless Saviour? Oh! she knew who it was; she knew what love for sinners that was, which came "to seek and save that which was lost." And fearless, with a broken heart, "she washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her

head. On the day of Pentecost, the great design of the death of the Son of God was unfolded to his murderers ; and three thousand were won to contrition and love. Look, too, at the father of the returning prodigal. While the lost, returning child is yet a great way off, he runs, falls on his neck, and kisses him ; calls for the best robe, to be brought and put upon him ; commands the feast, the songs, and the joys of the happy family. This, this is the image of divine love toward us. And, if a doubt can remain of the love of God to the guilty, I point you again to the chief of sinners. There, in the paradise of God, an example to all that hereafter believe, placed on one of heaven's highest thrones, and wearing one of its brightest crowns. Saul of Tarsus is in heaven, uniting his songs with the souls of those he murdered on earth. And no guilty bosom need distrust the love and mercy of a redeeming God.

It is this very influence that will form the tie that will bind together the whole family of God in heaven and on earth. And when the redeemed shall be assembled before the throne above, they will feel the love of God their Saviour, still changing them into the same image, from glory to glory. While they recount his blessings, they will still find that it is to a sense of that love they owe the highest raptures of immortality. It will be the beaming kindness of him who sits upon the throne, that will awake the highest transports of love and praise in return ; and it will be the reciprocation of this love, among those who have fellowship with the Father, and his Son, and with one another, that will cause the joy of heaven to be full. It is that which will open those fountains, amid the throne of God and the Lamb, and pour forth those rivers of pleasure and fullness of joy at God's right hand forevermore.

Such, my dear hearers, is the influence with which God assails your hearts, to recover you from sin and death. He leaves not his high and rightful authority over you, to a solitary influence, but he enforces that by the benefactions of a God. He appeals not only to the most powerful spring of

human action, but presses that appeal even to the very last vestige of human sensibility, leaving you not till he has tried the last avenue that the direst depravity can shut against him. To evince his kindness, and to perpetuate its attractive power, to win your heart to himself, he has multiplied his blessings from the moment of your being. He has given you blessings, in their nature exactly fitted to draw your hearts to himself; blessings, rich beyond all price, enough to fill and overwhelm the soul with gratitude and praise. He has brought the same moral influence to bear upon you, that has converted, and will convert millions of our race, and that will bind together, and bless forever his holy kingdom in all its harmonies and joys.

And now let me bring the subject to a personal application.

1. Some of you profess to have felt the influence of the love of God your Saviour. You have seen, in the blessings of providence and grace, the God of mercy aiming to lead you back from sin, and to draw you to himself. You have felt the influence in your hearts. Has love begotten love? In the blessings which God has given you, have you discovered the excellence and glory of his character, and have that excellence and glory awakened and enthroned a new affection in your heart? Has this new affection, awakened by your perception of the divine excellence, brought with it godly sorrow that worketh repentance? Have you felt the baseness of sin, as committed against a God of such perfection? God is love; and it is this character of God, seen through the gifts it imparts, that gives to repentance its relentings, and that thus establishes within us, in its fullest efficacy, the principle of new obedience. Is it thus with you? Then has the manifested good will of God toward you, not been lost upon you—then you have been brought to feel that attractive energy which will fix your heart on the fountain of infinite and eternal blessedness—then have you felt that influence that will bind your soul to God, in sweet, and holy, and animated obedience—then will you, under God's continued mercies of providence

and grace, be changed into the same image, from glory to glory—then will you rise to that world, where the blaze of his glory will beam on your enraptured sight, and call forth from your lips the song of the redeemed: “Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever.

2. What dire depravity dwells in the heart of man.

How will you measure the strength of depravity in a moral and accountable being? How will you measure it in those beings, who once stood before the throne of God, and looked at his uncovered glories, and rose up in the hardihood of rebellion against it, and who now mutter execration and blasphemies against him? “According to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not,” you judge of his guilt. And now, what is the strength of that depravity which braves defiance at all that influence which God lets in upon the heart of the sinner. Tell me, O sinner, with the commands of God pressed upon you by his kindness, with every sensibility of your soul assailed by the glories of God, as they are brought to your knowledge, and your experience, and home to your heart by all the wonders of his grace—say, what other sinner against God has such a heart as yours? Come, let us look at this matter as it is. See in the agonizing Jesus what a God you are dealing with—hear his entreaties—hear his accents, more tender than angels use. Look on that heart of kindness; how full, how ardent, how tender, how it heaves with emotion, how ready to break in its agony of affection for you; look at your own heart, cold and hard as a rock—not one tribute of affection—not one return of grateful obedience have you rendered. And still you are determined not to render it. Still, while all the love and mercy of God, and all the calls of Jesus, heaven, hell, invite you; while that Saviour opens to your view the heart of redeeming love, and tells you he desires nothing, he longs for nothing so much, as the return of love to him; while all the attractions that bind angels to the rapturous service of their God draw you, you resist; while

the full blaze of glory and blessedness falls on your heart, it is shut against, and shielded against it, bent on sin and rebellion. My dear hearers, this is reality. Here you are amid these efforts of eternal mercy to save you—thus averse to God, thus desperate in sin, thus hardening the heart to adamant against all the attractions and the charms of redeeming love. Oh! ought not such a heart to relent? Is not here cause for shame, and grief, and tears? Let this one thought, that you *have* such a heart, *break* it. Oh, come to-day, and bow in ingenuous, holy contrition before thy God!

8. And now, my dear hearers, is there no one of you whom I can invite and persuade to come back to the God against whom you have sinned? Have you not been ungrateful long enough—long enough grieved and broken again and again your Saviour's heart, and caused his tears to flow over you? Fellow-sinner, God loves you as much as he says he does; Jesus loves you as much as all his agonies for you testify—and will you reject all the blessings of eternal mercy?—blessings which God is so anxious to bestow upon you; will you still shut your heart against such a God and such a Saviour? Come, then, and lie at the feet of injured love—come and accept all that God longs to give you—pardon, grace, and eternal glory. But if you will not, if you resolve still to disregard and despise these entreaties of God's eternal love, what agonizing reflections, what a deep and awful perdition await you in hell, should you be summoned to the bar of judgment—a despiser of all the love, and grace, and goodness of God your Saviour! Oh! fellow-sinner, it would be enough to go on in sin, and enter eternity in contempt of the high mandate of God's eternal throne; but what will it be to break away from the arms, from the very bosom of redeeming love?—what will it be to take the firm attitude of an unyielding rebel against the God of grace, and to meet your doom under the indignation kindled by such ingratitude—what will it be to reflect that you forced your way to the deepest hell, in despite of all that the power of love and grace of a redeeming God

could do to save you? Can you bear such a doom; will you hazard it another hour? Oh! come ye who love not your Saviour and give him these hearts, so cold, so hard against him. This is his will—this the sincere and longing desire of his love. 'Tis love calling you to return love. It may be done, and done now. Oh! set yourself to it; bring before you the glories of a perfect God, and stir up your heart to the heaven-preparing affection. Look, think, meditate till you can love. God's authority commands, his glories attract; heaven, with its crowns of life, invites; mercy weeps over you; no mother's tears ever fell so tender o'er a dying child; Jesus that died once for you, and could die again to save you, stands, and knocks, and waits, and pleads, "till his locks are wet with the drops of the night;" and this to melt that heart of stone, and draw forth its affections to your God. Oh! then love him—love God; love that being whom angels love, and whose love shall be even more welcome than theirs; then with them you shall have fellowship with him; then, not hell, where his wrath burneth, but the heaven of his glory, shall be your final, your eternal home—there you shall dwell, bearing his likeness—there partake in its purity, its bliss, its joys—and eternity shall tell the rest, for what God has *said*, God will *do*.

Oh! thou prodigal from thy heavenly Father's house—thou lost child of his love—come back—come back to his arms of mercy—to the paradise of his glory—as thy eternal home. Heaven, in new songs, shall tell you its joys; angels, and the redeemed together, shall welcome your return; and God shall approve and heighten the joy, saying, "My son was dead, and is alive again, was lost and is found."

XVIII.

PARDONING MERCY IS ABUNDANT.

ISAIAH IV. 7.

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

If there be any one perfection of God, the reality of which he forces upon human belief, it is that of his pardoning mercy. He is said to be rich in mercy—plenteous in mercy—abundant in mercy. His mercy is said to be great unto the heavens, and great above the heavens. He delighteth in mercy—he keepeth mercy for thousands. His mercy endureth forever. But our text not only magnifies the mercy of God, but, as if to meet every doubt and every difficulty of unbelief, exalts it above all human conception. The prophet, or rather God by his prophet, here sets at naught all human reasoning on the subject—as if he had said, your thoughts are gloomy thoughts; your ways are marked by an imperfect, stunted benevolence at best. You think a few offences may be forgiven, and your way is at most to forgive seven times. You think small offences may be overlooked—sins of inadvertence and surprise, sins of no peculiar aggravation, sins of infirmity, and sins that do no great harm in the world. But saith God, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than

your thoughts. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."

The subject for our present consideration is—

The abundance of God's pardoning mercy.

I remark—

I. That the abundance of God's pardoning mercy is evinced by the removal of the obstacles to its exercise.

It was not by annihilating sin—by scattering our iniquities in the regions of oblivion with no evidence of the divine abhorrence—no display of the divine justice against them—that the way is open for their remission. But God laid upon his Son the iniquities of us all. He gave himself an offering and a sacrifice to God. You may scrutinize with thorough inspection every sterner attribute of the Godhead; you may search for and discover the principles and designs of that law, in comparison with the honor of which the universe of creatures is nothing; you may explore the interests of God's moral kingdom, and survey them in their full magnitude as the designed expression of his unsullied glory; you may inquire what saints and angels, and all the subjects of God's immense empire, will think, and how they will feel;—but you shall not find an obstacle, you shall not be able to meet, or to invent, or to suspect an objection, to the fullest exercise of mercy toward the penitent sinner. Divine Omniscience saw them all, and divine mercy, by atoning blood, has taken them all away.

II. The abundance of God's pardoning mercy may be argued from his benevolence.

The goodness of God—*i. e.*, his whole character, is intent on the promotion of the greatest good. When this end demands the punishment of sin, this goodness dictates it, and in this consists what we call justice. When this end is the pardon of the sinner, the same goodness dictates it, and in this consists mercy. In whatever form or way the ends of infinite benevolence can be promoted, the infinite be-

nevolence of God will act for their promotion; the greater the perfection which pertains to any one of these ends, the more inherent value it has in itself, the greater its influence on the general good, and the more entirely remote it is from impairing the general stock of happiness, the more intensely and effectually will infinite benevolence pursue it. Such is precisely the end to be answered in the full pardon of the penitent sinner. We have already seen how entirely remote the pardon of the penitent sinner is, from interfering with the attributes of God, the honor of his law, and the good of his kingdom. The highest gratification of God's benevolence here meets no obstruction. And look for a moment at the ill desert of the sinner—at the fires that are kindled for his eternal torment—at the glories which God has prepared to shed upon him on his admission to his presence, and say what greater blessing can God confer on a creature, than the pardon which delivers from sin and hell, and exalts to holiness and heaven? Look over that inventory of blessings which he bestowed on angels, and ask which so bespeaks the benevolence of God. Look over the regions where the benevolence of God lavishes its blessings, and say in what field are its riches so illustriously disclosed, as in that which is blessed by the dispensations of pardoning mercy? Where is such a revenue of glory to the Eternal, as proceeds from that multitude which no man can number, redeemed out of "all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues?" Thus, with every reason combining its influence to draw forth the full expression of divine benevolence toward the penitent sinner, and with every obstruction cleared away, nothing can restrain it. It must flow forth in a pure abundant stream of good upon its object. However the dispensations of good may be modified and restricted by the perfections and designs of God toward other subjects of his kingdom, he will meet the returning penitent with all the intenseness and fullness of the benevolence of a God. This can be the only limit of his abundant mercy, and if you would measure the abundance of God's pardoning mercy to the penitent.

sinner, you must measure the infinite goodness of God, its ardor, its strength—the whole dimensions of his moral perfection, when concentrated upon a single object, with a purpose to bless.

III. The abundance of God's pardoning mercy may be evinced from the riches of his forbearance and long-suffering.

Consider, first, the objects of the divine forbearance; a world, our whole species in rebellion. Consider its design; their repentance and salvation with eternal glory. For why else do we not sink beneath the righteous stroke of his wrath, or stand trembling in the horrors of despair. Consider its circumstances; how easy for Omnipotence to break the thread that holds us over the pit, and yet he spares us—he spares sinners, while he regards them with all the abhorrence that is due to sin—he spares them, while he can glorify himself in their instant and eternal destruction—he spares them, when in the midst of great and repeated provocations, when, from the very patience of God, they derive only hardihood in rebellion—he spares them that he may use every possible means for their conversion and salvation. Having opened to them the path of life, he has placed between himself and them, instead of the flaming sword of justice which turns every way, Jesus the Mediator, who opens the embrace of his mercy to the guilty. He comes to them in his word and in his providence; by the chastisements and the bounties of his hand; by every moment's preservation; in the counsels and prayers and example of the pious; in visible displays of his eternal power and Godhead, which meet the eye whenever they look on the light of salvation, which illumines their path wherever they go; by the heralds of the cross, who warn them night and day with tears; in the opened gates of heaven, and the uncovered mouth of the pit; in full displays of the beauty and glory and sufficiency of an incarnate Saviour. Thus God comes to the sinner, and thus he continues to come, till the shades of death and hell close the day of his probation. And for what? Why these efforts to bring to repentance, if he has no mercy for the penitent? Is God thus good by mistake; does he do all this

to bring sinners to repentance when there is no provision—no mercy adequate to their pardon if they do repent? Then what becomes of his omniscience? Is he thus good from designs of unkindness—good only that sinners may abuse his goodness and deserve a heavier doom? Then what becomes of his sincerity and his truth? Is he thus good—thus intent on the repentance of the sinner, when his mercy is exhausted and the sinner abandoned as the victim of his justice? Then why does not justice strike? If mercy despairs, why does justice delay the execution of its victim? Is God thus good to the sinner, and yet has he made him simply to damn him? Why, then, does he not damn him? In a word, is God good enough to do all this to bring sinners to repentance; good enough thus to provide a Saviour, take away every obstacle to their return, and pardon if they will repent; good enough to wait upon them and continue every effort of mercy to secure their repentance, through years of accumulated guilt, provocations without end, and ingratitude and abuse, unknown in hell itself, and yet not good enough to pardon the sinner who will repent—do all this for him when an obstinate rebel, and not forgive him when a humble penitent? God forbid. Every moment of his spared life proclaims a God ready to pardon. That abundance of mercy that does all this for the sinner, when contemning God and treading underfoot the blood of his Son, will not despise a broken and a contrite heart. Show me such a sinner, degraded as he is by sin, enveloped in its ignominy, its shame, its guilt, its desert of hell—contrite, penitent, ingenuously relenting for all, and I show you the God of glory descending to that man—aye, rather with him into these depths, to revive, to console, to bless, and to save. God is the comforter of the wounded spirit. God wipes away the tears of the penitent.

IV. The abundance of God's pardoning mercy is strikingly illustrated in the mediation of Christ.

It is not simply the removal of obstacles to dispensing pardon, which we now consider, but rather the *nature* of these

obstacles, and the *means* of their removal. The mere fact that mercy could be shown, might well excite our admiration and astonishment. But, when we think of the truth of God, it is as the great mountains—of his holiness, it is holiness that cannot look on sin, but with abhorrence—of his law, heaven and earth shall pass, but one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law—his justice, its demands must be enforced, though it plunge a rebel world into deepest perdition. Does mercy, then, come to our world in such circumstances? Is the simple fact proclaimed, that pardon can be granted, and the truth of God vindicated—the law of God be magnified, and made honorable—the justice of God be fully unfolded—the holiness of God be converted into the smile of eternal favor—all the interests and principles of God's moral kingdom upheld—yea, all the attributes of God be more impressively illustrated, than were the punishment of sin inflicted on the guilty. Is this the way in which God shows mercy—does mercy surmount difficulties and obstacles like these—does it force its way to our guilty world, through every barrier which the truth, the holiness and justice, law and kingdom of God could interpose? Instead of dishonoring God, of tarnishing a single attribute, does it not shed a richer glory on them all, and triumph still over their brightening glories, in our eternal redemption?—Such is the length and breadth, and height, and depth, of the mercy of our God. Surely it will open its widest embrace to the sinner who will make it his refuge. Surely such mercy will exhaust the full treasures of its love upon the sinner who makes application for them.

But how, or by whom, has this vast work been accomplished? There is not one of our fellow-mortals, from Adam to the present generation, that does not deserve the wrath of God for his own sins. Who, through the whole extent of universal being, can interpose—satisfy the law of God—and avert the fearful stroke of justice from a guilty world. The highest angels are bound to the extent of every power, to obey

the law we have broken, and can do no service for another. Who, then, shall turn aside, and bend, as it were, the unchangeable attributes of God to the sinner's wants; who shall intercept the incurred penalties of God's broken law, and yet magnify it; who shall uphold the throne of eternal justice, and yet transform it into a throne of mercy? When no man could redeem his brother, God himself found a ransom. When none among the angels around his throne could purchase peace for guilty men, he whom all the angels of God worship, said: "Lo I come to do thy will, O God." When no being whom God had formed could make ample expiation, then did the Lord of hosts say, "Awake, O sword, against the man that is my fellow." The plan devised and revealed, all heaven adored with wonder and joy. With prying scrutiny, angels labored to learn the magnitude and mystery of the great design. And from the first sin of man the revelation was unfolding its certainty and its blessings, and though man can overlook and disregard it, it stands first among the counsels of the eternal Godhead, in every exhibition of the divine purposes. "In the fullness of time, God manifest in the flesh, descended to earth in veiled majesty." He spent a life marked by the lowest degradation and severest sufferings, till he finished it on the cross. There the Father put into his hand the cup of trembling, that he might drink it to its lowest dregs. There the arrows of wrath, the poison whereof drank up his spirit, fastened in him. There he laid the full burden of wrath due to us on the head of the innocent sufferer, and witnessed all his bitterness, and agonies, and tears, when he cried, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me!" There the beloved Son of God suffered from his Father's hand, till he exclaimed, "It is finished!" bowed his head, and gave up the Ghost. Bursting away from the chains of death, he arose from the dead, and ascended to his appointed throne. And now he is the first and the last, who was dead and is alive again, ever liveth to make intercession for us, and is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. Such is the mercy

of our God—mercy provided at such a price—mercy which makes no compromise, no surrender of the attributes of God, but gives them a brighter radiance—mercy which unveils the whole Deity, in fullest grandeur and brightest splendor—mercy, beyond a doubt, which can pardon, which can save and bless forever the penitent, though the vilest rebel against the God of mercy.

Did time permit, I might here still farther exhibit the riches of divine mercy in many bright examples. Our whole race have needed it, and thousands and millions have obtained it. I might point you to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and all the patriarchs and prophets, the penitent multitudes to whom John the Baptist preached, the apostles and disciples of our Lord, the dying thief, the murderers of the Lord of glory, all believers from that day to this, and that countless multitude whom John saw redeemed from everlasting destruction, and assembled before the throne of God and the Lamb. I might point you to all who shall at last sit down amid the glories of that world, to all their glory and all their blessedness throughout the coming ages of eternity, as the gift of God's abundant mercy. And, if a doubt could yet enter the mind, I might point you to the chief of sinners, placed on the highest throne, and wearing the brightest crown among the saved, as an eternal monument of God's mercy. Yes, Saul of Tarsus is in heaven, and let not a doubt pervade a guilty bosom on earth, whether God will abundantly pardon a returning penitent.

REMARKS.

1. How important to man is divine revelation !

Not *necessary*, indeed, because man *could* not, but important, and even necessary in one sense, because without it he *would not* have discovered the mercy of God. The mere light of nature would be enough to bring to every mind the overwhelming conviction of his own sinfulness. But to the de-

cision of that question on which our happiness here so much depends, and on which all our hopes for eternity depend, viz., *whether God will forgive and accept the sinner*, no light but a light from heaven would in fact ever conduct us. Reason, indeed, could tell us, that God is good—our very experience of his goodness might force us to believe in this perfection of God. But the inquiry would still remain, how will that goodness, which confers on us its blessings during this period of probation, treat us when summoned into eternity? What will the principles of moral government—what will the interests of God's moral kingdom—what will the attributes of a holy and just God demand in that awful hour? That sin be pardoned, or that sin be punished? Plainly the latter. And if God's overflowing kindness to us here would furnish some faint intimation of his mercy—yet how inadequate to assure, to sustain a dying sinner! With no instance of actual forgiveness, with no declaration of God that he will forgive, with the burden of conscious guilt upon us, with no possible conception of any expedient by which God could show mercy, we should be conducted only to a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. In this midnight of gloom and terror, all our research and all our reasoning would leave us; and back again to this midnight, from the light which beams on us from the gospel of God, would the infidel conduct us. Let him go, if he will, into all this darkness, and dwell amid all these terrors. Let him go, if he will, to the bar of a spotless God on the footing of his own righteousness, and be tried by his own innocence or merit. But give me hope in a God of mercy. I am a sinner, and need his forgiveness. I am a guilty, lost immortal. I need deliverance from a deserved hell. Oh, hide not from me the abundant mercy of God in Christ Jesus!

2. It is not less dishonorable and offensive to God to despair of his mercy than to presume on his justice.

Does that sinner who, in quiet unconcern, defies the justice of the Almighty, provoke God to come out in wrath against

him, so does that sinner who despairs of his mercy. I know there is something in the latter case to awaken our compassion, and that almost forbids reproof. But has God revealed these treasures of his mercy to produce despair, after all that he has done to display that mercy—after he has concentrated, as it were, every moral perfection of his character in this, and unfolded it in its length and breadth? Can he approve of that unbelief which denies its sufficiency? Will he not deem this as dishonorable to himself as the denial of any other perfection? There is, indeed, no consolation for him who will not renounce his sins, no remedy from despair in such a case. But let none refuse to renounce sin because God will not show mercy. Let him come and survey the dimensions of the mercy of God—let him stand on the brink of this ocean. Behold, God has taken away every obstacle to the exercise of mercy toward a guilty world. Behold, infinite benevolence, with all its intenseness, fixes on the penitent as its object, and as if it had none other to bless. Behold, with what patience he waits upon you, with what kindness he seeks to convert and save you. Behold, what barriers divine mercy hath surmounted, what a high and awful vindication it hath poured over all the severer attributes of the Godhead. Behold it turning aside from the guilty the defied penalties of the law, while upholding in all its firmness and glory the throne of the majesty in the heavens, and from that very throne dispensing its gifts to the rebellious. Behold him by whom all this was done. And come, thou vilest of men—ye idolators, extortioners, murderers, adulterers, persecutors, assassins, blasphemers, return unto the Lord, and no vengeance shall reach you. By repentance and faith commit your polluted, guilty soul to God your Redeemer, and he will abundantly pardon. “For his thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

3. Let this subject remind Christians of their obligations.

Oh, my brethren, to the mercy of God in Christ, how great are your obligations! When you look back to the hole of the pit whence you were digged, and retrace your long and wayward progress on the verge of eternal woe—when you turn your view on the number of your sins, and the aggravations of your guilt, and see that hell was your deserved portion—when, in heaven, you shall see all this, and there, too, behold the riches of that mercy that saved you—when the mystery of redemption, as found in the deep counsels of the eternal Godhead, shall be unfolded—when the satisfied justice and holiness of God shall send forth a brighter and nobler radiance than had the sentence of death been executed upon you—when the light of heaven's day shall open all the intricacies of this stupendous work, and the mercy that here beamed from that cross of agony shall descend upon you from the throne of the Lamb, and surround you with the glories of his presence—with what wonder, and gratitude, and joy will you swell the notes of the everlasting song. To-day you commemorate this mercy—these are the memorials of the body that was broken, and the blood that was shed, that God might show you mercy. Oh, admire and praise that here, which you shall admire and praise in heaven. Cultivate here, and through all your pilgrimage below, that spirit of humility, and gratitude, and devotion, that shall wake, in eternal song, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!”

See, too, your obligation to imitate this divine perfection. “Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father which is in heaven is merciful;” “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy;” “He that showeth no mercy, shall have judgment without mercy.”

4. The very foundation of confidence and peace to the penitent, is the most awful cause of alarm to the impenitent.

The one trusts in the mercy of God, and mercy to him is the concentrated perfections of Jehovah, pledged to pardon, to bless, and to save him. The other despises the mercy of God,

and mercy despised, is the justice, holiness, and truth of God pledged to punish forever.

And now what shall I say to those who, by impenitence and unbelief, abuse and reject the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. There is not a sinner here to-day for whom pardoning mercy has not been provided; to whom it has not been offered from the morning of life; not one on whom the God of mercy has not looked with infinite pity, and to whom he has not addressed his calls and his offers. But, oh, how have they been received? How has the plan of salvation through the mercy of God been treated by you? What if God, my dear hearers, has removed every obstacle which your own guilt and which his attributes opposed to your pardon and salvation? What if his infinite benevolence has longed to fix its tenderest affections upon you? What if he has followed you with entreaties, and what if Jesus has died on the accursed tree, and deliverance from hell and an admittance to heaven have been urged upon your acceptance? What has all this been to you—what are you the better in character or condition—what have you done—what do you now do, but despise and reject it all? But remember that all this provision of mercy has given new sanctions to the law of God, and imparted a higher and more awful luster to his justice. The very perfections of God, which form a canopy of defense around the head of the believer, fix and necessitate the doom of the despiser of mercy, and these holy and everlasting attributes of God will pour down upon him a measure of wrath, great like the mercy abused. Oh, what will you think of the despised mercy of God, when the avenging moment comes; when these accents of God's compassion, that now fall on your senseless heart, shall be changed for the rolling thunders of hastening vengeance? Oh, while the day of mercy shines, will you not hear? Is there nothing in that mercy of God, which is above the heavens, to invite; is there nothing in all your past contempt and ingratitude, to soften to contrition; is there nothing in the wonders of redeeming love, nothing in Jesus, nothing in all his lone agonies for

you, nothing in all his glory? Oh! 'tis enough to break a heart of stone. Shall it not touch yours? Will you not come and lie at the feet of this injured Saviour? Will you not partake of the blessings of God's eternal mercy? Then do not abuse it—despise it—still let these calls pass unheeded. But I leave you with this question, and think of it when you go from this sanctuary! What degree of punishment must be your portion, if you are summoned to judgment as a despiser of God's abundant mercy?

XIX.

THE TERROR OF THE LORD PERSUASIVE.

2 CORINTHIANS v. 11.

“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”

OF all kinds of preaching there is perhaps none so unpopular—none, the propriety of which is so frequently denied—none, the salutary influence of which is so imperfectly understood—as what is commonly termed preaching terror.

The fact that the word of God abounds in the denunciations of his wrath against sin, decides, beyond a moment's debate, that some highly important end is the design of these awful threatenings. To ascertain this end is an inquiry of deep interest to beings who are to live under the government of God and feel its influence forever.

To this subject the apostle directs our attention in the text. “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”—as if he had said, knowing the fearful denunciations of God against sin, we apprise men of their exposure to his wrath, that by this means we may persuade them to comply with the terms of salvation, and thus escape the threatened doom.

The truth to which your attention is to be directed is, that—
The design and the practical tendency of the threatenings of God is to persuade men to holy obedience.

I. That such is the design of the divine threatenings, will appear—

1. If we consider them as a measure of God's moral government.

These threatenings are surely designed for some purpose.

They are not merely empty threats, intended to intimidate but never to be executed. The only possible light in which they can be regarded, as consistent with the character of the God who makes them, is, as a measure of moral government, designed to secure the salutary effects of that government upon its subjects. This is apparent on the very face of them. They are annexed to the laws of that government, and their execution is connected only with the violation of its laws. We have, therefore, the same evidence that the threatenings of God are designed to prevent sin—*i. e.*, to produce holy obedience, as we have that the penalty of the civil law against murder is designed to prevent that crime.

Besides, it is essential to the very nature of a moral government that its authority be supported by threatened punishment. Without it, there is nothing to show that its claims are to be enforced; nothing to show that it may not be violated with impunity; and, of course, nothing to show that the laws of the government do not as truly allow of disobedience as require obedience. Let God, then, repeal the sanction of threatened punishment, and the laws of his government are a mere nonentity, and rebellion is legalized from one end of his dominions to the other. Just so certain, then, as God has established a moral government over men, and required their obedience, just so certain is it that his threatenings are designed to produce such obedience.

2. This design is expressly declared.

Probably the most awful manifestation of the majesty and terrors of God ever witnessed by man in this world, was made at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. Here God descended in the midst of thunderings and lightnings. Here he lifted his mighty voice in the promulgation of his law, speaking out of the midst of the fire, and of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, and spreading awe and dismay through the thousands of Israel. "And the people said to Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die." "For who of all flesh hath heard the voice of the living God

speaking out of the fire as we have, and lived?" Even Moses exceedingly feared and quaked. And why was all this? The inspired historian tells us: "That his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not." It was, by fear and trembling and dismay, to make an abiding impression of the majesty and terror of that God who claimed their obedience.

Similar impression was designed at the reading of the law at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. There, by divine command, the Levites read the law in specific enactments, saying, "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image;" "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother;" "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them;" and all the people said *Amen*. Who can doubt that the design of God was to make a deep impression upon the minds of men of the awful curse denounced against sin?

3. The same thing appears from the commission of the Lord Jesus to the preachers of his gospel.

The sum of that commission is to declare, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." It is, therefore, the obvious design of the Author of the gospel—it is essential to the execution of their high commission—that ministers of the gospel preach the damnation of that gospel to him that believeth not. If any say that the Lord Jesus designed or expected that men would obey his gospel without hearing its awful denunciations of wrath, let them say it; if it be said that such denunciations are mere empty threats to augment our wretchedness, let it be said; but believe it, who can, in view of the character of him who is the Author of our salvation?

4. From facts.

Who was ever brought to obey the gospel without the influence of the divine threatenings? I do not now allude to the degree of this influence, but to the fact that it has been felt sufficiently to produce practical results. I know there are those who persuade themselves that the divine goodness

toward them has been the exclusive means of their conversion. No doubt of its efficacy. But in what does it consist? Chiefly in a sense of their ingratitude, and of their rich desert of damnation for that ingratitude. But are they quite sure that such would have been its influence had they never heard of the wrath of God against sin? In this respect they *may be* mistaken. I ask, therefore, for one solitary decisive instance of conversion, in which no influence of God's threatenings has been felt. How is the fact in the recorded examples of the inspired volume? Look at the trembling jailor falling down before Paul and Silas; look at the trembling and astonished Saul of Tarsus; look at the three thousand pricked in the heart, and hear from each the cry of deep emotion, *What shall I do?* And now say, whether these men despised the terror of the Lord, or felt it? The same gospel has produced the same effects in every age. The terrors of guilt and of God do, in a greater or less degree, impress the soul of all who obey that gospel. And let the question be answered, whether the gospel of God, so uniformly producing such effects, is not designed to produce them?

I might appeal to the preaching of prophets and apostles; yea, with greater evidence to the example of the Son of God himself. Every reader of the Bible knows what frequent and awful denunciations of the wrath of the Almighty are uttered in this book, both by himself, and by all who have brought his message to this guilty world. If any truth be apparent, it is that this world is in rebellion against its Sovereign, and must be awed back to its allegiance by his terrors. He who doubts, therefore, the propriety or utility of God's denunciations of wrath, may as well advise him to take back this part of the Bible, or with his own sacrilegious hand draw the effacing stroke over every line that utters such denunciations.

I proceed to show—

II. That the direct tendency of the divine threatenings is to persuade men to obey the gospel.

That I may not be misapprehended, I would remark, that

the divine threatenings have no tendency to persuade men to obedience, viewed as denunciations of mere suffering. Mere suffering presented to the mind, and operating exclusively on our natural dread of it, cannot excite holy affections, nor prompt to holy purposes. To tell a man that he is exposed to the fires of hell, and call upon him to fix his eye singly upon his doom, and, by anticipation, to realize its horrors, may disquiet him. He may tremble and quake at the aspect of menacing Deity, though he knows not and thinks not of the why and the wherefore of his anger. But all this, so far from tending to excite holy affection in the cold heart of man, tends only to harden in despair, or awaken more violent enmity against the God who threatens.

But if mere terror has no tendency to soften the heart into love—if its direct tendency is to produce a recoil in the affections—how is it, then, that the threatenings of God have a tendency to subdue the heart into cheerful submission to his will?

I answer—

1. By the solemn alternative which they reveal to man, as it tends to weaken his earthly attachments.

Now, although the mere disclosure of this alternative, of obedience or death eternal, will never of itself convert the sinner, yet no sinner will ever be converted without it. God may unfold to men his claims and their obligations, in the form of mere statement; he may tell them ever so plainly what they ought to be, and what he requires them to be, and by the naked influence of authority urge their compliance, but to beings desperately bent on their own selfish gratification, all this will be utterly ineffectual. The effect will be just what that of human laws without penalty, would be upon the most hardened malefactors. To beings supremely selfish, an appeal must be made to some other principle to counteract and subdue the selfish principle. Such a principle there is in man—a principle of self-love, or regard to happiness. Every sentient being desires happiness, and to this prin-

ciple, when man has chosen the wrong object as the source of happiness, the appeal must be made to lead him to renounce that choice. Sinners who have taken up a firm and determined purpose of revolt from God, for the sake of worldly good, must see that if they will take that for their portion in this life, they must have eternal torment for their portion in the next. They must see that they have interests at stake, compared with which earthly good deserves not to be named or thought of. Their sensibilities to these interests must be roused sufficiently to invest earthly joys with an insignificance or a gloom, sufficiently to arrest their infatuated career of rebellion—to force upon them the conviction of their folly, by making them think of its consequences, or all is desperation. To produce this state of mind, the denunciations of divine wrath directly tend. If to array the terrors of the Almighty against the sinner—if to lay before him the horrors of the impending death, and the woes of a ruined eternity, will not lead him to ponder the path of his feet—if this will not weaken the ardor of earthly attachments, and check the ardor of earthly pursuits, nothing can. These, at any rate, are enough to do it. Thus, although the mere fear of suffering is not enough to excite holy affections, it is enough to bring him to that state where purer and higher motives may reach him. It is enough to sink, in his estimation, the objects of sense to their comparative worthlessness; and even to excite a disgust and a loathing for objects fraught with such fearful ruin in the end. It is enough to awaken his sensibilities to the amazing interests of futurity, and force him to sober meditation and thoughtfulness—a point to which he would never come, without the constraining influence of a threatened damnation.

2. The terrors of the Lord also enforce the necessity of compliance with the terms of salvation.

There is, perhaps, no part of the influence which God uses in the conversion of sinners, which is more indispensable than this. Depraved man—in love with the world, and in love with sin—will continue his chosen way, till some dire necessity of

escape be shown to him. And even then he will employ his ingenuity, and rely on the authority, not of reason, but of his own wishes to determine the way of escape, in contempt of that which God has pointed out. It is this hope of impunity, under the sound of God's denunciations of wrath, which holds this guilty world in its awful death-like slumbers. It is only when the sinner sees that the threatenings of God cannot be defied with safety, and that every solemn utterance of his wrath will be carried into execution, and that there is none other way of escape than that to which his own heart is desperately opposed, that he begins to stand in awe of his almighty Sovereign. And it is in the threatenings of the infinite God, that he sees his helpless necessity of submitting to the terms of God. He sees a God of omnipotence, able to execute his wrath to the uttermost—a God, whose truth binds him to the full execution of its every announcement—a God, whose holiness kindles into a fire of indignation at the very approach of iniquity—a God, whose justice is pledged to uphold his law, his government, his throne, though worlds sink beneath the strokes of his wrath. It is such a God who threatens him; and by his threatenings he is driven to abandon all hope in sin. Such a God will not alter the terms of mercy, nor remit the curse without compliance. Thus the sinner is forced to renounce his vain conceits and expectations of safety, to abandon his refuges of lies, and to feel that there is no peace to the wicked while God reigns—thus he is cut off from all self-dependence, made to relinquish every proud attempt at helping himself, and of purchasing the favor of God by his own doings; for, in the denunciations of God, he sees his helpless necessity of being lost, or of submitting to his terms of mercy. Now, if ever, he hastens to the appointed refuge. God's immutable decree, "Repent or perish, believe or be damned," ends all his dreams, and scatters all his hopes.

3. It is only by the divine threatenings that the evil of sin, as God esteems it, can be shown to the sinner.

The evil of sin must be learned from God's estimate of it.

Man, the sinner himself, is not a safe judge on this question. The grand question is, what does the Lawgiver think of it? What is his estimate—what the measure of his abhorrence, who holds our being and our happiness at his disposal? Now, what should we think of God's estimate of sin, had he annexed no penalty to transgression, or withheld all penalty after transgression? The sinner by transgression openly sets at naught the claims of God; he proclaims the demands of God for his obedience to be unworthy of regard; and God, by withdrawing the threatened penalty, sanctions that proclamation, and acquiesces in the practical declaration of the sinner, that his law is unworthy of obedience, and that sin neither provokes his disapprobation nor deserves his wrath. Punishment is a manifestation of the Lawgiver, the measure of his abhorrence of sin, the proof of the claim of his law, and seal of its inviolability. Without it that claim would be as though it were not, and rebellion be legalized from one end of his dominion to the other. It is the only medium by which God can bring home to the sinner a conviction of his abhorrence of sin. The law might remain in the form of requisition or advice, but nothing appears to show that it is not, in God's estimation, just as well to transgress as to obey it. Of what, then, shall the sinner repent? Nothing appears from the government which God administers to show that transgression calls for repentance any more than obedience itself. Without the divine threatenings, therefore, the sinner can never be made to see the evil of sin, and of course can never repent of it as an evil. In the very nature of things, repentance under the government of God is out of the question. On the other hand, the threatenings of God unavoidably bring to the mind of the sinner who looks at them the inquiry, *for what* are these fearful terrors pointed against me? Is there not a cause—has no evil been done—by which a righteous God is provoked? Is there not something in sin which justifies a perfect God in enforcing its prohibition under such dread sanctions of his wrath? And the answer is at hand. There is that in sin which makes the

threatening just. That infinite Being whose glories enrapture all heaven, I have despised; that authority of God by which alone his supremacy and his right to govern can be sustained, I have trampled underfoot; that law of God which is holy, just and good, and the appointed means of blessing his holy kingdom, I have violated; all my obligations, which result from creating and preserving and redeeming goodness, I have slighted; and all the designs of a perfect God to glorify himself and impart blessedness to his holy universe, I have opposed and labored to defeat; and all the evil, the misery, which his sentient creation, my little self excepted, can endure, I have consented should exist. In heart, I have been willing to mar every design of a perfect God—to destroy his infinite blessedness, and to fill the universe with wailing and woe; and for this I deserve his wrath, and *for this* he threatens it. It is with me, as such a rebel—a rebel against God with such a heart—with such a principle of action, that God is displeased, and as much displeased as his awful threatenings say he is. Thus it is by means of these threatenings that the sinner is made to see the evil of sin—the measure of God's disapprobation of it, as manifested in these threatenings. If he would know that sin is an evil, let him ask how God regards it; if he would know how God regards it, let him ask the fires which his wrath kindles as its punishment. Conceal the threatenings of God, and thus prevent the sinner from seeing how God regards it, and he would never see the evil—the ill desert of sin, nor find any thing to repent of in sin. But open clearly to his inspection the import and nature of these threatenings, and let them tell how God feels toward sin, and nothing so powerfully tends to show him his ill desert—to show him to himself as God sees him, and to awaken the relentings, and the grief and the holy purposes of godly repentance.

4. The divine threatenings reveal the character of God in its glory and excellence.

This they do as they reveal his disapprobation—the full measure of his abhorrence of sin. This is God's holiness, and

his holiness is pre-eminently his glory. As God loves the happiness of his creatures, he loves their virtue or holiness—their moral excellence and perfection as the means, and only means of their perfect happiness. As he loves their holiness, their moral perfection, he abhors sin. God's abhorrence of sin, then, is the exact measure of his benevolence, his goodness, his love of his creatures. If, then, the sinner is ever to know God as he is—his goodness, his benevolence, and love to his creatures—he must see him as he abhors sin, the destruction of all good in the universe. If we would see God in his abhorrence of sin, we must see him through the medium of his threatenings. Here we may see with what intensity of will and affection God seeks the virtue, the holiness, as the means of the happiness of his moral creation. Nor is it conceivable, that that greatest, most enrapturing of all truths in the universe of truth, THAT GOD IS LOVE, that God is a being who, more than all things else, loves the holiness, and thus the happiness of his creatures, should be so impressively presented to human apprehension—that the glory of God should be so poured upon human thought, and human sensibility, in such full-orbed splendor, as through the divine threatenings. Here God's love for the happiness of his creatures may be seen in his intense abhorrence of sin, which destroys that happiness. There is no other mode conceivable, in which God can be seen as he is, and as all that he is—loved as he is, and all that he is, as through this manifestation.

Some suppose that for man to be moved by the divine threatenings, is to be moved by a mercenary influence; and to act under it, is, of necessity, to act in a selfish manner. Oh, how little such men know of God, and God's government! Let the sinner look at that highest glory of God, in view of which heaven's song makes heaven's pillars tremble, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty;" let him thus look and *love*, and can his *love* be mercenary, or mean, or selfish? In kind, you see it will, it must be the same which the effulgence of the Deity awakens in the seraph's heart.

5. The divine threatenings unfold the claims of God for the sinner's obedience in all their pressure of obligation.

By these it is that the sinner is made to see, if he see at all, who and what that God is with whom he has to do. God comes out to the sinner with his claims, he unfolds his obligations to obedience, as these result from his own infinite perfections, from his high and rightful supremacy over the creatures of his power, from the purity and excellence of his law, and from the great designs of his moral government; and now, for the single purpose of securing the ascendancy of these claims and these obligations in the heart of man, he makes known the tremendous alternative of submission or death. Here are none of the decrees and threats of self-willed despotism, fixed upon its own selfish ends, at the sacrifice of all good to those whom it has power to torment. The denunciations of God, properly understood, bring no such thought to the mind of the sinner. They are simply the enforcement of the obligations of eternal righteousness. Their language to the sinner, under a full discovery of the claims of the Most High, is, "Submit to these righteous claims of a perfect God, or die." It is the direct tendency of these threatenings, not merely to make the sinner tremble, but at the very moment of excited fears of the curse, to array before him his duty, and to bring before him all its obligations, and all its motives. They turn his eye downward upon the pit and its fires, and at the same instant raise and fix it upon God in all the authority of his supremacy, and in all the immutability and equity of his claims. He is made to see how perfect, how holy, how just, how unchangeable are the claims which a righteous God enforces by such awful sanctions. God, in all his majesty and perfection, is brought into nearer contact with the sinner than it is possible to conceive he should be by any other means. By the terrors of the Lord, all the sensibilities of his nature are appealed to, and he is made to stop in his career of rebellion, because his steps take hold on hell; and, by precisely the same means, he is in this attitude made to look upward, and to look intently,

to the great reality of a living and a reigning God; and while he looks, all the majesty, and all the loveliness, and all the glory of God are brought to bear upon his conscience and his heart. Thus he sees what God is—how God feels toward him, and how he ought to feel toward God. Thus he is made to feel—if by any means he can be made to feel—the full pressure of his obligations to obedience; thus the whole moral influence of God's moral administration is concentrated and poured upon his heart; and thus by the terror of the Lord, he is persuaded to obey him.

6. The efficacy of the divine threatenings will still farther appear, if we reflect that they are not absolute, but conditional.

Such is the constitution of the human mind, such the condition of man as a sinner, that absolute threatenings would reach him with no salutary influence whatever. To know the terrors of the Lord, and that there is no way of escape, would only awaken his dread and his enmity toward the Being whom he is commanded to love. He might sometimes look toward God, as an irreconcilable Lawgiver and Judge, but seeing him only in the severities of frowning majesty, he would find no place in his heart, either for love or confidence. Instead of entering with hope on the path of obedience, he would sit still in the sullenness of despair.

Widely different from this has the mercy of God made our condition. "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Does he denounce against us the fearful penalty of his violated law? That "law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." Does he denounce the deeper curses of a despised gospel? It is "to save by fear." True it is, and true it ought to be, that if the sinner resolve to go on in his iniquity there is enough to make his heart "meditate terror." On that path God sheds his heaviest frowns—that way of the sinner God infests with all the horrors of anticipated vengeance. And it is right and best that it should be so; for if that will not check the rebel's wayward step, what will? But is there no hope?

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.” Let the sinner only think of turning back from the ruin that awaits him; let him only stop and listen to the entreaties that call him to life; and that moment God puts on the winning countenance of invitation, and throws wide the embrace of his friendship. And now, let it be told what must be the influence of the threatened wrath upon one in circumstances like these. With heaven before him, with an inviting God and Saviour welcoming him to the arms of his mercy, will not an opening hell behind him quicken the footsteps of his return. Let it be supposed that his sensibilities are awake, before the appalling severities of the coming wrath; and now, will not the sight of his great Deliverer awaken his gratitude and inspire him with confidence? Can he see his inevitable doom on the one hand, and God his Saviour waiting to be gracious on the other, and not trust him? Surely the terrors of the Lord, if any thing can do it, must make him welcome the mercy of the Lord, and bring him, as a humble, grateful, trusting penitent, to the feet of the Saviour.

On the other hand, you may set before the sinner all the compassion of God, and the tenderness of redeeming love; you may call him with all the expostulation and entreaty of divine invitation; you may point him to the wounds and the agonies and death of Jesus, but if you do not show him that he is lost, he will never embrace a Saviour. Why should he? What is all this to one who has no concern with it? If the sinner be not lost, the compassion which God has revealed in the gospel is not for him; the entreaties of the gospel are not addressed to him; the tenderness and love and mercy of the Saviour are not toward him. There is not a particle of influence in all this that can reach or touch him. You may call him to accept of the great salvation, but his exposure to an opening hell must move him or he will never stir. The expected wrath of God must endear to him the compassion and

the tenderness and the mercy of God, or all the melting, mighty efficacy of gospel grace will fall upon his heart as upon the cold rock of the desert.

REMARKS.

1. Our subject furnishes an important topic of self-examination—viz., what has been the influence of the divine threatenings upon us?

The question is not merely whether we have awakened to see our exposure to wrath, and even trembled at the expectation and the fear of its actual execution. All this may have been felt—our disquietude and fears may have continued long, and may have spoiled, during its continuance, all our earthly joys—and we be none the better for it. The first point to be settled is, have we felt the power of the divine threatenings at all? And the next is, have they produced their true practical effects? Have they so affected us as to spoil the world of its charms, as our chief object of pursuit, and made the conviction practical, that a man gains nothing by gaining the whole world and losing his own soul? Have they brought home to our practical feelings our urgent, dying necessity, of submission to the terms of mercy—so shown us the evil of sin—so pressed upon us our obligations, and so arrayed before us the motives and persuasives—the whole moral influence of the gospel—as to bring us actually to obey the gospel? Have we, through God's threatenings, seen God—God as he is? Has their actual result been repentance for sin, faith in the Saviour, love to God, and a holy purpose of consecration to his service? If not, our religion is wholly selfish and hollow at heart. If not—no matter what may have been our fears and distresses—no matter what relief from these fears and distresses we may have experienced—the divine threatenings have not had their proper influence on us, and we are yet “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”

2. Saints, as well as sinners, ought to derive practical benefit from the divine threatenings.

Some there are who, supposing that they have fled to the appointed refuge, imagine that they have no concern with the terrors of God, though they are very willing, and often peculiarly pleased with this sort of preaching for others' sake. But why has this sort of preaching no application to them? Because they are Christians, and therefore safe from the wrath of God? That is much to be doubted, if they find the threatenings of God have no influence upon them. Be it so, however, that just so far as they have evidence that they are Christians, so far the probability is that they will not feel the actual execution of God's threatenings. But is there nothing in these threatenings of salutary influence on the Christian? Has he no need to see and to feel more of the vanity of the world, as it is shown in contrast with everlasting burnings? Has he no need to feel more of the necessity of persevering in holy obedience? Has he no need to see more and more of the evil of sin—more and more of his obligations to God; and more and more of all that moral influence which results wholly from his guilt and ruin as a sinner? He cannot doubt it. Let him, then, see it, and feel it, more and more, whenever the terrors of God are arrayed before him. Let him remember that "he that endureth to the end shall be saved"—that if any man draws back, he draws back unto perdition—that unless he keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, he too shall be a cast-away. Let him often think of that God "who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." I tell you, Christian, even your heart needs this influence, and it is a sad mark against you, if you are not willing to feel it.

3. We see why God threatens sin with eternal punishment.

His threatenings are designed to show—and to answer their end, they must show—what God is. To show what God is, they must show the measure of his disapprobation of sin—his holiness. Any other threatenings would tell lies concerning God. They would exhibit him as he is not. God hates sin as much as his awful threatenings say he does. And they who deny it, deny the God of heaven.

They deny his holiness—his real abhorrence of sin. They exhibit, of course, a false God to the human mind—a God who does not abhor sin, as it ought to be abhorred, and as a perfect God must abhor it. Sin is the supreme evil; and a God who does not so regard it, is not a God who regards things as they are, and might as well not regard it as an evil at all. He is worthy of no confidence, nor respect. He is a God without principle, a God without character. Such a God on the throne of the universe, and every angel would drop his harp—every devil shout in ecstasy. The bands of God's moral dominion would be broken, the pillars of eternal justice would fall, and heaven fall with them; the fires of hell burst forth unchecked, and rebellion stand triumphant on the ruins. Such is the Universalist's God. Let him trust him, if he dare! Such is not the God of heaven. Such is not my God. If I know my own heart, I love a God so holy, as to abhor sin as much as his awful threatenings say he does. That there is such a God, is the joy of the holy universe. In his hands, and only in his, all is safe.

4. The object of preaching terror, is not *to agitate* with alarm.

Let me not be misunderstood. I do not say, that the object is not to produce alarm in some degree—even that salutary dread of wrath, which shall be necessary to induce the sinner at once to flee from it. But I mean, that it is not as some imagine, so to insulate the mind's view of the wrath of God, as to exclude all thoughts of his mercy—so to turn the eye down the precipice of damnation, that nothing but its terrors can be seen. This, instead of being useful or salutary, is injurious, and even fatal. The threatenings of God are neither designed nor fitted to produce this effect. They are the threatenings of a God who is just, but who is merciful also; and they are promulged, pre-eminently, to accomplish the design of his mercy. They are not absolute, but conditional—not fitted to take away hope, but to lead the sinner to lay hold on the hope set before him. Suppose one in a prison, whose walls and

fastnesses destroyed all hope of escape—suppose him surrounded with beasts of prey, whose eyes flashed rage on him as their helpless victim. It is easy to conceive, that he would be agitated, convulsed, overwhelmed with terror. But suppose now these objects of fear are asleep—you see it would be some mitigation of his emotions. Suppose now a door to his prison—a door on the latch—his relief is still greater. And now, suppose the door stands open! How much would he be frightened? Just enough to induce him not to stay another moment in this place of danger, but instantly to flee from it.

So, fellow-sinner, the wrath to which you are so fearfully exposed, sleeps. Another moment's delay, and it may break in an eternal storm on your guilty head. Now, we proclaim "the opening of the prison-doors to them that are bound." Fly, then, to Jesus. Hasten to the Son of God as thy Saviour. Oh, how kind, how benignant is God, even in the denunciations of his wrath!

5. We see the self-deception, and the hardihood in sin of those who scoff at the divine threatenings.

Their self-deception is obvious. They flatter themselves that it does no good to preach terror, they are not to be frightened into religion—frightened to heaven—and wonder that ministers do not preach more upon the mercy of God. Does no good to preach terror? Why, then, does the living God preach it? Why did the Saviour of the world, who loved sinners and died for them—why did he preach it? Never did the denunciation of eternal wrath break in such thunders from any lips as from his. But why not tell us of the mercy of God? We do—and we ought; the theme should fire our hearts, and make our language glow. And why is not this enough? Why so often attempt to frighten us into religion? I answer: we make no such attempt; we never declare the wrath of God merely to make you tremble; we never point you to an absolute, unconditional damnation. We make known the terrors of the Lord, that you may fear, and hear, and be saved—that you may thus see the folly of plunging

blindfold into the abyss of hell, for the sake of this vain world. We make known the terror of the Lord, that you may see your dying necessity of feeling it, or submitting to the terms of mercy—that you may know how guilty you are in the sight of God, and learn the justice, and holiness, and glory of God, and your obligations to submit to his claims—in a word, that you may be persuaded to embrace the offered salvation—and because we know you never will be thus persuaded, unless you know that hell must be your portion, if you are not. Deceive then yourself, fellow-sinner, no longer. If you contemn this preaching, you are your own worst enemy—you are despising the appointed means of salvation, without which you will perish. Despise it if you will, but if you do not fear hell, you will go there. And why should you not fear it? Is it not a reality? Does not the God of mercy teach you to fear it? Are you not exposed to it? Why, then, do you affect to despise and resist the preaching of terror? Surely not because that is not the preaching which you need? No. Because it disquiets and troubles you in your purposes of sin. Here is the secret of all your objections—you are not willing to be disturbed. And tell us, is this the reason why we should let you alone, and sew pillows under arm-holes, and rock you to sleep on the brink of everlasting burnings? Would you thank us for our kindness, when those fires kindle upon you?

After all, perhaps, you can contemn the preacher of these things, and heap obloquy and reproach upon him. It is often done. Yes; let the preacher of the gospel denounce the wrath of God, in the very words of God—let him tell of the fire which shall never be quenched, of the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; and many there are who can quote these words of the Holy Ghost with a sneering, scoffing contempt of the man that utters them! What hardihood in guilt is this! God utters their damnation, and they throw back his words into the face of God. Tell me if such men will not feel that wrath, till they shall learn not to despise it? Tell us,

for whom is hell prepared, with its chains, and darkness, and fires, if not for men who set the wrath of God at defiance, and who thus rush upon the thick bosses of his buckler?

And now, my dear hearers, let me request you to bring to the test of experiment the doctrine of this discourse. The doctrine is, that the design and practical tendency of the threatenings of God is to persuade men to holy obedience. Now, if they ever have this influence, they must be thought of until their efficacy is felt.

Now, you may be too proud, or too slothful, to make this attempt. You may be too proud to be saved in the way in which the jailor was saved. But unless you are willing to come to this point—unless you are willing that the moral influence of the gospel, as it comes through the divine threatenings, should reach your conscience—unless you consent to feel that you are guilty, and deserve the doom which God has threatened—that you are lost—fearfully exposed to the execution of those threatenings, you never will be converted, and never will be saved.

Will you, then, brave all these terrors of God? Will you go on dreaming that the world only is good, when, if you have this good in this life, you must take hell with it in the next? Will you yet trifle with that resistless decree of the Almighty, which has fixed the alternative of repentance or perdition? Will you refuse to think of that evil of sin, which a just God measures by denouncing eternal woe on the sinner? Will you go on heedless of that God, who frowns and thunders in his wrath, to awe you back from eternal fire to the embrace of his mercy!

XX.

THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE.

LUKE xiii. 5.

“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

OUR Lord often based his instructions upon undeniable and admitted facts. On the present occasion some who had heard him declare the certain and eternal destruction of the wicked, told him of those Galileans whom Pilate had murdered when they came to the temple to worship, and whose blood he had mingled with their sacrifices. From this signal instance of destruction they inferred that there was some peculiarity of character or circumstances in the case of these unhappy sufferers which did not pertain to others, or at least to themselves. To correct this false conception and to show them that they stood exposed to a similar doom, he answered, “Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” To bring this view of the subject still closer to the conscience of those whom he addresses, he alludes to another instance which, so to speak, occurred among their own acquaintance. “Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

I propose to consider—

First, The nature; and,

Second, The necessity of repentance.

I. The nature of repentance.

I remark—

1. That repentance implies godly sorrow for sin.

“Godly sorrow,” saith the apostle, “worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.” Repentance, then, is the effect of godly sorrow, and implies it. In every requirement of repentance this sorrow is therefore required. Godly sorrow is sorrow for sin, as committed against God. It is the thought that he has sinned AGAINST GOD—a God so holy, so good, so gracious—that affects and softens the heart of the true penitent with ingenuous sorrow. To know what God is, as a Being to whom pertains all that is vast in power, comprehensive in wisdom, enchanting in goodness and mercy; thus to see his glories, and while they beam on the fixed and wondering eye of contemplation, to be obliged to say, “Against **THEE**, thee only have I sinned”—oh, it is this which touches the secret place of tears and melts the heart in contrition.

2. Repentance involves the hatred of sin.

This hatred of sin is of the same disinterested and ingenuous nature as godly sorrow. It respects the intrinsic turpitude of sin. It is not the mere punishment of sin as natural evil, which it respects, but sin itself—sin in its inherent moral turpitude and odiousness—sin, the most odious object conceivable—the most fit to be hated and abhorred—sin which, as opposition to God, his soul hateth, on which he cannot look without shuddering, and the measure of whose abhorrence is the doom with which he threatens it. Sin, what is it? It is the governing, actuating principle of a moral being—a being, made to live and act, not to defeat but to promote God’s great and perfect designs. It reigns in the heart of such a being, giving direction and form, tendencies and results to all his doings. It is the principle of selfishness—a principle which is concerned only for self—which does not fix on universal good, and which, therefore, sacrifices to its own private, limited end or object, all other good—a created universe—God—his designs, and his blessedness; and more, unrestrained it goes forth to fill a universe with anguish, and is, therefore,

nothing else, nothing better, than the fell malignity of an infernal. It is the hatred and the abhorrence of such a heart, *as being his own heart*, which the penitent sinner feels. He sees, and says, and feels, such is *my heart*; such is and has been *the principle* from which I have acted; such I am in truth—God's enemy; such I am in his sight. In the light of his glory I see it, I know it, I feel it; I am vile, I abhor myself.

It is obvious that such hatred of sin will be directed against every form and manifestation of sin, against sin in all circumstances, against sin in himself, and against sin in all men. Sin will possess its own inherent odious nature, whatever form it may assume—whether it be secret or open; whether in thought, or word, or action; whether it be mean or honorable in the eyes of the world; whether productive of present good or present evil, it will still be sin, and will be the object of abhorrence to the real penitent.

8. Repentance includes reformation.

This, as it respects both the affections of the heart and the conduct of the life, is the crowning excellence of this evangelical virtue. The very word used in the New Testament signifies that amendment and reformation from what is wrong in us, produced by just views of the nature of what is thus wrong. Indeed, true godly sorrow for sin, and a genuine hatred of sin, while they are in themselves a part of real amendment or reformation, must in their very nature tend to produce a universal reformation in heart and life. He who truly mourns for his sins, and who truly hates all sin, in proportion to the strength of these principles, will infallibly forsake all sin. At the same time, as we unavoidably love that which is the direct opposite of what we hate, the true penitent must love holiness, and therefore must be led to aim at universal obedience to the will of God, in heart and life. Let me not be understood to assert that the imperfect repentance of saints on earth, secures perfect freedom from sin. This, however, may be said, that sin has not dominion over the true

penitent in this life; he will never rest satisfied with himself while sin mars the affections of his heart or stains the conduct of his life; the commanding object of his purposes and his efforts will be to avoid sin and to practice holiness. More and more continually will this purpose be cherished and strengthened; more and more will these efforts be made. He will go from strength to strength, he will improve in holiness as he approaches his eternal home, till perfection absolute shall render him a meet partaker with the saints in light in their communion and their blessedness.

Perfect repentance, then, on the part of a sinner, is substantially the sum of all religion. The penitent is a sinner, who, having just views of sin and just feelings toward it, renounces it and becomes holy. Indeed, in its nature, repentance in man differs not from the religion of angels in heaven, only as it is modified in reference to the character of man as a sinner; and the true penitent has substantially in kind the same views of sin, the same feelings toward it, and the same purposes respecting it, which the holiest seraph, had he once sinned, would possess. It is easy to see, in such a case, how a being so holy would feel. Had Gabriel sinned, he would grieve for sin, for its own intrinsic turpitude and guilt as hostile to the God whom he sees, adores, and loves; he would hate it as he now does, and for the same reason; he would employ the whole energies of his spirit to avoid it, and to be like God in purity and holiness. And unless we have some of these feelings and these purposes we have no warrant for a thought that we have repented.

I proceed to consider—

II. The necessity of repentance. “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

I remark—

1 That this is the decision of God respecting all men.

This decision is presented in many forms. In the commands of God. When John the Baptist came—when the Son of God entered on his public ministry, they came—saying,

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” When the apostles went forth, they made known their commission, by declaring that God “now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” And obedience to God’s commandments is required on pain of eternal death. Repentance and faith were, indeed, the burden of apostolic preaching, the sum and substance of that gospel which was to be preached to every creature, as “testifying to the Jews and also to the Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” To disobey the call, therefore, is to reject the gospel, and to incur its curse. But we are not left to mere deduction and inference—conclusive as this method of argument is. We have God’s express decision—we have it on record, as uttered by the Saviour of the world—we have it in terms as plain as language can furnish. The point, therefore, is not to be disposed of in some easy, indolent, superficial way, by supposing that God is too merciful to condemn, or our morality too exemplary to expose us to his wrath. If what God says of himself, is of higher authority than our own opinions or conjectures concerning him—if what he has fixed as the terms of life and death will stand in spite of our notions and fancies, the impenitent sinner, be he who he may—wise or ignorant, rich or poor, moral or immoral, a little sinner or a great sinner—is stripped of all hope by the text. We have the declaration, “Except ye *repent*, ye shall ALL likewise perish;” and it is the decision of him who “hath the keys of hell and death,” who “openeth and no man shutteth, who shutteth and no man openeth.”

2. From facts.

The solemn declaration in the text is an appeal to acknowledged facts. The slaughter of the Galileans by the sword of Pilate, and the destruction of the eighteen by the fall of the Tower of Siloam, were well-known instances of divine judgment against sin. Sinners have perished—sinners distinguished by no peculiarity of guilt—sinners, therefore, in whose case there was no more reason to anticipate the righteous judg-

ments of heaven than there is to anticipate it in other cases. What God has done in these instances, there is every reason to believe he will do in others like them. This is the argument of our Lord, and it comes to us in unabated force. For what was there in those Galileans and Jews, why God, immutably just and holy, should deal with them in the severity of righteous retribution, which is not to be found in the case of impenitent sinners of this age, and this place? Let the point of difference be told, if it be known. Beyond this, we might appeal not only to instances of individual sinners, but we may see the truth before us in the destruction of thousands and millions by the deluge, by the storm of fire and brimstone, and by the massacre of the Jews by the Romans, and in all cases in which the divine judgments have hurried the guilty without preparation into eternity. In the whole history of his providence, in this record of his own doings, God has presented himself, in every age, a God taking vengeance. He has not punished one, and suffered another to escape. He has appeared but in one character, revealed himself in very deed, in awful and uniform consistency, for six thousand years; and through the whole series of his dealings, not a solitary exception has occurred to authorize a doubt or suspicion of what he will continue to do. Whether, therefore, we can unfold the fitness and equity of this procedure or not, whether we can establish the truth in the text by independent reasonings of our own or not, may be left out of the question. Under the administration of a God of infinite perfection, final and eternal ruin *has* overtaken the impenitent in every age. The solemn truth, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," meets us in the stubborn, unyielding aspect of A MATTER OF FACT.

3. From the moral government of God.

That God has established a moral government is one of those facts which the lowest depravity of man seldom, if ever, has denied. It is so clearly taught by what man knows of himself, of his relations to his fellow-men, and to his Maker, that all the darkness of heathenism has not been able to efface

the conviction from the human mind. The veriest profligacy of atheism itself has ever been forced to admit that there is a right and a wrong in human conduct. But if God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, has established a moral government—if, as the essential part of such a government, he has promulgated a law as the rule of conduct—if he has enforced that law by the necessary sanctions—if the ends aimed at by such a government be more important than any other which God himself could discover, then that government will be maintained. I know that there are loose, imperfect notions on this subject in most minds. With respect to it, most men are in the deepest midnight of ignorance. They scarcely see or know a reason why God should punish his creatures. Here is the reason. God, as the means of the highest good to the universe, has established a moral government. The measure is worthy of a God, and the question concerning the maintenance of that government is no other than whether God shall be God—whether God shall be glorified. What, then, must become, what ought to become of the persevering rebel against the most High? Shall God suffer him to escape the threatened and yet defied penalty of his government, and thus subvert his throne? Shall God relinquish the designs of infinite wisdom and goodness, and the means of accomplishing those designs, for the rebel's sake? Especially, when to secure these designs in behalf of rebels themselves, he has given his Son to become a curse for them, and they still persist in their impenitent rejection of his mercy? Will he thus stamp with folly the work of redeeming grace? Any conscience can answer. No; God will roll on this plan of his own to its final consummation, though it overwhelms a revolted world in hell; and the result would show that his wisdom and his goodness—his very existence as God—required that every impenitent sinner should be put in that place of perdition. We may imagine and theorize, and think and dream on this subject, but our conjectures and our theories, in competition with the principles of God's moral government,

will be as tow amid the fires of the last conflagration. If there be such a thing as a moral government—if there be such a thing as a high, and holy, and divine Legislator—if there be such a thing as a throne in heaven, and if the infinite God sits upon it, then with all the weight of an eternal truth should it settle on every mind, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

4. From the moral character of God.

It is not necessary to dwell on the argument which might be drawn from each particular attribute of the Deity. There is one great and comprehensive perfection which includes and pervades every other. I mean the holiness of God. Now, without repentance, the sinner still continues to be a sinner—the enemy of holiness and of God. The purposes of God, and the character which he displays in accomplishing his designs, the sinner steadily hates and opposes. But all this guilt and pollution, all this vileness and odiousness of character, are naked to the omniscient eye. As a holy God, he must regard it with absolute abhorrence and ceaseless displeasure. To suppose otherwise, is to suppose God either to approve, or to be indifferent to what is directly opposite to himself, and worthy of his eternal rebuke. It is to suppose God to hate, or wholly disregard his own perfections and glory. But can a spotless God hate himself? Can his own infinite perfection become an object of indifference to himself? Can he fail to abhor sin with a measure of indignation proportioned to the purity and infinitude of his nature? Will he forfeit the character which commands the adoration of all heaven, and dismiss from his Godhead that attribute to support and honor which he has given his Son to die on the cross? And will the omnipotence of God sleep, when the holiness of God is offended to the uttermost? When we look at the holiness of God, in its aspect of irreconcilable hostility to all sin—when we look at that inaccessible height of purity and splendor at which it raises him, above all possible perfection of his creatures, so that angels are charged with folly before him—when we think of

those pure eyes which cannot behold iniquity—when we think of that sanctuary of his presence into which nothing can enter that defileth—a sanctuary guarded by all the jealousies of the divine nature—when we hear that voice of adoration to a thrice holy God, which makes the pillars of his temple tremble, we know that God is a consuming fire, we know that the fury of his indignation will go forth in the eternal destruction of his impenitent enemies.

5. From the character of the impenitent.

Character will decide the allotments of eternity. The last breath will fix the character beyond all change, and “he that is holy will be holy still, and he that is filthy will be filthy still.” Now, we do not appeal to an arbitrary decision of God to determine the state of an impenitent sinner after death, but to his own character as then becoming unchangeable, and ask where and how must his eternity be spent? From the world, the only source of happiness to him now, he cannot then derive a particle of enjoyment. In heaven, though admitted there, he could not find it. He has neither taste nor capacity for its services, for its society, or its joys. The very foundation of all the happiness of that world is holiness. Every being, every affection, every pursuit, every enjoyment is holy. With such society the impenitent sinner could not unite, such affections he could not exercise, in such pursuits he could not engage, in such enjoyments he could not partake. He does not love those who are holy on earth, he exercises no holy affections, he engages in no holy employments, he relishes no holy joys. God he does not love, in Jesus he does not trust, in Christians he does not delight—in the law of God, in the gospel of his Son, in his Sabbath, or his sanctuary, he finds no delight. What happiness, then, is there for him ever in heaven? Saints and angels would shun his society as still the enemy of God and the Saviour; and he would find himself alone, a forsaken outcast, the object of unmingled contempt and scorn amid the happy throng. “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,” is the delightful anthem of each celestial,

and that God the sinner hates. With still higher rapture each redeemed spirit cries, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us to God by his blood." But every note of that song would be a lie on the sinner's tongue, and anguish to his heart. To fulfill the high commands of God would be a painful drudgery, and to behold him face to face would overwhelm him in the agonies of conscious guilt. Whither, then, shall he fly? In heaven he cannot dwell. So surely as his body must be transformed before he could be insensible to pain amid the fires of the pit, so surely must his soul be transformed before he could fail to feel a weariness—yea, a torment amid the hallelujahs of paradise.

Where, then, and how shall he be happy? If in any way, by indulging his desires, by acting out his dispositions in corresponding conduct. And where and how shall this be done? In hell, in the rage and blasphemies of the enemies of God. Hell, then, is his only refuge; for that world and its employments only is he prepared. So long as he remains impenitent, so long his love of sin remains; and a sinful mind, in a disembodied state, cannot be happy. God cannot make that mind happy, except by making it holy—by making the sinner penitent. The love of sin will become more and more intense. In all the restlessness and woe of intense, unsatisfied desire, wounded by the arrows of an angry conscience, he must be wretched. Take away, then, all the chains, and bars, and gates of the eternal prison—let the impenitent sinner go away from its dark and woeful regions, he carries hell within him. His character—his very disposition make hell. Himself is hell.

We do not, then, appeal to an arbitrary decision of God to determine the state of the impenitent sinner after death, but to the nature of things—the nature of the mind, and his own character. We see that impenitence is itself perdition in its deepest horrors.

Thus I have endeavored to lay before you the nature of true repentance, and the necessity of it, to avoid everlasting de-

struction. *Repent or perish* is the great alternative of the gospel. One or the other must be realized in the case of every human being. And as surely as a day is coming which will place all men on the right or left hand of the Judge—all men in heaven or hell—so surely is there in the character of every human being a foundation for that final and awful discrimination. There is a line which separates the whole race into two great and awfully important divisions—a line which takes its own steady and undeviating way through this assembly, and on one or the other side of which each is placed, and according to the situation of each—should instant death overtake us—the allotment of each would be fixed in eternal bliss or woe. It is, then, a question of most momentous interest, my dear hearers, on which side of that line are you? To answer this question, you have only to answer another—have you repented or have you not? Have you seen, in the light of God's glory, how exceeding sinful sin is? Do you hate sin, for its own intrinsic turpitude and odiousness? Is it because it is opposed to a holy, perfect God, a God whose excellence you see and love? Is it because it is against a law that is holy, and just, and good, that you hate sin and mourn over it? Does your sorrow and aversion to sin lead you to forsake it? Is it your supreme desire to be freed from it, and to become holy like God; and does this desire prompt to effort, and do these efforts produce the actual result of holiness of heart and life?

It is easy for you to put aside these questions—it is easy to dismiss the subject which involves your eternal all, in some loose and superficial way suggested by carnal sloth and stupidity, and pretexts of unbelief. Thus most of you have a thousand and a thousand and a thousand times dismissed it. The same causes for putting it away from you still exist, and will exist till the hour of death. But the subject cannot be dismissed on the judgment-day. There will then be a decision, a final decision for eternity. Have you repented of your sins against God? If your conscience answers, as in many cases it does, that you have not, then I ask you will you re-

pent now? Who, in this congregation, is so abandoned to wickedness as not to feel the desirableness of reformation—who does not look forward to his own repentance as a delightful object of attainment in the future? Who can say, in the sincerity of his soul, “Let me live and let me die without the least contrition for my sins against God?” Who, were it not for the insignificant pleasures of sin, would defer his repentance for an instant? Say not that you intend to repent at a future period. Better resolve that you never will repent, for this is a resolution which probably you could not keep; the other is easily kept till the day of mercy is gone. The question, then, is: will you repent of your sins against the God that made you, and the Saviour that died for you, *to-day*? Bear with my importunity. I know I must meet you at the bar of judgment; and there, if you reject the call of the gospel, I must see you sink under its fearful curse. This may be the last time I shall call you, and, my dear hearers, I am in earnest. God is in earnest, when he now commands all men to repent. The Holy Ghost is in earnest, while he touches your conscience and your heart. Angels are in earnest, while they wait to witness your purpose, and long for your return to life and to God. Saints are in earnest, while they lift the cry for mercy in your behalf. Hell and its legions are in earnest, while they strive to prevent or weaken your resolution, and to draw you downward to perdition. Jesus your Saviour is in earnest, while, amid the agonies of his cross, he comes to you in the accents of entreating mercy, and now, in the hearing of you, declares: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Will you not be in earnest, too? Will you repent? Can you hesitate? What is the world, if your soul must perish in hell? What is your life? A brittle thread. And once broken, what is the eternity before you? Oh, look at your approaching doom! How certain—how inevitable! See it in God’s declarations—see it in that wreck of souls which sin spreads around you—see it in the stabilities of God’s eternal throne—see it in that attribute of holiness which con-

stitutes his own divinity—see it in your own character, in the hell that is within you. It must come. You must perish. How powerless the desire of man! How, resistless the decree of God!

XXI.

IMMEDIATE REPENTANCE PRACTICABLE.

2 CORINTHIANS vi. 2.

“Behold, now is the day of salvation.”

DURING the present life the character of every child of Adam will be formed and fixed for eternity. Of no part of this short and fleeting probation can we be sure, save the passing moment. While, therefore, the Scriptures represent man as a prisoner of hope so long as life lasts, they assign to the present moment the unspeakable importance of being that portion of life in which, and perhaps the only one in which, his salvation can be secured.

On this subject there are two practical errors on the part of impenitent men, which are equally fatal. The most common, perhaps, is, that repentance is a duty which may as well be done at one time as at another; that it is a work of such easy and sure accomplishment, that little or no danger attends the delay of it. Hence such multitudes, under the light of salvation, sleep on in sin and die forever. The other error, not less fatal, and very common, is, that *present* repentance is utterly out of the question—a thing on their part utterly hopeless at the present time, and, as a present act, to be entirely despaired of. This is fatal, because under this view of his condition not an effort to obtain salvation would ever be made by a human being. Who will attempt to do at any moment what at that moment he despairs of doing?

The text, by clear implication, teaches what may be called the present practicability of salvation.

The season denominated “the day of salvation” is that in

which salvation may be obtained; and when it is said, "Now is the day of salvation," we are plainly taught that the time in which this blessing may be secured is the present time.

The doctrine contained in the text is, that—

The sinner is authorized to regard immediate compliance with the terms of salvation, as a practicable duty.

From this statement of the doctrine it may be understood to apply to man, both as a moral agent and as dependent on divine grace; and in this large sense it is intended that it should be understood. That is practicable to man which he has power to perform. If, therefore, he is a moral agent, then he has power to perform every duty which God requires, and is therefore fully authorized to regard immediate compliance with the terms of salvation as a duty which *can* be done.

When I say that immediate compliance with the terms of salvation is to be regarded as a duty practicable to the sinner, viewed as dependent on divine grace, I do not mean that there are not some sinners who never will be brought to repentance. Doubtless there are many such. Neither do I intend to assert that any thing which the sinner will do without renewing grace, creates an absolute certainty or even a strong probability, that his heart will be changed. But I mean that he has ample warrant for the conclusion that compliance with the terms of salvation, is an event which may take place the next moment.

I. There is no decisive proof to the contrary.

The fact that God judicially abandons some to final impenitence, is no warrant to any individual to conclude that *he* is thus abandoned. Many a sinner has awful reason to fear that such is his case; but God has nowhere so designated his case—nowhere, either in his word or providence, so marked out any individual as already abandoned to hopeless impenitence, as to warrant the absolute conclusion that such is his unhappy condition.

Further, the doctrine of regeneration furnishes no decisive proof on the point in question. The doctrine of regeneration

is, that the grace of God is necessary—necessary through the sinner's perverseness in sin—to bring the sinner to repentance. But the necessity of such influence is no proof that it will not be given. It is necessary that God should preserve life, but no one infers from this necessity that his life will not be preserved.

Again, the doctrine of election furnishes no proof that God will not give repentance to the sinner. The doctrine is, that God has determined to give repentance to some, even to many, of our guilty race. But surely the purpose of the unchangeable God to give repentance to some, is no proof that he will not give repentance to any, nor, of course, that he will not give it to this or that particular person. True, if you are not elected, you will not repent. But possibly you may be elected. God has determined that the life of multitudes shall not be prolonged another day. This surely is no proof to any individual that *he* will die before night.

Again, the doctrine of God's sovereignty in the dispensation of his Spirit, is no proof that he will not now give the sinner repentance. So far from it, that it can be shown that this doctrine is peculiarly fitted to urge the sinner to instant duty.

Three views of the dispensation of the Spirit may be taken. One, that God will wait and be ready to grant his Spirit whenever the sinner is ready to receive it. The second, that he will not now grant repentance. The third, that he will do as he pleases—give or not give, as it seemeth good in his sight. Now, to illustrate the tendency of these views, let us suppose a case. Suppose a man wishes to go from one place to another by steamboat, and that on the most urgent and important business. Suppose, also, like every sinner, he has some business of less consequence which he would be glad to transact before he sets off. Suppose, now, he sends a servant to the captain of the boat to see whether he will not accommodate him in this respect by waiting half an hour, and the captain to return one of the following answers: first, "That he will wait as he wishes." Now he goes quietly to his business here

instead of hastening to the boat. Or, "He will not wait a moment beyond the hour." The man looks at his watch and finds it too late; it cannot be done now; and all is despair, and of course no effort. But the third answer is, "He will do as he pleases;" and now he looks at his watch and sees that he may reach the boat and he may not. Now he runs; he flies. Not a moment must be lost. So the sinner, if he believes he can safely defer, he will defer. If there is no hope from present action he will not act. But when by immediate action he may succeed, and by delay all may be lost, then, if ever, will he hasten to his God and Saviour.

Further, the number and aggravations of the sins of an individual is no proof that God will not give him repentance. Were his guilt so great, as persons sometimes imagine, that God cannot *pardon*, then, indeed, it might be true that God would not grant *converting* grace. But to warrant this conclusion, even in such a case, the person must know the fact that such is the degree of his guilt, a fact which God never reveals, and concerning which he never furnishes to any individual in this life the means of deciding. Nor is this all. The premises are false. God *can* pardon the greatest as well as the least sinner. Atoning blood is sufficient for the forgiveness of a world. In heaven there is room for all. The invitation extends over this revolted world and summons every dweller on the face of it to accept of the great salvation.

Once more. The want of conviction is no proof that immediate repentance is impracticable. What is conviction? A deep sense of guilt and ruin. What length of time, then, is necessary that one who knows that he is a sinner against God, and justly condemned to eternal death, may feel it? What if he saw his body in the same danger in which his soul is; how long before he would feel that? In an instant. And what is certain in one case is possible in the other—yea, certain in the other, if he did not resist the power of the truth which he believes. There is not a sinner in this assembly who would not this moment be an awakened sinner, did he not

shut out that light from heaven which discloses to him his guilt and his condemnation. The want of conviction, then, does not render immediate repentance impracticable.

Nor is it a proof that immediate repentance is impracticable, that conviction has continued long, but to no salutary purpose. It is no uncommon fact that sinners have been long impressed with religious things without being converted. They seem, in their own language, to have done every thing which they can do, to give their hearts to God, but all to no purpose, and hence conclude the event to be impossible. Now, there is much reason to believe that this state of mind has, in many instances, been followed by immediate repentance. It is, therefore, no proof that the same may not be true in other instances. A degree of self-righteousness, or pride, or something else, may have occasioned the failure of all past efforts. The next effort may be without such defect—the next effort may surmount all former obstacles—the next effort, though a thousand previous efforts have been vain, may be that by which, through the grace of God, the work will be done.

I have now considered the principal, if not all the reasons, for the opinion that immediate repentance is impracticable. If the remarks be just, this opinion has not the shadow of evidence for its support.

I shall now proceed to offer—

II. Some direct proof of our doctrine.

1. The text, and many similar declarations.

We have already remarked that the text clearly implies that there is a time when salvation may be secured. Similar declarations will readily occur to every reader of the Scriptures. Now, it is incredible that God should so decisively and frequently declare that there is a time, even the present, when salvation is attainable, and yet have left the sinner to believe that present compliance with the terms on which the blessing is offered, is utterly impracticable. Let any one read the declaration from God, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation," and say whether he can

deny the possibility of his repenting this moment, without charging God with falsehood!

2. The commands of God.

God *now* commandeth all men everywhere to repent. All the commands of God impose present obligation, and urge to immediate obedience. Now, when the commands of God in this form meet us on every page of this holy book, what is the natural inference? That the immediate submission to these commands is utterly out of the question? That days, and weeks, and months, or even years, must elapse before obedience can be regarded as possible? Why has God issued his commands to men? Is not one reason this, that men should obey them? Does not God design and expect that some at least will obey them? But, surely, none will obey them while they regard obedience as utterly impossible? No matter what the impossibility is. It is true, indeed, that a moral impossibility, or what is the same thing, perverseness of heart, is consistent with obligation to obey. But so long as man believes himself to be subject to such an impossibility, without relief from any source, he will never make an effort at obedience. He will sit still in sullen despondence. Just so certain, then, as God expects men to obey his commands, just so certain is it, that he furnishes no warrant for them to believe that such obedience is impracticable. The most distinct utterance that ever broke from the eternal throne on mortal ears is, "My Son, give me thine heart;" and who shall say that God is not sincere, or that man is doomed to another moment's disobedience?

3. The means used to bring men to compliance.

Not only the commands of God, but all his warnings, all his threatenings, all his rebukes, all his invitations, entreaties, and exhortations, unite with all his providential dispensations, to stop the sinner in his iniquity, and to bring him to an immediate submission to the terms of the gospel. He discloses to him his awful condition. "He that believeth not, is condemned already." He leaves him no ground of hope or

quiet in his present state. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." He reproves him for his continued abuse of his own patience and forbearance toward him. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering?" He reminds him of the shortness and uncertainty of his probation. "What is your life? a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanishes away;" "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow." He unfolds the great principle of the dispensation of the Spirit. "My Spirit shall not always strive." He apprises him of the danger of perverting the admonitions of his word. "He that is often reprov'd, and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." He laments over his wasted day of mercy. "Oh that thou hadst known even thou at least in this thy day." He brings all his tenderness and compassion to touch his heart, and urges it upon his notice, under the solemnity of an oath, saying, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked;" "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" And with all that earnestness of entreaty, and authority of command, and solemnity of warning, as if the present were the only time, he says, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

In his providence, he plants the path of sin with thorns. In his kindness to the sinner, he suffers him not to be completely happy for a moment. He visits with afflictions, to teach the vanity of the world. He pours out his blessings, to conduct to himself as the source of all good. Constantly, suddenly, unexpectedly, he surrounds us with the dead and the dying, and makes us hear his voice, saying, "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." Now, whence is all this? Why does God, in all his efforts to save sinners, thus crowd the concerns of eternity into the present moment? Why, as if there were no other day of hope, does he, as it were, make our eternal all, depend on the present? Is it, that we may believe that some future time will be better fitted to the purpose? Has God thus designated the present

time for the great work of repentance and salvation, and yet is the sinner to suppose that this is the time, and the only time in which the work *cannot* be done? That some future time will be even better than the present? or is he to believe as God would have him believe, that if he ever can repent, he can repent now?

4. I appeal to facts.

I do not here appeal merely to facts as they fall under our own observation. From these we are liable to derive very different and often erroneous conclusions. Could we look with an omniscient eye into the mind of the converted sinner, we should probably often find the process of thought and feeling very diverse from what we are accustomed to suppose. Be this as it may, facts, as they fall under our observation, furnish a very doubtful source of argument respecting the methods of divine grace, compared with facts recorded by the Spirit of truth. Let us, then, appeal to these. How long after Peter preached on the day of Pentecost was it before three thousand of his hearers repented? It was on the same day. How long after Paul spake to women on the side of the river at Philippi, before Lydia repented? While he was yet speaking the Lord opened her heart, that she attended to the things spoken by Paul. How long after the jailor asked, "What must I do to be saved?" and was answered by the same apostle, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," before he received the Saviour? It was "the same hour of the night." Many other instances might be mentioned. Indeed, the whole history of the progress of the gospel exhibits this, as the uniform method of divine grace in converting sinners. Do you say these were miraculous conversions? I reply first, that your assertion is without proof. Secondly, if these recorded instances do not unfold the method of God's grace, we have no sure instruction on the subject. And thirdly, that where we find similar causes we find similar effects, in every age. It would be easy to show, did time permit, that under that kind of preaching which most resembles

the preaching of the apostles, that sudden conversions have always been common. Here, then, we have plain matters of fact. No sooner has the gospel been brought before the minds of sinners—no sooner have their guilt, their obligations, and their duty been shown to them, and urged upon their conscience, than they have repented. What has occurred on this subject, may occur again. And the sinner, when divine truth is brought home to his conscience, has as much reason to think that in that same hour he may repent, as the jailor had.

5. Evidence to the same point is furnished by the nature of the subject, and the providence of God.

Compliance with the terms of salvation, whether we consider it as repentance or faith, or love, or regeneration, is an effect produced by the instrumentality of divine truth. Reasoning, then, from the nature of the human mind, and the nature of divine truth, how long a time should we naturally conclude would be requisite for such truth as God's truth to take effect? How long a time is necessary, when a man is told that his house is on fire, to secure the influence of the truth?—or if his property, or his life is in danger, to feel such truth? How much longer time should we reasonably suppose would be necessary for him to feel the truth, that his soul is under God's righteous condemnation, and exposed to eternal perdition? How much longer to feel the truth, that there is an all-sufficient and glorious Saviour able and ready to save? How much longer to intrust his soul to his keeping? How much longer, with the glories of a perfect God revealed, to love him? How much longer with the odious and abominable nature of sin exhibited, to hate that? Plainly, an affection or purpose of the heart a week or an hour long in the forming, would be as much of an anomaly in religion as in any other concern. No; it is a thing which, if done at all, must be done at once—done, as it were, in an indivisible moment. Why, then, so far as time is concerned, may not this purpose be taken now, and taken once for all?

So far as the nature of the mind is concerned, or the nature

of the thing to be done, it were natural to suppose that man should feel such truth as God's truth, as soon, and as powerfully as any other truth, and act accordingly. But the objection arises—sin has benumbed the moral sensibilities of the soul—the depraved heart resists the truth of God. Yes; and it always will, so long as you think it must. Yes; the depraved heart does resist. But is it not the very office and work of the Spirit of God to remove this insensibility, and overcome this resistance? Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Do you know that he is not even now striving to do it, and that with your consent he would not do it? Do you know that this moment, of all the future moments of your probation, is not the brightest with hope? Can you assign any reason why God will not give effect to divine truth to-day, as well as to-morrow? The longer the sinner resists the Holy Ghost, the more he multiplies his provocations; the longer he despises the authority of God, and rejects the Lord Jesus Christ, the less likely is that divine agent to renew the sinner's heart. Will accumulated guilt, years of rebellion, violence to conscience, obduracy of heart, habitual hardihood in despising God, and heaven, and hell, prepare the way for converting grace? But you say, will he do it to-day? That is not the question. Are you sure that if you awake, as you may, to your eternal concerns, and bring yourself in sober earnest to the work of giving your heart to God, that by the power of the Holy Ghost you will not do it? Is not God on a throne of grace—is he not reigning there to carry on the work of redemption, to regenerate and sanctify, and save just such sinners as you? Open your eyes, see the hundreds around you who were going in the same path to hell in which you are; but who, by the grace of God, are now humble penitents for sin, devoted believers in the Lord Jesus, and fellow-heirs of his glory. And is *your* repentance impossible? See God on the mercy-seat, hear his declaration that now is the day of salvation. Listen to his calls and entreaties, consider what he has done and is now doing to bring you to repentance—look at facts as recorded on the sacred

page—reflect on the nature of the subject, and survey the scene of divine wonders spread around you—these monuments of the grace of a present God ; and who is the sinner, in this house, of whom it can be said by man or angel, that he may not repent before yonder sun shall go down ?

REMARKS.

1. We see the folly of those who refuse all efforts in the work of their salvation, on the ground that success is uncertain.

Many there are who flatter themselves that they would begin the work of turning to God, in solemn earnest, were they sure of success ; but the fear of failure and of shame holds them back. So long as God in his word and his providence authorizes sinners to regard their salvation as possible, so long it is folly approaching madness to sleep in sin. More than this they ought not, in friendship to themselves, to desire—more than this, God in kindness to them does not authorize. Such is their love of the world, and such their love of quiet in sin, that were there a certain connection between any efforts of sinners and their salvation, such efforts would never be made. Sloth, then, stupidity and inaction, because the success of their efforts is uncertain, is perverting the most salutary truth—truth, which in its adaptation to its end, bespeaks the riches of the mercy that revealed it—truth, than which, God in mercy to the sinner, could reveal no other. Appeal to common sense in all other cases. You are sinking in the waves, with the bare possibility of deliverance through the utmost exertion ; would you, therefore, relinquish effort ? A falling rock is descending from the precipice that hangs over your head ; a bare possibility of escape is all that is left. Sitting still, you must be crushed in instant death ; will you, therefore, make no effort to move ? Like this, my hearers, is the situation, such is the folly of those of you who yet remain stupid in sin. Hell and destruction are just before you.

“Now of a long time your destruction lingereth not, your damnation slumbereth not.” Sleep a little longer, and you are lost, lost forever. “Behold, now is the day of salvation.”

2. When ministers exhort sinners to immediate repentance, they ought to be understood to mean what they say.

Plainly, as such exhortations are founded in the unerring truth of God, and as plainly, too, as they contain substantially the only true and proper directions to be given, they are often regarded as insincere, as strange, inapplicable, or even as the result of artifice. So erroneous are the views of many of the doctrines of dependence on the grace of God, so inconsistent are these views with the obligation and practicability of immediate repentance, that they can hardly persuade themselves that ministers who confine their directions to this duty are sincere and honest. But they are sincere, they are honest, they mean exactly what they say. And if the dependence of the sinner on the grace of God, is consistent with the practicability of repentance—if it be true, when we thus instruct sinners in their duty, that God peradventure may give them repentance, why doubt either our honesty or consistency? The apostles were sincere, and the Lord Jesus Christ was sincere, when they gave such exhortations. God is sincere when he commands sinners to repent. And, my hearers, if I know my own heart at all, if I am sincere in any thing, I am when, in the name of God, I exhort you to repent, and to repent *now*. I disclaim all duplicity. I mean as I say. I do not intend *merely* that you should be awakened, merely that you should be more deeply convicted, more distressed for sin, more alarmed. I mean that you should repent, and repent *now*. I mean that you should regard it as a concern now on hand, and put yourself to it with all the urgency which becomes a work so momentous—a work which may be done—which ought to be done, and which must be done, or you must be damned. Always, whether in the pulpit, or on other occasions, when I exhort you to repent or believe, to give up your heart to God, and to do it at once—do me the justice to

believe that I mean as I say—believe that at that moment it is possible that you should repent. For, if that moment never comes in which you shall believe, that you may repent, and must repent, you never will, but will perish.

3. We see the guilt and danger of those who deny the practicability of immediate repentance, and thus persist in their sins.

This is a common perversion. Many there are who tell us, in reply to the rightful claims of God, that a new heart, repentance, &c., are his gift, that they cannot repent themselves, but must wait God's time. And what is this but casting the blame of their continued impenitence upon God, a justifying plea for their continued rebellion against him? And is it so? Are men free moral agents, fully qualified to do their duty, and accountable to God? Do they know who God is; what his law is; what his gospel is; and can they vindicate their impenitence by the plea of inability? Do they believe that not themselves but God has been to blame all this time for their continued impenitence? They know better. To all the guilt of a life of rebellion against God, they add the guilt of knowingly, impiously, and falsely casting the blame on God. They cherish that perverseness of heart against God, that determined spirit of rebellion which all the motives in the universe cannot subdue, and then plead it as a justifying inability—make their very guilt their vindication, their very desert of hell their title to eternal life. Nor are their guilt and opposition to God less obvious in another light. Where has God told them, that their immediate repentance is impracticable; where has God told them that so far as his grace is necessary that such grace is not ready, and has not always been; and how, when they appear at his bar, will they be able to prove it, and thus to make out the truth of their plea, and that the real, only difficulty did not lie in the hostility of the heart? Beyond this, so long as you indulge the thought that you cannot repent now, you never will repent. My hearers, if any of you are indulging notions like these, I warn you be-

forehand that the judgment-day will correct your error. It will then appear that you were a complete moral agent, fully qualified to do your duty; that you loved the world better than God; and when the question shall be asked, why did you not love God, believe on his Son, and repent of sin, your mouth will be stopped by the consciousness that you ought to have done it, might have done it, and would not do it. It will then appear also, that God never authorized the conclusion that his grace was not ready; that it is a device of your own to escape from your duty to God your Saviour, and that you knew it to be so. It will then appear that you never put this question, concerning the readiness of God's grace, fairly to the test of experience, never spent one day or hour in solemn, earnest efforts to give your heart to God. Your guilt as a moral agent, and as dependent on the grace of God, will be uncovered, assembled worlds will approve the sentence of your Judge, and you, in all the horrors of anticipation, will go away to the reality of a double damnation.

4. "Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."

Fellow-sinner, if you cannot repent to-day, when can you? Now, God waits to be gracious. Now, in all the sincerity of infinite love, salvation with eternal glory is offered. Now, with all the yearnings of a parent, over froward, ruined children, with all the tenderness of a redeeming God, you are entreated to turn and live. And if you cannot repent to-day, when can you? Now, your sins are fewer, your provocations less; now, you have the use of every faculty; now, the truths of God are known to you; now, the interests of eternity are in your thoughts; now, your obligation to repent is felt; now, your guilt is felt; now, you are half resolved to begin the work in earnest; now, you are convinced that it ought to be done, and must be done—that nothing will be lost, that every thing will be gained by the doing of it. And if you cannot repent now, when can you? Now God commands, Jesus invites, the Holy Ghost strives—all holy beings look with deep

solicitude upon you. Saints pray; angels have sung in rapturous song the proclamation of "GOOD WILL" to the guilty and the lost. Jesus hath wept over them, and still follows them with the entreaties of his love. Heaven lifts up its everlasting doors and throws open its everlasting gates. God hath laid aside his terrors, and comes, a beseeching suppliant, to his wayward children; he has cleared away the darkness and storm from his throne, and looks upon you with the aspect, the smile of inviting love. The broad flag of peace and reconciliation floats on heaven's high portals, crowns of life attract, thrones of glory allure, palms of victory, robes of righteousness, and songs, and bliss, and joy forevermore, invite you to God's eternal presence; and now, with his commission in his stead, *for* God and in his name, we beseech you to receive his great salvation. To-morrow, you may be dead; to-morrow may look upon your body in the grave, and on your soul in the pit of anguish and despair; to-morrow, and the Holy Ghost, who now touches your heart and makes you sober and solemn, may, for your rejecting this offer of mercy, never touch that heart again. If you cannot repent now, when can you?

XXII.

ON STRIVING TO ENTER IN AT THE STRAIT GATE.

LUKE xiii. 24.

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

WITH great propriety and force our Lord often represented human life, under the image of a journey through this world into that which is eternal. In his sermon on the mount, he adopts this metaphor, and in a manner equally just and alarming, exhibits the different courses which men pursue through this world, and the different ends to which death at last conducts them. “Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way which leadeth to destruction; and many there be which go in thereat, because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

The instruction of this passage is substantially the same as that given in our text.

One had asked our Lord, “Are there few that be saved?” Without satisfying his curiosity by a direct reply, he aimed to impress those around him, with the far less importance of knowing how many others would be saved, than of knowing how they themselves might be saved. He said unto them, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

To all who view themselves as still going in the broad way to destruction, it is a question of deepest interest—how shall they escape that way, and enter the path of life? It is a

question which any one must tremble to answer, were he not guided by the decisions of inspired truth. We consider the text as one of the plainest and most simple forms in which this great subject is presented in the sacred volume. It will not mislead us, for it is the direction of eternal mercy, of everlasting truth.

My design is—

First, To explain; and

Second, To enforce the exhortation.

I. To explain it.

By *the strait gate*, we are to understand the entrance into that way which leads to life; and *to enter in* at the strait gate denotes the commencement of holiness in the heart of man. The same thing is denoted by conversion—by making a new heart—by giving God the heart—by reconciliation to God—by repentance for sin—by faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. These are substantially one and the same thing, varying only as the particular object before the mind varies; and, therefore, either may be used with exact propriety, as they are in the Scriptures, to denote the commencement of holiness in the soul of man—and what, in our text, is represented under the figure of entering in at the strait gate. Qu.?

It may be remarked, that some expositors understand by the strait gate, the entrance into the heavenly city. Whether it be so or not, it makes no material difference in the nature of the duty enjoined. For it is only by repentance and faith, by the surrendering of the heart to God, and a life of holy obedience; *i. e.*, by the vigorous use of the powers of the moral agent, that an entrance into that world can be obtained. The gate is said to be *strait* or *difficult*, on account of the difficulties of entering it. The expression is designed to show us, that to commence a religious course is difficult. The difficulty arises, not from the nature of religion, but from the depravity of the heart. Are we required to turn to God, to make to ourselves a new heart, to put off the old man, and to put on the new man—compliance is difficult, because the de-

mand finds the heart supremely set on the world. The world has governed the affections and formed the character. To hate at once what we have always loved, to renounce what we have always eagerly pursued, and what we are still pursuing with unabated attachment and ardor—to withdraw the whole man from objects of supreme affection—and thus, as it respects character, to demolish and annihilate the old man, and yield the whole man to the influence of objects for which we have hitherto had no affection, and under their transforming influence assume a new character—to put on the new man, as it were by a creative act of our own—is truly difficult.

No truth has come home with more entire conviction than this, to the mind of every one, who has made the experiment, and learned by trial the strength of indwelling sin. The thoughts have so long flowed in one channel, and the affections so long been riveted to the objects of earth—God, and Christ, and heaven have been so little thought of, have excited so few sensibilities, they are so removed by distance, so lost in obscurity; and all this has become such a fixed state, such a habitude of the soul, that the moment the sinner attempts to bring himself under the transforming power of divine realities, a wall of separation rises in his path, and he sees that much, much is to be broken off, broken through, resisted, and overcome, if he would enter the strait gate and narrow way which leads to life. If any one denies the difficulties of the work, we would ask him, at least, not to be too confident till he has tried it.

Hence the text requires us to “*strive* to enter in at the strait gate.” The word *strive* is one of the most significant terms used in the Bible to denote the highest possible exertion. The original word signifies literally to agonize. It implies the act of strenuous contest with the most powerful antagonist, and forcibly shows us in its connection that, to reach the crown of life, we must break and force our way to it by a sort of holy desperation of effort. Or, to drop all metaphor, the sinner is required to summon all the powers of his soul to the

performance of his duty, and to put himself upon the utmost exertion, of which as a moral being he is capable, in the work of turning to God. His understanding, as the faculty by which he is qualified to see his duty; his obligations and the objects of holy affection; his conscience, as that by which obligation is felt, with all the sensibilities of the soul by which hope and fear and desire are felt; his will or heart, as that by which he chooses and refuses, loves and hates, are all to be summoned to their appropriate office, and charged to perform their appropriate part in this great work, on pain of eternal death.

1. The understanding must be duly employed.

God has given man understanding, that he might perceive the nature of his duty and his obligations to perform it. He has presented them both in the light of heaven, and man is therefore bound to see and understand them both. But how shall the truths of God's revelation, the great realities, in view of which man must act if he act as God requires, bring their influence to bear on the soul, unless man turn his attention toward them, and by abstraction of thought from earthly objects, and by intent meditation on the powers of the world to come, he acquire some just views of their nature and their importance? Will God abandon his moral government, and cause truth to take effect on the *mind* that does not perceive that truth? Will he transform the subjects of his moral government into machines, tarnish his glories and prostrate his throne, by becoming the mover of passive recipients of influence, the superintendent of the laws of matter and motion; or will he maintain his high supremacy as the governor of intelligent beings, and reign over subjects formed in his own image, according to the laws of such a jurisdiction? But such a government cannot be administered without the intervention of truth or motives, and if truth and motives are to have any influence on man, they must be seen and thought of. They must enter the mind, and become objects of fixed contemplation. No matter with what clearness a man's duty and obli-

gations are set before him—no matter what objects are presented as objects of affection; so long as the mind shuts its eye or turns it away, it is to no purpose that heaven is opened and hell uncovered. With some steady inspection he must look in on the glories of the one, and downward on the horrors of the other, and, with wakeful eye and vigorous footstep, trace the way of life. This demands effort. All, then, that man as an intelligent being is capable of doing to obtain just views of his duty and of his obligations—just views of himself, of God, of the Saviour, of all that truth which is designed to influence him as a moral being, must be done. No one who neglects to do this can be said to comply with the precept in the text.

2. Conscience must perform its appropriate part in connection with all the moral sensibilities of the soul.

By this I intend that all that power or capacity in man by which he is qualified to feel his obligations, the motives to obedience, or, in a word, to feel the force of divine truth, must be yielded to the impression of the objects of feeling—*i. e.*, the mind must take the impression. Every one knows that it is in the power of the mind to repress feeling—to restrain and check sensibility. In vain are the truths of God studied and understood as matters of cold speculation. A seared conscience and a hardened insensibility must render the clearest perceptions of truth wholly ineffectual. When the eye of the understanding, then, is fixed on the duties which the sinner owes to God, his conscience must also perform its office in feeling his obligations to perform what is required. Conscience must open the soul to the weight of obligation which lies on the sinner to obey his God; he must bare his guilty bosom to the arrows of conviction, and let them strike and fasten and thrill in the conscience. He must come to this point as one from which he cannot retreat, and yield to the weight of his obligations, as that which, like the pressure of great mountains, he cannot shake off. It is for this very purpose that God has given man a conscience. Conscience, then, must per-

form the part for which it is given. It is a faculty of the soul without which man cannot act as a moral being. So of all the sensibilities of the mind to the objects which God presents to the mind that they may be felt. Without the due exercise of these—without employing them for the great purpose of feeling obligation to his God and his Saviour—feeling what God made the mind to feel—no one can be said to *strive* in the sense of the text.

3. *The will or the heart*—that faculty of the soul by which man chooses and refuses, loves and hates—is also to be properly exerted.

Merely to perceive duty and to feel the obligation to perform it, are not enough to constitute that striving which the text enjoins. This implies the utmost exertion of every faculty which has any concern with the great work to be done. To such an exertion the power of the soul to perform voluntary acts, to love and to choose, must then also be summoned. Since man is a complete moral agent, possessing all the powers of such an agent, no reason can be assigned why any one faculty or power of the soul should not be required to perform its appropriate part in an act of duty, as well as another. Now, the heart is the whole moral man; it determines the whole character. The right exercise of the heart is the very substance and soul of duty. And by what prerogative is this faculty to be exempted from its appropriate exercise? What plea is to be offered to excuse the heart of an intelligent, accountable being, as man is, from loving that God and Saviour when revealed to his clear apprehension? What authority can put an interdict upon the heart, when the most distinct utterance that ever burst from the eternal throne on mortal ears is, “My son, give me thine heart.” Unless the heart, then, be put to the act of yielding its affections, there cannot be that striving which the text demands.

I will only add an example or two in further explanation.

By a clear revelation from heaven God is presented to man as the great object of affection. Would you love that Being?

Bring your understanding to some distinct apprehension of his excellence—open your conscience to the full weight of your obligations, and summon the voluntary powers of the soul to the greatest possible effort, actually to fix your affections on that Being. And when you look, and still look, and see God as he is—see him, as it were, face to face—let the glories which enrapture all heaven touch your heart.

Again, in the same revelation a Saviour from sin and hell is presented as an object of trust or confidence. Bring, then, your thoughts to a clear apprehension of the loveliness and all-sufficiency of that Saviour, welcome a full sense of your obligation to trust him, and of the guilt and the woes of a refusal, and while he throws wide the embrace of his mercy by an unqualified act of affectionate confidence, commit that polluted soul, that guilty soul, to Jesus' everlasting arms.

Again: the nature of sin, the character of the sinner, is plainly presented. The moral character of moral beings consists in the governing principle of action. Of these principles there are but two. The one is the principle of benevolence—good-will; the other is the principle of selfishness. One the principle which formed the character of the man Christ Jesus—that perfect character—that model of all perfection—that most beautiful, lovely object that the created universe presents to our admiration and our love. This is the principle which would bless the creation—that gives perfection in character and blessedness to beings created in God's image. The other the principle of selfishness—a spirit that fixes on our own individual gratification, to the exclusion of all other good—a principle, of course, which in its very nature would sacrifice God and all other good, to secure its own object—a principle which in this world is covered up, restrained and tolerated. But uncover it—take off the mask and expose its true nature—and you see the most odious and revolting object in the universe. You see a principle which arms its subject against God, against man and against all good—the principle which in one form makes the robber and the assassin and the

cold-blooded incendiary; in another form the hero and the conqueror, desolating kingdoms, filling a world with widows and with orphans—which breaks human hearts, and covers the earth with human blood and human corpses, and triumphs in its own achievements—the very spirit that murdered the Son of God—the very spirit of infernals, and that will mutter blasphemies against God forever—aye, the very fire of the pit, that consumes under a sense of perpetual anguish. Now, this is sin—this the principle, the character of the sinner; *your* principle, your character, your heart, fellow-sinner. Would you repent? Look at yourself, think of yourself, with such a heart; and in this view of yourself, abhor yourself, and with sorrow—with ingenuous sorrow—renounce all sin forever, and assume a new principle, a new character. Be in character like Christ.

The same general directions respect every other duty which God requires of man.

Such being the nature of that striving which is inculcated in the text, I proceed—

II. To enforce the injunction.

1. It is a command of God.

I need not say that the duty is inculcated in the text. It is also inculcated in every other divine precept. Take, for example, the similar precept, "Enter in at the strait gate." Now, as no one can enter in at the strait gate without *striving* to do so—*i. e.*, without the efforts and acts of a moral being—the command to enter in clearly implies all that is contained in the command to "strive to enter in." So also the commands to *repent*, to *believe*, to *love*, clearly imply what in the text is denominated striving. For no one can repent without striving to repent; no one can believe without striving to believe; no one can love without striving to love. The very thing commanded is action—a given exertion of the moral faculties of the soul. The duty, then, of striving to enter in at the strait gate is enforced by the full authority of every precept of God.

2. The command is perfectly reasonable.

The requisition is, that man should do that, neither more nor less, which, as a moral being, he is qualified to do; that he should put those moral faculties which God has given him upon their appropriate exertions; in a word, that he summon all the faculties of his soul to the single point of doing as well as he can do. And, I ask, can such an exertion of either faculty of the soul be reasonably dispensed with? Ought not man to employ his understanding to learn his duty? Ought he not so to exercise the faculty of conscience, that he shall feel the full weight of his obligations; and ought not the will or heart to be so exerted as to choose and love what is right, as well as the understanding in seeing, and the conscience in feeling, what is right? Mark, my brethren, the question is not, what man will do; nor what, on account of his obstinacy, it is necessary for God to do for him. But it is, what ought man to do? Ought he to do his utmost—ought he to do all he can do? Yes. It is the voice of reason, the voice of conscience, the voice of men and of angels, it is the voice of the God that made him, and that will judge him—**HE OUGHT.**

3. It is only by compliance with the precept in the text, that man will perform his duty, and secure his salvation.

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for, I say unto you, many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” This clearly implies that any thing short of striving will prove utterly ineffectual. All who shall *seek* the favor of God and eternal life without striving, *i. e.*, *seek* these blessings without that full, and vigorous, and appropriate exertion of all the moral faculties of the soul, must fail of final salvation. This is plain from the nature of the case. If duty is not seen, if obligation is not felt, if the will or heart does not comply, no obedience is, or can be rendered. The obedience which God requires is the result of intelligence, and of a sense of obligation, and implies the homage of the heart. If, therefore, we suppose either the understanding, or conscience, or heart to fail in the performance of its appropriate part in any action,

no duty is performed. A blinded mind, a seared conscience, a hard, rebellious heart are, each and all, the just objects of God's abhorrence. It is through failure in some one or all of these respects, that so many seek salvation here, and will seek to be admitted into heaven hereafter, who will be finally thrust out by the awful sentence from the lips of the Judge: "I know you not, whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."

On the other hand, the text clearly implies that they who do strive to enter in, shall be able. Indeed, to suppose that man should do his utmost to obey God, and yet not obey, and thus fail of salvation, were alike absurd and impious. Absurd, because it supposes that man ought to do more than he can do; and impious, because it makes God a hard master, "reaping where he has not sowed, and gathering where he has not strewed." Besides, he who should exert himself to the utmost extent of his powers, would perform what God requires; for his requisitions are exactly limited by the powers of man. "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength." Here, you see, the very thing required is the moral energy of man, in the exercise of right affections toward God. If, then, we would obey God's commandments, and obtain eternal life—if we would not remain guilty of his whole law—if we would not live in constant rebellion against the Almighty, and in constant exposure to his wrath, we must bring all the powers and faculties of the soul to the single point of duty, and ply their utmost energies to its performance.

4. I would further enforce the injunction, from the case of those who make *no efforts* to perform the duty, and *the manner* in which the divine Spirit converts the sinner.

It is a momentous fact—a fact which, in one respect, even after all the displays of mercy in the work of redemption, saves this guilty world from the midnight of despair—that the Spirit of God renews the heart of man through the truth. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." The

very object, and the only object, for which the Spirit strives with sinners, is to give truth its proper effect on the mind, the conscience, and the heart; and the thing, and the only thing, which he does, in regeneration, is actually to secure this effect. But how? Does the Spirit of God give effect to truth, when that truth is unthought of; and when the sinner effectually shuts it away, alike from his understanding, and his conscience, and his heart? Has such a thing ever been known or heard of, in all the earth, that God has converted a *stupid* sinner, continuing stupid? Is there one such on earth—one such among the redeemed in glory? Not one. Even the miraculous conversion of Saul of Tarsus, was not effected till he was an awakened, distressed sinner. Will God ever convert a sinner in this state? Convert them, when treating the message of his grace with deliberate contempt and pointed scorn—when they suffer their thoughts to roam to all the trifles of earth and time, and never even compliment the message of eternal mercy so much as to think of it? And even, when sounded in their ears by the voice of the living God, with all its terrors and all its grace, make less of it than of the whistling of the breeze? Will the Spirit of God convert such sinners? Nay more; I ask, *can he* convert them? No. It involves a contradiction in the very nature of things. A sinner love God, while he never thinks of God—a sinner believe in the Saviour, while he does not think of a Saviour? The Spirit bring the sinner to do such things? Never. I care not what else may be true of him, if he does not bring himself to this very point, the actual surrender of his heart to God—he resists the Holy Ghost, and takes a most fearful step toward everlasting damnation. Elect or non-elect, while he sleeps in sin, God will not convert him. Elect or non-elect, so sure as there is a hell, he is the victim of its indignation and wrath, its tribulation and its anguish.

On the contrary, let the sinner awake to the great concern of his salvation, and his case is not hopeless. Let the terrors of God, which he has thrown around the idol of his heart,

detach his affections from it—let him, under the pressure of his necessities, as a guilty, self-ruined sinner, bring himself to the point of complying with the terms of mercy—let him put his understanding to some just apprehension of God, and of the Saviour—let him open his conscience to the weight of his obligations—let him ply his heart with the exercise of holy affections—let him take it up as a concern now on hand, and put himself to it with the urgency of a present achievement, as that which may now be done, and which must be done, and may as well be done now as ever, as that which, if it cannot be done now, there is not a particle of reason to think it ever can be done—let him thus put himself, the whole man, to the point of duty; and who shall say, that it will not be done? “Peradventure God will give him repentance.” Neither man nor angel can say, that in that same hour, or even moment, such a sinner will not become an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ.

REMARKS.

1. This subject shows us that the sinner may become a Christian soon, and how he may do so.

It is thought by many to be a question of some difficulty, “How shall I repent?” or “How shall I believe?” I answer, first, *not* by remaining ignorant of what is to be done, nor of the way to do it. Ignorance, mistake here, will be death. I answer again, not as some very erroneously imagine, by waiting for God to convert you. It is a very common mistake to suppose, that sinners are to take the attitude of *passive recipients of grace*, waiting for God to impart some gift, they know not what, but shall know when it comes; and are, in the mean time, to look, and wish, and pray, till the blessing comes. Sad and fatal mistake. Religion, whether it be called repentance, faith, a new heart or love to God, is *action, mental, moral action*. The sinner, to become the subject of either, must *act it*. What the Holy Spirit does, is not to impart a gift merely to a passive subject, a mere receiver, but to move a free moral agent

to act—to act as a moral agent. And can it be, that all the calls of mercy, and all the thunders of wrath which God sounds in the ears of sleeping guilt, only say, “Sleep on; and sleep away your hours of probation, waiting for the Holy Ghost to convert you?” Oh, no, no, no, my hearers. The sinner must act, or the sinner must die. God will not repent for him, nor love for him, nor believe for him. He must awake and begin, and begin with the earnestness of a dying immortal falling into damnation. God tells you in every command of his authority and every entreaty of his love—and every voice that speaketh from heaven says, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate”—and every voice of truth on earth echoes the mandate. And now, if you will not do your duty in the way in which God has told you to do it, your case is hopeless. This is the way, and the only way, in which it ever was, or ever will be, or ever can be done. God can cause you to do it in no other way. This is the very thing which the Spirit of God strives to bring you to do. If you do not yield and act in this manner you resist the Holy Ghost. Bring, then, all your powers to the subject. Apprehend it; take hold of it as it is. Have done with that idol of your heart. Resolve to take care of your never-dying soul. Put yourself to the point of renouncing sin—of fixing your heart on God—of committing your soul with affectionate confidence to the Lord Jesus Christ. In this work suffer not your understanding, nor your conscience, nor your heart, to fail in its fit and proper exercise. Whatever you find to do—whatever your case requires of knowledge, of more knowledge—of feeling, of more feeling—of decision, of more decision—of the going forth of affection—whatever you find to do in these respects, do it. Do it; because God tells you to do it. Do it; because if you do it as well as you can do it, the work is done. Do it; because there is no other way of doing it. Do it; because though imperfection may mar every effort, yet in this way, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, you may become a child of God and an heir of glory.

2. We see what a fearful condemnation awaits the impenitent sinner.

He is a complete moral agent—possessing all the powers of a moral agent—which qualify for the exalted service and exalted destiny of God's holy kingdom. This will be seen and understood—this will be felt, when he stands before God in judgment. It will be seen—it will be felt—that he was made in God's own image—made to live and act with God, amid the grandeurs of eternity—to be one with him in character and blessedness forever; and the inquiry will be, why have you not loved the all-perfect God; why have you not acted up to the high design of your being? Why, when the character of the all-perfect God was exhibited as an object of affection, why did you not love him? When invited by all the excellence and sufficiency of Jesus the Saviour, did you not trust in him? You have loved the world and sin, and why did you not love the Judge on the throne? And what will he say? Will he deny his moral agency; will he say, I could not; "I knew thee, that thou wert an hard master?" No; he is now conscious of his power as a moral agent; he knows that he ought to love God; and the same consciousness felt—the same fact revealed in the light of the last day—will cover him with shame and confusion of face. But this is not all. It will then appear that the Spirit of God had often entered his heart when he read the Bible; when he heard those thousand rumors; when his friends warned; when some providence admonished him; when driven to his knees, in prayer, for mercy. But it will also appear that he never made one effort to give God his heart. He never did seriously and soberly labor to renounce sin and the world; he never did strive to make a complete surrender of himself to God; and thus he resisted and grieved the Holy Ghost,—thus, with the eyes of the assembled universe—the eyes of his omniscient Judge fixed upon him—his guilt will be uncovered, and his doom pronounced: "Take the unprofitable servant, bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness. There shall be

weeping and gnashing of teeth;" and, as he sinks under the awful sentence, the assembled world will pronounce the solemn *Amen*.

And now, my dear hearers, let me entreat and exhort those who have no hope in Christ to obey the exhortation in the text, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." Remember, that whatever you do, unless you aim to yield to the claims of God, you are fatally resisting the Holy Ghost. Remember, that if you are ever converted by the Spirit of God, it will be when, in view of God's glories, you are striving to give your heart to him. Come, then, my hearers, and thus begin the work of your salvation. Begin now. Summon all your powers, and press them to the work of giving God your heart. If the first attempt fail, repeat it, and repeat it again and again, as often as it shall fail. When you go into your closet, there make the solemn attempt to commit your soul to Christ. If the attempt fails, repeat it with new and increased effort. *On this—oh, on this*—every thing depends. View yourself in what light you will—as a moral agent, or as dependent on the grace of God—this, this is the way. If you sleep in sin, you are lost. If you try to give your heart to God, you may in fact do it. By all your eternal interests, then, I beseech you, if you would not abandon all hope of heaven—if you would not compel me to become as a swift witness against you, and this humble attempt to rouse you to your duty, deepen the accents of final vengeance, "strive to enter in at the strait gate." Bring your whole mind to the act of duty. Did I know that this was the last call of mercy—the last moment of your probation—still I would say, put yourself to the act of duty. And should your first effort fail, and you have another moment's respite, I would say, repeat that effort. And did I hear the noise of the coming judgment, and could I yet hope that a moment more might be given you, still I would say, repeat that effort, and repeat it till you can go to the judgment-seat, and say to the Judge of the quick and the dead, that you have done all you can do.

XXIII.

SALVATION FREE TO THE WILLING.

REVELATION xxii. 17.

“And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

It is a striking instance of the goodness of God, that water, one of the most necessary and valuable gifts of his bounty, is so easily procured. And it is a no less striking instance of his *grace* that the blessings of salvation may be obtained with equal ease.

There is no image under which the freeness of the great salvation, by Jesus Christ, is so often set before us by the inspired writers, and none which could more forcibly exhibit the willingness with which it is bestowed. The text is one instance in which the offer is made under this metaphor: “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” The declaration goes as far as plain common sense would naturally understand it to go. His meaning is, that whosoever you may be, pardon, peace, and eternal life are yours, if you are willing to accept them. “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely;” or, as he declares in the preceding chapter, “I will give unto him that is athirst, of the fountain of the water of life freely.”

I design to show—

First, What it is to be willing to accept of salvation; and,
Second, That the blessing will be freely given to all who are willing to accept it.

I. What it is to be willing to accept of salvation.

This point is important because it is frequently misunder-

stood. To be *willing*, in the sense of the text, is not merely to be willing to escape future misery. In this sense every child of Adam, in proportion as he realizes his exposure to suffering, is willing to escape it.

If this were the condition, every sinner would be saved, for every sinner will sooner or later tremble at the wrath of God. It cannot, therefore, be this sort of willingness that is meant in the text. Nor can it be merely a willingness to be happy. No person can take a serious look into eternity and not be willing to be eternally happy. This desire may exist, and yet be nothing more than a desire to enjoy the heaven of Mohammed—a heaven consisting of the pleasures of sin. This cannot be the sort of willingness to which salvation is promised.

Something more than a desire to escape misery, and to obtain happiness, is implied in this willingness. It is this: the sinner must be willing to accept of the salvation of the gospel—to accept it as it is, not in some of its parts, but as a whole—not something else, but this very thing. Now, the distinguishing features of the salvation of the gospel are, that it is salvation by grace; salvation from sin; salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To be willing, therefore, to accept of salvation, is to be willing to be saved by grace. This implies the absolute and unqualified renunciation of our own righteousness, a deep conviction of our own depravity and guilt, and consequent desert of the wrath of God. No man can be willing to accept of salvation, as altogether of grace, who has a word to say about his good deeds, or his own efforts of any sort. All these must be abandoned as the ground of acceptance, and he must be willing that God should have *all the glory* of his salvation.

He must be willing to accept of salvation from sin. This is a distinguishing feature of the salvation of the gospel. Christ came into the world to save his people from their sins—to save them not only from the wages of sin, but from its dominion. To be willing to accept of his salvation, therefore, implies a desire to be delivered from the dominion of sin. It implies a

hatred of sin for its own sake, and a desire after holiness for its own sake; it implies a willingness to part with all for the sake of conformity to the divine image; it implies that state of the heart which chooses God and Christ and heaven as the portion of the soul; which delights in the divine law, and in the way of salvation in all its parts; which submits cheerfully to the humbling doctrines and self-denying precepts of the gospel; which desires the service of Christ because it is a holy service; the happiness of heaven, because it is a holy happiness. In a word, to be willing to be saved, in the sense of the text, is to be willing to be all, and to do all, that the gospel requires of those who partake in its salvation.

I proceed to show—

II. That the salvation of the gospel will be freely given to every one who will accept it.

I design so to treat this part of our subject so as not only to establish the truth, but to obviate objections.

1. There is no obstacle in the way of bestowing salvation on such sinners, on the part of God.

By sin all mankind had become deserving of the penalty of God's law, and had no way to escape the extremity of his justice. Whatever might have been our speculations, our hopes, our pleadings, there would be nothing more before us but the righteous vengeance of God. But there was one in heaven able to make atonement—a full, perfect, all-sufficient atonement for the sins of men. He was willing to make it. He has actually made it. The Son of God has died on the cross. He is a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Thus the gate of heaven is thrown open to guilty men. Pardon and eternal life are offered to all through the blood of Christ. There is nothing on the part of God now to prevent him from giving this salvation to every one of Adam's race, who is willing to accept it, view the subject in what light you please. Did the justice of God prevent? God can now be just and the justifier of the ungodly. Did the law of God prevent? That law is magnified and made honorable by the

very act of pardon. Did the truth of God? Mercy and truth have met together on the cross of Jesus. Did guilt, inherent depravity, turn away the face of God's holiness from the sinner? He may be "washed and justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Search and scrutinize every severe attribute of the Godhead—scrutinize his purposes. Look over the interests of his vast kingdom, there is nothing, *nothing*, to prevent the benevolence of God from flowing forth in its largest, richest gifts of grace and salvation to the sinner, who is willing to receive them.

2. There is no obstacle on the part of sinners themselves.

The want of regeneration, or a change of heart, is no obstacle. This willing mind is the change of heart itself. The want of conviction, of distress for sin, is no obstacle. He who has had conviction and distress enough to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour, has had enough to answer the great end of conviction. The greatness of the sinner's guilt is no obstacle. It is as easy, just as easy to save the great sinner as the little sinner. No sinner is, nor can he be saved, for what he is or for what he is not, for what he has done or for what he has not done. He is and must be saved, solely on account of what Christ has done, through the merits of his blood. And that blood cleanseth from all sin. No crime is so deep, no guilt so black, that the blood of Jesus cannot wash it all away. Were all the guilt of the whole family of man embodied in a single heart, that blood could make it white as snow. No human guilt can mock the efficacy of Jesus's blood.

Nor is there any obstacle on account of the number of sinners. The language of the Saviour is, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." "He is a propitiation for our sins." "He gave himself a ransom for all." Not another drop of his precious blood need have been shed, not another pang need he have felt, that every one of our race, who has lived, and who shall live, might be freely pardoned and saved. There is room enough in heaven, and to spare. There is a

crown of life for every one who is willing to wear it. There is a throne of glory for every one who is willing to sit on it.

Nor is the want of reformation, or amendment, any obstacle. Although no sinner will be saved without reformation of life, yet no one will be saved on account of such reformation. Every sinner who becomes interested in the great salvation of the gospel will reform; his reformation may be evidence that he is interested in it, but he does not become interested in it by reforming. This is not the price, that he should become better before he accepts of the offer. He need not say—I have nothing to give, as the price of this benefit; my stock is too small to buy such an inheritance, and till it is better improved, it is in vain for me to expect the gift. No—these services—this sort of premium for the blessing of salvation is not wanted. It is utterly needless in this respect. Christ will never dispose of the blessing in this way. He need not be tempted by such offerings. He never will accept an offering that in the least degree takes the place of his atoning blood. *That's enough without them.*

Nor is there any inability on the part of such sinners which is an obstacle. It is often supposed by sinners, that they are willing to accept, but are not able. But this is a sad mistake. What is it to accept, but to be willing to receive a gift, and why not as able to accept as to refuse an offered gift? Nothing is fairly offered to any man, in whom something more is needful to his accepting it, than a willingness to accept it in view of its true nature. What should we think of a man who should offer his charity to a poor sufferer, who was famishing for the want of it, who had no hand to take it; and is this the offer of salvation which the gospel makes? Is this the treatment of Christ toward sinners, for whom he died? Does he hold out the blessings of his death to perishing immortals, and yet withdraw them from their willing acceptance? In all the overtures of his mercy, and entreaties of his love, does the Lord Jesus Christ thus tantalize our wants, and mock our wretchedness? Who dare say it?

Is it here said: why tell us that the blessing is freely offered to him who is willing to accept it, when no sinner can be willing, without grace to make him willing? I answer, first, because he can be willing, and ought to be willing, and deserves to be damned, because he is not willing. And I answer further, that although by his perverseness, he has rendered the grace of God necessary, he has no warrant to say, or think, that the want of grace is, or can be, the true and proper cause of his unwillingness. He grieves the Holy Ghost by his very unwillingness—he perversely struggles against and away from this highest and most powerful influence that the God of mercy can use—and shall he throw the blame on God? But I have another thing to say. Peradventure God will give him repentance. Let him awake to sober consideration, let him make one honest effort, and put himself in earnest to this act of giving himself to Christ, and no voice of truth, in heaven or earth, can say he will not do it. Thus the path of the sinner's return to God's everlasting friendship is cleared of every obstacle. Heaven's gate is thrown open to the guiltiest, and the smile of God, who is love, invites acceptance of the great salvation.

3. The sinner has nothing to give for the blessing.

Not only would every thing be unnecessary, utterly useless, if he had it, but he has nothing. If, therefore, he receives this blessing, it must be freely given. The sinner has nothing to give for his salvation. He has broken the divine law in every instance of moral conduct, and he cannot mend it. Present obedience can only fulfill present obligation. We might as well suppose that past obedience would atone for present sins, as that present obedience can atone for past transgression. But a child knows that present obedience can neither annihilate nor lessen the guilt of what is past. Present duty, though absolutely perfect, can do no more than answer for itself. Tell your creditor, that you will run no more into arrears, and will he give you a receipt in full for that? Acceptance, therefore, on the ground of law, of that law which requires us to

“love the Lord our God with all our heart,” which demands the universal and unceasing operation of this principle in every thought, word and action, must, with regard to every individual, be entirely and forever out of the question. The blot of a single sin, on a character as pure as that of an angel, would seal his condemnation. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

Beyond this, if the sinner has, or can have any thing to offer, as the price of his salvation, why is a Saviour provided? And if one sinner may obtain acceptance, all may—a world may—and why then has Jesus died? Why, when the blessed Redeemer, the object of unmingled approbation and love, thrice prayed, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,” why was he permitted to drink it, even to its bitterest dregs? Was it for no purpose? Was it because the Father delighted in the agonies of the Son? Why, then, I ask, was it that Jesus bowed his head on the cross? Ah! my hearers, let the sinner look at that cross—let him consider well the price of salvation, and then say if he can pay it.

Further, let it be told *what* the sinner can offer for his acceptance. Can he offer his repentance? While he is unwilling to accept of salvation, as a free gift, he has none to offer. His faith? While thus unwilling, he has no faith. His prayers? But the “sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.” His tears, his anxiety, his distress? “They that are in the flesh cannot please God;” “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” All its offerings, therefore, must be impure—whatever the sinner does with such a heart, must be offensive in the sight of God. He must still lie at the feet of uncovenanted mercy. Infinite purity cannot commune with pollution—no, not in a single instance. An enemy of God cannot commend himself to the favor of the Searcher of hearts by pretense and mockery. He still hates his God, and still deserves his wrath. He has a thousand times pierced the heart of redeeming love—he still does it; and still deserves

the wrath of the Lamb. The case is hopeless. He cannot give the least thing for his salvation. If given to him at all, it must be given freely.

4. God is willing, even solicitous, that sinners should comply with the conditions of this salvation, that he may give them the blessing.

Hear the voice of God, addressed to every sinner: "Oh! that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end;" "Oh! that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace;" "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim, my heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together?" Now, is all this only a display of unreal feeling—delusive pathos on the part of God? God gives express and unequivocal assurances—he has revealed himself a God ready to pardon—he declares that he would have all men to be saved—that he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth. And lest these assurances should not satisfy, he hath sworn by himself, saying: "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Is the living God a deceiver—is he perjured?

The means which God uses for our salvation speak the same language. The remonstrances of conscience, the declarations of his word, the dispensations of his providence, the display of heavenly glories, the denunciation of endless misery, are so many barriers with which his mercy has guarded the passage to destruction. The transgressor must force them all before he can seize on death. At every step toward ruin, a voice is wafted to his ear, in the groans of damnation: "O come not to this place of torment." The voice of God is heard saying, "Why will ye die?"

As decisive proof of this point, I will only point you to the work of redeeming love. Why did God redeem this world? Why this expense—why this mightiest miracle of God, this spectacle of wrath and mercy—why this joy in heaven, that

makes all its pillars tremble—why these drops of blood in Gethsemane—why this soul of the Son of God exceeding sorrowful, even unto death—why these arrows of the Almighty, the poison whereof drinketh up his spirit—why this prayer with his dying breath, for his murderers—why, the sounding of these bowels which still yearn over lost sinners—why these heavenly accents of entreaty still repeated—why this Holy Ghost now touching your hearts, and striving to melt them into submission? Is there a sinner here willing to be saved, and God not willing to save him?

5. The direct promises of God settle the truth of our position. These, as contained in explicit declarations, and as blended with the tenderest invitations of mercy, abound in the inspired volume. “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end; I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life, freely. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat—yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not. Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come, and let him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life *freely*.”

REMARKS.

1. How reasonable are the terms of salvation.

Sinners are very apt to regard the terms of salvation as hard and difficult, and to persuade themselves, if it were not so, they certainly should comply with them. But what are these terms? They are, it is true, variously described in the

gospel; but they are all contained in this *whosoever will*. A new heart, faith, repentance, love, are substantially but one and the same thing, and that is a willing mind. And, surely, there cannot be easier terms of obtaining a blessing than merely to be willing to accept it. What is there hard in this? What is the difficulty? Is not "the way of transgressors hard?" Are not the "ways of wisdom pleasantness, and all her paths peace?" Is it not more easy and more pleasant to submit to the living God than to rebel against him? Is it not more easy and more delightful to tread the bright path to heaven than to stumble on in the dark way to perdition? Is it not easier and more delightful to listen to the voice of God's authority, the invitations of redeeming grace, to be cheered with the visits of divine mercy—to be protected and upheld by the everlasting arms—to triumph over death—to rise to heaven, and wear a crown of immortal glory, than to break through calls, and warnings, and Sabbaths, and Bibles—the entreaties of men, and angels, and God, and Christ, to walk all the way to hell on the blood of Jesus, and to dwell there in the lake of fire, forever? What, then, so hard in being willing to do this. Where is the difficulty? Let this matter, my hearers, be fairly tried at the bar of conscience. Where and what is the difficulty? What terms, if it were left with you to settle, would you prefer? On what terms would you accept of salvation? Would you undertake a tedious pilgrimage—would you consent to suffer, by sickness or by torture, for a season—would you pay a farthing for the blessing? It is yours on easier terms—it is yours for accepting it. What more can be asked? Here in the name, and by the authority of the living God—here in this book is my commission—I offer you eternal life. Will you accept it? Take it, take it freely; it is yours. The God of truth has said it; and, fellow-sinner, can you complain now that this is hard?

2. We see how absurd it is for sinners to attempt to obtain the salvation of the gospel, in any way, except by becoming willing to accept it.

It is a very common mistake of such persons, that they must begin with a course of awakening and conviction, and go through with a process of anxiety and distress for days and weeks, perhaps months, before they can even think of becoming interested in this salvation. Now, in answer to all this, the gospel declares that this salvation will be freely given to those who, knowing what it is, are willing to receive it. And that it will be given to no other. The great thing, and the only thing, is to be willing. All that thinking and feeling which is necessary to, and involved in becoming willing is, of course, to be done. I'll tell you, fellow-sinner, what you must do. You must have a just apprehension of this salvation, and then be willing to accept it. This you *must* do, or die. Say not this is hard. It is reasonable—it is right that it should be hard. "There is no peace," saith God, "to the wicked," and there ought to be none. What more or what else can be said, when the terms are as low as they can be—when salvation is urged upon your acceptance in every way, and by every possible motive, and you will not accept it—when you had rather die than take it freely, what more can be said, than that die you *will*, die you *must*, and die you *ought*. God, and angels, and men, and devils, and your own conscience say, and will say to all eternity, *Amen*; it is right.

And, now, my dear hearers, what is your purpose to-day? Yes, to-day; for to-morrow may be too late. The salvation of the gospel is a free salvation. To him that is willing to receive it, it shall be freely given. It has been bought by the sacrifice of God's beloved Son, and it is offered to all. It shall be given to all who will accept it. Salvation for sinners, salvation from endless woe, salvation from sin, salvation with eternal glory. It is brought to each of you. It is no false, delusive offer. The very Saviour who died for you makes it—it is urged upon your acceptance. That you may accept it, this Sabbath shines upon you; that you may accept it, this sanctuary has again opened its doors. A present God is here to meet you with the gift. Jesus, with the same love and

pity that brought him from heaven to die for you, entreats you to take it. Saints lift their souls to God in earnest longings for you. Angels have stopped their songs, and tremble with holy impatience, to witness your decision. Hell itself is moved with anxiety, while the treasures of eternal glory are laid at your feet. And now, while the Father thus holds out the scepter of forgiveness, and Jesus, by all his groans, and agonies, and blood, entreats you to accept the offer; and the eyes of all heaven and hell are fixed upon you—how solemn the moment—how tremendous your decision! Come, then, and accept the offered blessing, come and be *willing* to accept it. Come, just as you are, poor, polluted, vile as you are. Test the sincerity of the Saviour, who died for you. There is no mistake here. Take eternal life, take it without offering, or thinking to offer the least price for it. Reject the thought, for the blood of Christ hath purchased it already. Take it, therefore, if you *will*; you do nothing but abuse his mercy, and provoke his patience till you do this. Take, then, the gift.

I take you to record, my dear hearers, before God again, that the offer of eternal life has been repeated to you; you see clearly that it is freely offered; and now if you reject it, remember that you have again slighted an offered Jesus. *Remember it* when you rise from your seat; *remember it* when you pass the threshold of that door; *remember it* when you enter your dwelling; *remember it* when you lie down to rest at night; *remember it* when you rise in the morning; *remember it* when employed in the business of the week. *Remember* when the voice of eternal truth said, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely," you replied, *I will not take it.*

XXIV.

THE GOSPEL HIDDEN TO THE LOST.

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 8.

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.”

THERE is one fact of which, notwithstanding our familiarity with it, we cannot think without wonder, that a being so great as God—a Saviour so full of mercy as his Son—realities so momentous as heaven and hell, should be presented in the light of divine revelation, and yet by men whose every interest they involve, should, to every practical purpose, be overlooked and unseen. Still more wonderful is this fact, when we reflect that the things of the gospel are presented to no mind without producing at least a measure of conviction of their truth and reality. Strange, however, as it appears, this revelation itself declares the fact and unfolds its solution. “Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.” Sin has put a covering of thick darkness on the mind, and thus maintains its gloomy and obstinate resistance to the very gospel of God.

It may be remarked, generally, concerning those to whom the gospel is hid in the sense of the text, that they live under its external light, and have, as all such persons do have, at least some secret convictions of its truth. The apostle is not speaking of those to whom the gospel has never been sent. In the context he asserts the zeal and fidelity of himself and of his fellow-laborers in preaching that gospel. “Not walking,”

says he, "in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God;" and then adds, "but if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost"—who are perishing—who are under those influences which lead to perdition. In the original, they are those *who are perishing*—in a state in which the process of destruction is begun. The causes of perdition are in full operation, and the work of their perdition is begun already and going on. They to whom the gospel comes in such circumstances, and who refuse to enter into the spirit and design of it, are in a state most fearfully dangerous. So abundant, so overwhelming is the light which is shed from the gospel wherever it comes, that none can be in darkness for want of the medium of vision. Nay, so irresistible is that gospel in its efficacy, that it does infallibly secure for itself and those who preach it the approbation of *every* man's conscience. After all, it is quite another thing to perceive the truths of the gospel in their true nature; quite another thing so to perceive the spiritual truths of the sacred record of God, that they shall come home to every feeling of the man with full effect. If to those to whom the gospel is sent—to those who are surrounded by its light, and who, in their consciences, whatever they may profess with their lips, are forced to acknowledge its truths—if to them that gospel be hid—if they are blind to that gospel in its practical bearing—blind to its truths in their nature and excellency, and weight, and glory—if they never see the things revealed as they are—if they never enter that region of light where the objects of faith are invested with the bright coloring and controlling aspect of realities—and where these objects bring to the mind and the heart their true and appropriate influence—they are in a state which fearfully forebodes final perdition.

My design is to show—

First, To whom the gospel is hid.

Second, The danger of their condition.

I. The gospel is hid to those who deny its divine authority.

1. No man to whom the manifestation of the truth has been made, has ever been able, to the satisfaction of his own mind, to disprove the Bible. Many, indeed, have ventured on an open professed denial of its authority. But to the strongest convictions and boldest asseverations of its falsehood, has still adhered the misgiving, harassing suspicion—this may be the truth of God; these may be the only overtures of reconciliation from an offended God, the very language of the supreme Lawgiver and final Judge of men. The dying horrors of such men as Voltaire and Paine are decisive on this point. Such men have rendered no trivial homage to the gospel by anticipations of its doom in that honest hour. The darkness of the infidel, then, is not that which consists in the want of external light, nor yet that which results from the want of an inward conviction that the gospel is true. That light penetrates even his benighted mind, and in an honest hour extorts, in open confession, the homage which his conscience always secretly renders to the truth of the gospel. Yet there is a sense most clearly in which the gospel is hid to the infidel. For example, has he any of those views or perceptions of the Lord Jesus Christ which his gospel claims? Has he who plans a war of extermination against Christianity and its Author—who summons his hosts to the onset, by the watchword, “Crush the wretch”—has he formed any just views of the revealed character of the Son of God? Has he ever caught even a glimpse of the glory of him whom saints and angels adore? Over this scene of manifestation his eye hath never passed. To all the loveliness of the Saviour; to all the beauty of his precepts; to all the moral power of his doctrines, he is as practically blind as had no revelation been made.

2. The gospel is hid to those who are ignorant of its peculiar doctrines.

Almost every man has formed for himself some scheme of religion, imagined some terms of acceptance with God, but which in most cases are not derived from the gospel, and are

as unlike what is there revealed as are the lessons of the Alkoran. They have formed such inadequate views of their own character as sinners—of the character and law of God, and of the relations which they sustain to him—have adopted principles of moral reasoning so opposite to the truth, which have become so inwrought into all their conceptions by habit, that they cannot renounce them—that when the peculiar doctrines of the gospel are presented, and come to be tried by their preconceived opinions and modes of thought, these doctrines appear dark and mysterious, or absurd and self-contradictory. There is no previous preparation of mind to discern the truth and bearing of the peculiarities of the gospel; there is in their notions and principles no adjustment, but direct contrariety to the truth as it is in Jesus; and of course all the avenues, both of the understanding and the heart, are shut and barred against it. Let the faithful preacher of the gospel tell such a man that the gospel pronounces him an enemy of God, and builds its whole superstructure of doctrine and precept on the existence of such a controversy between man and his Maker; let the necessity of pardon through the blood of the appointed Mediator, the necessity of regeneration by the Spirit of God, and other distinguishing truths of the gospel be insisted on; and all this is so directly opposed to his preconceived opinions, that he cannot understand, he cannot receive it. God he does not hate, he has squared his conduct to the strict rules of morality; a mediator he does not need, or at least only partially. In a word, so totally inadequate and false are his notions, that the whole gospel sounds as strangely and as obscurely as if it were preached in an unknown tongue. Such men are intellectually blind; blind to the whole scope and character of Christianity. And, although the truth may at times flash plainly and powerfully into this midnight of error, yet it there meets with fatal repulsion from the heart, and the cloud of darkness settles on the mind in all its blackness. To every such person “the gospel is hid.” From the ignorance of his understanding moral darkness is inseparable. And let

him be told that to those spiritual perceptions of Christian truth which secure its *practical* ascendancy, he is as really a stranger as the most benighted heathen.

3. The gospel is hid to all those who do not obey it, however extensive and correct may be their views of its doctrines.

In every congregation, we find persons who are well taught in the great truths of the gospel, but who, after all, derive from them no true and appropriate influence. Indeed, it is impossible to assign the limit to which the acquisition of religious knowledge, in its speculative views, may be carried, and yet the gospel be hid in the midst of these high attainments. A man may not only know that the Bible is the book of God, and be spiritually blind to its contents; but he may learn the number of chapters and verses—may be minutely acquainted with its facts—may compare Scripture with Scripture; nay, may understand its doctrines and precepts—be able to demonstrate its truths with the power, acuteness, and learning of the most accomplished theologian—all this, and more may be true of him; and still he may know only the letter, and absolutely nothing of the spirit of the gospel. He may still carry in his bosom a heart untouched by a single truth which that gospel—which he knows so well—has revealed. He may still be unshaken from any one attachment to the world, and an utter stranger to the power of those divine truths, which give to him that feels them the high character of a co-worker with God. Nor is this mere hypothesis. It is what occurs within our constant observation. How common is it to find, for example, persons who admit the being and perfection of an omnipresent God, and yet live in all the sinful stupidity and unconcern of habitual darkness! The light which beams from the objects of sense and sight completely overpowers the light that beams from this object of faith. The world, and the world only is seen; and though God may be occasionally thought of, and his presence and attributes be confessed, yet the trifles and vanities of the world are enough to exclude, in every practical respect, the very thought of a

present Deity. The man thinks, and reasons, and feels, and acts, just as he would do had no ray of light from the eternal throne ever reached him. The broad daylight of the world obscures and hides every just view of God, and excludes every right conception of that awful majesty and glory that surrounds him in full manifestation at every step.

To illustrate in another example. Here is a man who admits into his creed without hesitation, and with the clear discriminations of the soundest orthodoxy, all which the Scriptures affirm of himself, of the law of God, of its precepts and its curse—all that is said of the character and work of Christ, and of the world to come. But to the power of all this truth he is dead; no trace of its efficacy can be found in his heart, or in his life. It is only to the power of this world's interests and pleasures that he is alive. He has never been humbled as a sinner—never trembled at the deserved, acknowledged, and approaching curse of the Almighty—never derived from all that he has seen a feeling impression that he needs a Saviour. Is not some manifestation of truth, which he has never had, necessary in his case to secure to that truth its practical energy on the man? Has not the obedient believer had some revelation which he has not had; and must there not be a revelation to him—I do not say of new truths, of things not clearly advanced in the written record—but a revelation that shall throw over these truths the character of realities; must there not be some perception of these things as realities, of their real nature and relation to him, of their weight and glory, that shall enable him to withstand the commanding influence of the things of sight and sense? Most unquestionably. He who dies to the world, and lives to God, must live under that peculiar manifestation of divine things by which they become visible to the mind, and are brought home with their appropriate energy on the heart. Where the latter is wanting, the former is. Where the effect is not, the cause is not. In this high and important respect, therefore, the gospel is hid to all who do not obey it.

Having thus shown to whom the gospel is hid, I proceed to show—

II. The danger of their condition.

This will appear, if we consider—

1. That the blindness of those to whom the gospel is hid, is voluntary and criminal.

It cannot be ascribed to the want of light. There is not a single truth in the Bible seen by him whose understanding is opened to understand the Scriptures, which may not be seen by them whose minds are “alienated from God through the the ignorance that is in them.” The word of God is ever the same. The difference is: one sees these things as they are, the other does not. The question is, why does he not? And the answer is, because “he hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprovèd.” Why, in the language of an apostle, is the “understanding darkened?”—why are men thus “alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them?” Because, as he tells us, “of the blindness of the heart.” The appeal to common sense and common experience is equally decisive. Why is it that men contrive so absolutely to exclude God from their thoughts, and remain as free from every impression of God, and every affectionate regard for him, as were there no God? They hide the glory of that Being who is present in all the scenes of earth, and in all the paths and abodes of men, behind the shadows and visions of this material world. And why is this, except they choose to do so? What but the want of a willing mind, a heart to welcome and desire the divine presence, prevents any one from marking the footsteps of God wherever he goes, and living under a continual sense of his presence? Nothing. It is voluntary blindness. The same remarks substantially apply to every truth of the gospel. If any thing approaching a right conception of its truths enters a sinner’s mind, his preference for the world drives it all away from him. To him the Saviour “hath no form nor comeliness.” The faintest glimpse of the sun of righteousness awakens disgust, and he

turns away his eyes, or shuts them on his meridian splendors. The blinded sinner, therefore, is in danger of perdition, because he deserves it.

2. His danger is increased by the measure of light and evidence which he resists. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." In proportion to the light is the guilt of him that rejects it. And such an augmentation of guilt does the light of the gospel, when hated by the carnal heart, bring with it, that Christ declares that the Jews without his instructions had not had sin. The gospel is light. It sets before us the things that belong to our peace as they are. It carries with it evidence of its truth, which no honest mind can resist. It discovers to us in the beaming effulgence of mid-day, the glories of God, the beauties of holiness, the evil of sin, and the amazing interests of eternity. It unfolds to our own inspection the recesses of our hearts, the duties we owe to God and man; it sheds the luster of noon on the path of life, and brings into full view the Saviour of sinners. And what is the effect? Men love darkness rather than light; they hate the light. What can more aggravate guilt, and augment danger, than thus to contemn and hate a revealed God and Saviour? What malignity of sin, what a dark and settled depravity must that be which can thus maintain its dominion, amid the realities disclosed by this light from heaven? What a mighty influence has the God of this world over the mind of that man, whom he thus holds in allegiance, when the majesty and glory of the Eternal stand in visible array before him! What a fearful prelude to everlasting perdition is such a state of mind as this!

3. No other means will be used for his salvation but those which have been tried and proved ineffectual. Unless that gospel which is hid from the sinner—unless that gospel, from whose truths he derives no salutary impression, become the power of God to his salvation, nothing can. A new gospel will not be given. Here God has revealed the only overtures

of mercy, here he has fixed the terms of salvation, and here he has presented that truth, which only can bring the sinner to comply. But this gospel—this truth is hid; not hid as a matter of speculation—not hid by an honest conviction that it is false, but while acknowledged to be true, and in many instances understood in theory—hid in its practical energy—hid as a revelation of realities which are designed to affect human feeling and human action!—hid, therefore, to them that are lost! Of whom is there not hope if there is of such persons? They believe the truth, and yet they do not believe it. They see it, and yet do not see it; they believe and see it in every sense except that which gives it its practical power. In this they believe nothing—see nothing. The truth is perceived by the understanding, and has commended itself to the conscience, but the blindness of the heart still maintains its gloomy and obstinate resistance. They believe it in every sense which can create responsibility, enhance guilt, and secure perdition, and that is all. Amid the revealed perfections and glories of God, the fullness and excellency of Christ, and all that gives to eternity its importance, there is no practical reality but the world. To all the truths which spread transport through heaven, and terror through hell, there is indeed a frank acknowledgment, but an utter blindness and insensibility. And, I ask, if they are thus blind to truth; if they can confess the majesty and glory of God, when presented in visible manifestation before them; if they can see and acknowledge that the claims of their Redeemer are brought to them by the actual presence of their Redeemer, and yet remain blind to the perception of the reality; if they can admit that heaven and hell are opened before them, that death is at hand, their final Judge at the door, and yet slumber on; if all the appointed means of impression are thus counteracted, and nothing new will be furnished—I ask, if such men are not outcasts of condemnation? I ask, if such fearful results alone are realized on the soul from things like these, if that soul is not lost?

4. Because in danger of being given up of God, to continued

ignorance and error. That there are those who are lost in this higher sense, the Scriptures leave no room to doubt. Who were those who excited the exclamation of the compassionate Saviour—"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?" Who are those to whom God will send "strong delusions that they should believe a lie," but they who "received not the love of the truth?"

And now, in conclusion, permit me to express to you the painful conviction, that the gospel which we preach is hid from many of you. The point to be settled is not merely whether any of you are open and avowed infidels; if that be your character, there is no question remaining whether the gospel in every practical sense be hid to you; nor is it merely whether through the influence of preconceived opinions, you do not understand and receive the great and distinguishing doctrines of Christianity; in this case one point is equally plain—to you the gospel is hid. But you may not only believe the gospel you may have embraced the exactest orthodoxy, you may welcome the preacher who deals in the plain and just exhibitions of God's truth, you may admire the power of his eloquence, you may allow the truth of all that he says, and yield to his discourses a solemn and deep attention, a momentary conviction may flash the truth he utters upon the mind, and carry a thrilling influence to the conscience,—but, my hearers, there is still a question between you and your God—what is the effect on your heart? Do the objects presented by his gospel, fix and settle on your spirit with the substance and weight of realities? Are you doers of the word as well as hearers? You believe the gospel of God, but where is the fruit of your faith? Where and how do appear the effects of that gospel, seen and felt in all the energies of its momentous truths? Alas, my hearers, when we come to you, and look around upon you, Sabbath after Sabbath, and after all the respect you show by your attendance and your attention, we are constrained to regard the great majority of you as list-

less and unconcerned about the things of eternity, as obstinately alienated from God, as firmly devoted to the world, your farm, your money and your merchandise ; after all our sermons and addresses, all the light from heaven that beams upon you, we find the power of darkness still upon you, we find your spirit as firmly locked in the dark and gloomy prison-hold of sin, as ever ; we find you knowing enough, and believing enough, to strip you of all excuse to augment the measure of your guilt, and to sink you to the lowest pit of damnation ! And if there is one on whom we look with emotions of pity and distress which we cannot utter, it is upon that man who is adorned with all the amiable decencies of worldly morality, is receiving the everlasting gospel as eternal truth, reading, learning its instructions, and treasuring them up in his intellect, and is yet carrying in his bosom a heart unmoved by its influence, uncheered by its consolations, unshaken from his sordid attachment to earth, and dead to those truths whose ennobling, sanctifying power would make him a fit companion of his God ! This is the man on whom the full experiment of the appointed means of salvation has been made to no purpose ; this is the man who assumes the unchristian attitude of admitting all that God has said, and yet despises and braves it all in the acknowledged presence of his Maker and his Judge ; this is the man whose weekly accumulation of guilt we cannot compute, and whose fearful exposure to the aggravated doom of despising the acknowledged gospel of God we cannot conceive ; this is the man upon whom all that we can say, on the authority of the infinite God, has no more effect than the feeble lisplings of infancy ; who well nigh fills us with discouragement and despair ! And such, my dear hearers, are some of you. But we will not abandon you in despair. From that power of corruption and blindness that maintain their resistance to the light of salvation, we would learn with a deepened impression, that our sufficiency is not of ourselves, but of God ; we would feel that another and higher power must be brought to act on this mass of resistance. In your

behalf, and for the success of our ministry, we say to all who can plead for the covenanted grace of God, "Brethren, pray for us;" and pray "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ."

And now what must you do? I answer, one thing you must not do. You must not so engross the mind, thought, sensibility, feeling, affection, hope, desire—the whole man—with this world and the things of it. Go on doing this, and you can never see the objects of the gospel—the objects of holy affection, as you must see them. Go on doing this, and you can never comply with the terms of life. Go on doing this, yielding thought, feeling, and affection to earth and to vanities, and you will live in the veriest midnight, even amid the splendors of the light of life. Go on doing this, and you die. What, then, must you do? You must give the mind to some sober contemplation of the things of God's revelation. Give yourself to that solemn pondering of these things, till your convictions of truth shall give reality to truth, till it shall take hold of sensibility, and prompt to action. Think of God, and love him. Think of sin—hate and renounce it. Think of the Saviour, and trust your soul to his mercy. Think of discipleship to Christ, of the character, the duties, the hopes, the prospects of a Christian—and be a Christian.

XXV.

THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN.

LUKE xviii. 10.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee and the other a publican."

It would seem, that if men would ever form a just estimate of their own character, it would be when standing in the acknowledged presence of God. So erroneous, however, is the standard by which multitudes judge of themselves—so prone and so accustomed are they to think better of themselves than they ought to think—that they can carry their equivocation and concealment to the very throne of Omniscience. Nor do I know that we ought much to wonder, if men who have never compared themselves with the spiritual requisitions of the law of God, and who, in its stead, substitute as a standard the average moral character of the world around them, approach the very mercy-seat of God in the attitude of proud self-sufficiency.

The gates of this sanctuary have been again opened for the admission of those who choose to enter its courts. The foot of the hypocrite did not stumble as he passed the sacred threshold, nor is the tongue of the profane and the haughty sinner withered in the midst of these devotions. To the eye of human inspection the incense of our prayers and praises has seemed to mingle and to rise with acceptance before the object of our worship. But there is an eye which has penetrated every disguise and searched every heart. God knows the heart of every professed worshiper in his presence, and

doubtless sees in each substantially the spirit of the Pharisee or the spirit of the publican. It may help us to know ourselves, to consider particularly the spirit and character ascribed to these two men.

The Pharisee, as the parable describes him, "stood and prayed thus with himself." The pride and self-exaltation of this man appear in the very posture he assumes. "He stood and prayed." Mere posture, indeed, can have no influence in itself, to render our supplications more or less acceptable to God. Still, circumstances may be such that the posture shall strikingly evince the temper of the heart. The posture of standing, for example, as in this case, may evince a spirit of high self-complacency, and a desire to be seen of men, and to be noted for great sanctity in devotion. So, too, the posture of kneeling in other circumstances, may just as plainly bespeak the same spirit. Still many a sinner to whom it has been proposed to *kneel* with others in the act of supplication has found, and doubtless many, were it proposed to them to enter their closets and assume this attitude of a suppliant, would find, that like the Pharisee, they have a heart too proud thus to bow the knee before the footstool of the Almighty. Each one can ascertain how the fact is in his own case, by making the experiment.

The Pharisee "prayed with himself." The phrase denotes the inward thought of his mind, the secret estimation of himself, made in an ostensible act of worship, and thus indicates that pride and self-complacency, which occupied his mind with himself, to the exclusion of the God whom he professed to worship. This state of mind is exhibited substantially by thousands, occupied with the conceit of their moral superiority to others, and who thus quieting the reproaches of conscience, can thank God with the same thoughtless flippancy of compliment, and the same self-congratulation. Now, it is not that they believe the grace, the unmerited grace of God, hath made them to differ; it is not that God has shed abroad his love in their hearts when deserving his wrath; it is not even that they

discover by an enlightened spiritual discernment, real moral excellence of character in themselves, but it is simply that they are better than others—that compared with others they have whereof to glory. The question in such a case, is not whether they have in the lowest sense complied with the standard of righteousness which God has given. It is simply a question of comparison; and no matter how far below the true standard they may fall, if others fall below them, if there are others worse than they are, they still find cause for congratulating themselves, and thanking God. Miserable delusion! Who will ever acquire a knowledge of himself while he takes such a method to form the estimate? Who cannot find some one in the circle of his acquaintance, or at least some one in the world of perdition, worse than himself? And who can think that a spirit which boasts of such pre-eminence as this, is the spirit of a true worshiper of God! Yet such was the spirit of the Pharisee; such is the spirit of thousands who resemble him.

But let us trace still farther the workings of his mind. “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.” Now, how far was this true, and how far was it false? And in deciding this question let us admit his own declaration in its full import. He was not an extortioner, nor unjust. He had not wrung from his debtors their hard earnings; he had not taken advantage of their necessities; he had not snatched the bread from the mouth of a famishing family, nor left the father to pine away in the cold damps of a prison. He had been content with moderate profits; he had been concerned in no usurious contracts, no sly or crafty impositions, falsehoods, and frauds. He was surprisingly free from these external immoralities which he had no temptation to be guilty of, and of this wondrous outside purity he comes to the temple of God to boast.

He was not an adulterer. No, he has never been willing to run the risk of being stoned to death by the law of Moses,

for such a crime, and for this, too, he thanks God, and triumphs over others. The catalogue of virtues had now been exhausted, had he not perchance discovered a poor publican who had also come up to the temple to pray; when he adds, "or even as this publican." The publicans were a peculiarly odious class of men to the Jews, as the appointed collectors of the revenue exacted by the Roman government. Generally they were as iniquitous and oppressive as they were odious. Such, then, was the character of the Pharisee, and such his consolation, that he was not so bad as the lowest and most despised members of the community.

And how common is a similar estimate! What multitudes delude themselves and offend God by these partial estimates of their moral worth. How easy to glance over the darker, and fix with delight on the brighter portions of our character. Few, it may be, are extortioners, or unjust, or adulterers, or distinguished for the avarice and oppression of publicans—I say these may be few, perhaps there are some, who cannot say as much for themselves as the Pharisee. But allow the number to be small who outstrip their neighbors in degeneracy and corruption of morals. Is the number small who value themselves highly on account of such distinction? Are there not many who think it a great virtue, and, indeed, about enough to challenge God's acceptance on the ground of it, that they have abstained from great vices? Be it so—they have abstained from these—they are completely exempt. They know it, and those who are best acquainted with the minutest parts of their history also know it, and must acknowledge it. But are they not on this account tolerably well satisfied with themselves? Are they not even in the presence of God proud of their superiority? Yes, they are thus superior. They are perhaps singled out by the admiration of one another, and by their own, too, as the just, the true, the upright, the amiable, the kind and the charitable among the many around them. They are not as other men, for others are a great deal worse than they are, and perhaps even in this temple of God, and

before his mercy-seat, their own conscience can tell them how pleased they are to hear the acknowledgment.

But not so fast. For we have to inquire whether, after all, the declaration of the Pharisee was not substantially false. I mean to raise the question whether, in character, he was not substantially like other men—even just like the publican. What, then, decides moral character? Motives—principles. Did the Pharisee abstain from overt acts of extortion, injustice, adultery, fraud, and oppression? Be it so. What was his motive? Nothing appears to prove to the contrary, and much to prove directly that he was actuated by nothing but a spirit of mere selfishness. The fact that such a man would be apt to boast of all he could, and he boasted only of external exemption from gross sins, looks very much as if he had nothing better to boast of; and that, therefore, nothing better than a regard to his own reputation, or an avaricious spirit, or some other selfish principle, was the moving spring of all his boasted abstinence from the crimes which others committed. What, then, is the mighty difference between the man who is unjust, or sensual, or oppressive through selfishness, and one who abstains from these overt acts from the same principle—between a man who, to promote a selfish purpose, defrauds you in a contract, or who, to secure the same selfish end, deals honestly? Do you say the difference is great in the *degrees* of wickedness? Be it so. What is the difference as it respects substantial character, as that is decided by motives—by principles? Not a whit. Besides, what is there in such a man, which might not be in him, and form precisely the same character, were the belief of a *God* utterly discarded? Were the being of a God denied or unknown, still there might be a feeling of compassion for suffering humanity—the shame of being detected in any thing mean and disgraceful. Still a regard to reputation might make men outwardly just, and true, and kind, and public-spirited. But would there be any moral excellence in such a character, any goodness in a heart that acknowledges no God, and thinks of none? And does

the fact that there is a God, and that he has come to man with his claims upon the whole heart of man, in nowise touch the question of character? Are the very principles and motives which might exist in the midnight region of atheism—are these enough, when the reality of a perfect God is revealed with his claims on the heart? Men may say it is enough, the deluded man of pride and self-sufficiency may say it is enough; but will God say it is enough? No. He says, and every conscience approves of the decision—he says of such a man, be the operation or form of his selfishness what it may, he loves the world, and the love of the Father is not in him. He loves the world, and the friendship of the world is enmity against God. Whether a Pharisee or a publican, whether graced with all the charms of external morality, or debased by the deformity of the greatest vices, in character he is a rebel against the government of God, so long as he wants the love of God. For surely, if such principles may exist where all is atheism, because God is unknown—how does *he* stand convicted of a still deeper and more determined atheism of heart, who, under a full revelation of a ruling God and all his claims, is still satisfied with himself, and proud of his moral superiority, while living without God in the world! And are there no facts to prove it? Have you never heard it said, we have done no harm in the world; there are others a great deal worse than we are; we have done a great deal of good? Have you never heard the humble Christian ridiculed and laughed at for his humility and self-abhorrence, and all that part of experimental religion which lays the sinner guilty and condemned at the feet of mercy—have you never witnessed all this denounced as hypocrisy, cant, and enthusiasm—and have you not witnessed, too, at least a secret self-congratulation, like a *thank God* of the Pharisee, that we have no cause for such humiliation before him? Yes, yes, we have all witnessed it in others, if we have not felt it in our own proud hearts! And thus it is, that in this world of alienation from God, and of rebellion against him, the very rebels themselves, who have one and the

same character, and are under the same condemnation, and for whom the same atoning blood was shed, are praising one another, flattering themselves, and secretly thanking God, too, that they are not as other men are.

But the Pharisee has something more in reserve, even some works of supererogation to recommend himself to God. "I fast twice in the week, I pay tithes of all I possess." The observance of these fasts rested on no higher authority than the tradition of the Rabbins, and was designed simply to make an impression of superior sanctity. It is true, useful as occasional fasting may be to the Christian, that it is not the method of discovering our religious character, and of securing a reputation for religion. And as to tithes, although our contributions, and donations, and charity are demanded, and although more of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus would double them; and although we are not so Judaical and superstitious as to avow the creed that such punctilious observances will atone for the want of vital piety—still are there not many who take such a complacency in these things, so substitute them for something better, as really to overlook their own want of vital godliness? Is it not fashionable with many, to acknowledge with much seriousness the importance of religious institutions, religious doctrines, and to deprecate the prevalence of heresies and infidelity? Is it not creditable to lend to the religion of the gospel, generally, our countenance and approbation, to show to its ministers agreeable attentions, and to its ordinances an honorable respect? Is it not a matter of custom with many, to give a scrupulous attendance on the worship of the Sabbath, and even on all other occasions of meeting for this purpose? Is it not also sometimes a fashionable affair to make contributions to the religious and charitable enterprises of the day? Now, in all this, in itself, there may be nothing to condemn. I will not raise the question whether, in any of these things, there is excess or defect. There may be both. We are glad to see religious institutions respected, we are certainly, as ministers, thankful for personal favors; but

do not ask us, in return, to strengthen you in the delusion that all this is of necessity real religion—that any outward respect will atone for the wickedness of a heart that sets at naught its authority, or to allow you to rest in the quieting hopes of ultimate salvation, upon these easy expressions of respect and good-will to religion. Is there no reason to fear, in your case, that you substitute these for that thorough purity and inward devotion of heart which are the life and soul of Christianity? Is it not an easy and a pleasant service to contribute a word or a dollar in support of divine institutions, but would it not be a task and an aversion to give an example of the graces these services would form, or to sacrifice a sin that is at war with their spirit? Is it not a matter of some self-complacency that you are so punctual at places of worship, and yet a matter of no painstaking to govern your tempers or to practice the more self-denying duties of the family? How does your religion thrive in the closet? What are the emotions of your heart when alone with God? Now, the religion of fashion, the religion of habit, the religion of inheritance, and the religion of form may all exist, and the heart cherish real enmity to the God who made it. Can you, then, apart from all that is connected with the religion of externals—all that is adapted to obtain for you applause—all that is calculated to foster pride, or sloth, or self-dependence—can you then appeal to the affections, when religion is reduced as it were to its very elements and substance—the naked exercise of the spirit—the longings and the purposes of that spirit, and its practical results, as the proof of real godliness? If not, it is all the homage of a formal, hollow-hearted service; and yet thus it is that thousands deceive themselves. They are resting their hopes for eternity on this rotten foundation, and secretly, if not openly, thank God that they are so much better than others.

We now recur to the publican, who is set before us as an example for imitation. We can only refer briefly to some of the prominent facts respecting him.

“The publican standing afar off, would not lift up so

much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." There is nothing in this account that leads us to conclude that the publican, after all the boasting and the abusive insinuations of the Pharisee, was any worse than himself, or that he fell below the average character of unrenewed men. At all events, if this were the time and place for boasting, he might have made no unfavorable comparison between himself and his fellow-worshiper. He might have said, God, I thank thee that I am not as proud, as vain, as superstitious, as formal as other men, or even as this Pharisee. I place no reliance on ritual observance, I am not a slave to the traditions of the elders, but I worship thee, who art a spirit, in spirit and in truth. If boasting belonged to either, it belonged to the publican. If it be the actual possession of moral excellence that is a just ground for self-complacency and gratitude, it is the sinner humbled at the foot of the cross, and he only, who has cause to glory. But you hear no encomium on himself from the publican—you never hear it from any humbled sinner. You hear it, if you hear it at all, from those who have nothing to boast of, and who must be not only filled with pride and self-conceit, but bold enough in iniquity even, to lie at the very footstool of Omniscience. No other men do or can boast of their good deeds.

"The publican stood afar off." Here you can contrast his feelings with those of the proud suppliant near him. The place was the temple, and he felt it to be consecrated by the presence of God. Not the conceited imaginary worth of his own character, but a sense of the purity and awful majesty of the God he worshiped, occupied his soul—and you see in his very attitude and demeanor that deep reverence and solemn awe which a sinner ought to feel when, as it were, he is alone with God, and holding converse with him. The worth and majesty of the Eternal stood in visible array before him, and well might he feel that his place was afar off.

You can see also his sense of unworthiness and guilt. He

would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven. To lift both the hands and eyes toward heaven was a common attitude of supplication. In his refusal to lift so much as his eyes, we see the deep sense he had of his own unworthiness. It tells with an emphasis what language could not tell, how unworthy he felt to appear even in the attitude of a suppliant; how unworthy to look toward the habitation of his offended God; how unworthy of an inheritance in that world of purity and blessedness.

He felt as if he had not a word to say. His unworthiness was too great to permit him to tell God his necessities. He scarcely dares vent his griefs and desires. To utter a word in his own vindication he could not; to offer a single deed of his life, or even his present anguish and distress, as a reason for the divine favor, he could not. He is too wicked to pray, and too wicked not to pray. To defer his application for mercy, is to add to his guilt, to multiply his provocations, and to be more wicked still. To offer to God the desires of a heart unbroken for sin, is mockery, and he has no evidence as yet of his own contrition; whether he can pray with acceptance, or whether his very prayer will be an abomination, he knows not. What shall he do? "He smites upon his breast." What an expression of inward grief—of his sense of the wickedness of his heart—as if he had said, oh, this wicked heart of mine, how alienated from God, how ungrateful for his mercies, how rebellious against his authority! What a fountain of iniquity it hath been; what authority, what motives, what obligations, what light and love and grace I have slighted! How desperately wicked it hath been, every imagination of the thoughts thereof! It is full of evil; and even now, how hard and stubborn and unyielding! Still I can reject the proffered salvation of God; still my heart will not relent. Oh, what must become of me! To return to stupidity in sin, is death; to remain where I am, is death. I have never prayed aright before, and it is high time I had. I can but persist; I am resolved to try. "God be merciful to me a sinner." And

never did a sinner utter a better prayer. Though short and unlabored, it flowed from a full soul; and this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

Let us, then, briefly examine this prayer, which prevailed with God. It was dictated by a broken and a contrite heart. As in the case of Paul, the commandment had come, sin revived, and he died. He saw and he felt the evil of sin as the transgression of the perfect law of a perfect God. He saw and felt the evil of sin as committed against God—as a contempt of his authority—as ingratitude for his mercies—as rebellion against his throne, and hostility to all his designs. He saw and he felt the justice of his own condemnation. All questions and all doubts on this point ended at this spot; he felt his desert of the just sentence of a just God, and his mouth had been stopped from that moment had that sentence been executed. To be a sinner against God, and to feel it, is to feel all this.

His plea was for mercy. There was not a word, not a thought, about justice—about merit—about good deeds outweighing bad ones—not one proffered act of obedience as the price of God's favor, but he asked for mercy, for favor to the guilty and the hell-deserving.

Nor is this all. It was the prayer of faith in the atonement. This the original word decisively denotes. Whether he knew the precise nature of the atonement by the Son of God or not, is immaterial. He knew, as did all the saints under the old dispensation, that God showed mercy to the guilty only through an atonement—only in a way which should magnify his law and vindicate his justice. Here, then, was his reliance. He did not approach God as too severe to punish sin, as an indulgent God who can overlook the sins of his creatures, whose denunciations of wrath are mere empty threatenings that neither will be, nor ought to be, executed. Such was not the God whom the publican approached. He came to that God, whose justice is pledged to execute wrath for sin, and will execute it, either on the sinner or on a substitute—to that God

whose justice has poured his wrath upon the head of its propitiatory victim and shines with no less splendor in the pardon than in the punishment of the guilty. He wished to come in no other way; he wished to come in this. He saw the glory of that God with whom he had to do, and he did not indulge a desire to be saved in a way that should tarnish it. Here, then, in the mercy of God in Christ, on the merit of that precious blood typified by the blood of lambs—the blood of the Lamb of God—he put his trust. And here we must all come. For it is added as the grand point of instruction of the parable, and as the decision of eternal truth, “For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

REMARKS.

1. How vain must be the hope of those who expect heaven because they are not so wicked as others. Few there may be who frankly avow that such is their hope, but there is proof enough that multitudes cherish it. We have heard the hope expressed on the very bed of death, and witnessed there the delusive quiet, the consolation, the pride, and the contempt of Jesus and his salvation, which result from the persuasion that the dying sinner is not so wicked as some others. And is it so, that this is just ground for such a hope? How wicked must a man be to be damned? Is it no matter how wicked, if so be another can be found more wicked than himself? Tell us where is the limit of this hope. If the man who can find others worse than himself may, on that account, hope for heaven, then go down the descending scale of moral character, and tell us where and who is wicked enough to be damned, and where, in the name of truth and righteousness, are you to stop? At the prison, the thief, the cell of the highwayman, and the gallows of the murderer? No. Peradventure there may be one worse than they, who, by his still deeper malignity in sin, shall become, to all intents and pur-

poses; the savior of those who had otherwise deserved and incurred the same damnation! And thus it is that multitudes are solacing themselves with the conception of the slenderness of their own guilt and the kindness of an indulgent God; thus it is that a spirit of deep slumber has laid hold of their conscience, and is speeding their infatuated way to hell. But is this the plan of salvation revealed in this book of God? Are you not just as wicked as if you were the only rebel against God in the universe? Summon all the devils in hell to your side, and enter into a comparison, and prove that every one of them has cherished a deeper malice against God, uttered more blasphemies against him. Will this lessen your guilt? Will this impair your desert of the wrath of that God against whom you have maintained as firm and open rebellion as your own selfish interests would permit? Tell us if such greater guilt in devils can take the place of Jesus's blood in your salvation. Away, then, with these flattering comparisons of yourselves with others, this self-gratulation, this deep and fatal tranquillity, because you are not the worst sinner throughout God's dominions. To the law and the testimony. There you shall find that you have guilt enough to damn you, and that it will damn you unless you hasten to the spot where the publican stood, and with him cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

2. Let us beware how by comparing ourselves with others we are led to despise them.

This is what the Pharisee did, not the publican. This is what God abhors, not what God approves. It is pride. No humble Christian does it when conviction of sin has taken possession of the mind, and the sinner is brought to compare himself with the law of God, and see himself in that light, as he is, a guilty, hell-deserving sinner; then he has done with comparing himself with other men. But a more proud and haughty man treads not on earth than he who, from the pinnacle of self-righteousness, looks down on his neighbor, saying, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than

thou;" "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men." Like leviathan in the waters, that man is king over the children of pride.

It is ignorance. It is ignorance of the most plain and important of all subjects—ignorance which implies a mind stupefied, degraded, besotted by sin. The man is ignorant of God, ignorant of his law, ignorant of himself, ignorant of what he ought to be, ignorant of what he is, ignorant of what awaits him in a near and hastening eternity. Comparing himself with other rebels against God, and on the ground of their superiority in guilt, trusting in himself as right, and expecting God's approbation, what does such a man know?

It is hypocrisy—hypocrisy of the grossest aspect. I know such men flatter themselves that they abhor hypocrites. It is their character to despise others; and that whether they are better or worse than themselves. But who is a greater hypocrite than he who has always lived unmindful of his God, who has broken his law in every instance of moral action, who has not a particle of moral excellence, and if he had, would have no cause for boasting, and yet boasts of his abstinence from sin, and straightens himself among his fellows on the staff of his imagined merits? I tell you there is not a more vain, conceited being, as God sees him, either in this or in any other world.

It is open and base contempt of Jesus and his salvation. For how can such a man need the benefits of Christ's mediation? He can come directly to God and challenge acceptance; and why was atoning blood shed for him? It was a vain and useless sacrifice, and this he pronounces it to be. But this is not the worst of it. The sinner brings his imaginary righteousness, destitute as it is of every quality of holy obedience, polluted as it is by enmity against God, and tells a spotless God, in the pride of self-complacency, that this is an adequate price for his favor; it is a better offering than many others can make; and that is reason enough why, polluted as it is, it should be preferred to the sacrifice of the son of God. I ask,

if he who rejects the atonement of the Lord Jesus, who thus rejects it with the scorn of self-righteousness, rejects it by offering his very rebellion against God, as a worthier sacrifice, does not cause the measure of all ordinary guilt to overflow? I ask, if the man who thus exalts himself will not be abased; will not the darkest frown of divine indignation be turned upon him, and must not this attitude of self-complacency, this avowed contempt of God and his Son, land him in the deepest perdition of the pit?

3. No sinner, after such an example as that of the publican, can have any excuse for not praying right, immediately.

Persons are very apt to suppose, that if they have never prayed aright, that a long time of preparation is necessary; that they must at least feel more strongly, that they must wait and wait till they grow better, and often they wonder that ministers should urge them to a surrendry of their hearts to God, in the first prayer they offer. They know not how to do it, and there may be those who would be glad to ask us how they shall do it now. We answer by asking them, how did the publican do it? Knowing as you do, that you are guilty and under God's condemnation, how long a time is necessary that you may feel it; knowing as you do that there is no hope for you till you put your trust in the Lord Jesus, how long a time is necessary that you may feel that? Knowing that you grow no better till this is done, but rather grow worse; knowing that to think you are growing better is a fatal delusion; knowing that the Lord Jesus is willing to be trusted, and that you must come just as you are, how long time is necessary to feel that? What was there in the case of the publican which is not, or may not, at this moment be true of you? If he was in the temple of God—as you now are—if he was under a conviction of guilt, as you now may be, and in the act of prayer actually yielded himself to God, why may not you. Fellow sinner, you may; and if you refuse now to give up your heart to the same Saviour, you will add sin to sin.

4. Every one of us must be humbled before God, if we would partake of his mercy.

Every one of us, wise or great, rich or happy—be we who or what we may—if we would partake of the salvation of God, must come down to the place where the publican was brought. Sinners we are, and sinners we must feel ourselves to be. Christ died for us in this character; all his overtures of mercy are made to us in this character; and God will accept of us in no other. That sense of guilt and just condemnation which makes mercy our only plea—that believing sense of the efficacy of Christ's atonement which leads us to make it all our dependence, must be felt, or his wrath must be felt for eternity. And now, my dear hearers, have you felt it; have you smote upon your breast before God, as did the publican? If not, you are yet resting in proud security concerning your eternal all, while eternity is coming nearer and nearer every day. You are still clinging to a delusive notion, which defies the decisions of the eternal God, and pours scorn and contempt on the atonement of his Son. And, oh! fellow-sinner, what shall sustain your tranquillity when death shall come and look on you in earnest. Will your own righteousness at that hour of pain and breathlessness—that hour when eternity and the God of eternity shall be so near—will your own righteousness then charm away the anticipations of vengeance? Or if your delusion should be strong enough, for so it may be, to stupefy and conduct you, without alarm, to the judgment-seat, how will you then feel, when shall be laid bare to God's inspection, and your own, and that of assembled worlds, all your devotedness to the world, all your proud imaginations, all the filthy rags of your own righteousness, all your insolent contempt of Jesus' blood, all your enmity to God, and all your defiance of his decisions and his attributes? Oh, when this shall be—when the Judge shall have come to fix the destinies of yourself, and your fellow-immortals—when the high test of heaven shall be applied to your character—when you shall thus be convicted of your utter and constant rebellion

against God, and stand speechless before the coming retributions of eternity, what shall sustain you? Justify yourself you cannot; hide from the hastening wrath you cannot; avert the arm of vengeance you cannot; bear the woes it will inflict you cannot. Fly, then, to the appointed refuge and be safe.

XXVI.

HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS.

1 KINGS xviii. 21.

"How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."

It seems to have been the policy of the kings of Israel, at some periods of their history, to introduce that variety of worship which should suit the taste of all. Accordingly, temples were erected for the worship of Baal, as well as altars to Jehovah. The consequence was, idolatry became as fashionable as true religion, and far more prevalent; and the further consequence was, indifference to all religion. The people did not deny that Jehovah was God, but they considered Baal as God also. Thus they halted between two opinions, neither openly avowing Jehovah nor Baal to be the true God to the exclusion of the other; but were satisfied with rendering to both a superficial and divided service.

The bold and zealous prophet Elijah, who held men responsible for their opinions on such subjects, could not view such conduct without deep and strong emotion. Having by the king's command assembled all Israel, he came and said to all the people, "HOW LONG HALT YE BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS?" Why this indifference and indecision, on the most momentous of all questions? Jehovah and Baal cannot both be God. Decide, therefore, which is God. If Baal be God, worship and serve him accordingly. But if Jehovah be God, choose him and him only as your portion; give him your whole heart, and submit to all his commands.

The spirit and conduct ascribed by the prophet to the people of Israel, are exhibited by multitudes at the present day. They do not despise religion; they are convinced of its truth, its importance, its excellence. Neither do they despise the world. They wonder, indeed, at the conduct of the profane and grossly wicked; that men should dare to venture upon a course of open contempt of God and his laws; but still their attachments to the world are so strong, that they do not wholly renounce this idol of their heart. Their sense of obligation to God is too feeble to fix them in a steady, uniform course of obedience to his will. There is too much self-denial in this; and yet they have such convictions of its importance, that they do not deliberately resolve to renounce his service wholly and forever. If they do not profess to be religious, and openly and decidedly arrange themselves on the Lord's side, yet they profess not to be irreligious. They intend to be religious, perhaps sometimes attempt to be so, but the world easily diverts their attention, and weakens and breaks down their strongest resolutions. They bring nothing to pass. The reason is, they are undecided, they halt between two opinions. Thus multitudes go on, year after year, in a middle course between open irreligion and vice, and real devotion to the service of God. Thus, too, they die and go to the judgment.

The text justly—

First, Condemns this indecision in religion; and

Second, Enjoins the duty of deciding who is truly God, and of serving him.

I. This indecision is justly condemned.

1. It is not honest.

This indecision is not honest. It exists rather in appearance than in reality. It is an attempt to accomplish an utter impossibility. No man can have two objects of supreme affection. To whatever degree, therefore, such persons may pretend to renounce the world; to whatever degree they may pretend to serve God, it is in fact mere pretense. So long as their hearts are not fixed supremely on God, they are the ser-

vants of mammon. In all that they seem to do for God, nothing is truly done for him. The heart is insincere; their purpose fluctuates, and therefore is unreal. God is not chosen as the portion of the soul. The whole attempt is, in reality, a hypocritical artifice.

2. They derive no full enjoyment from religion or the world.

They enter not into the spirit of true religion; they are in fact destitute of the least degree of it. They can, therefore, derive no enjoyment from religion. As to the world, their convictions of duty are too strong to suffer them to derive the full measure of enjoyment from that which it might otherwise afford. They desire from the world what they cannot have without uneasiness, and seek to find at least some good from religion, with no relish for its joys. They resort to two opposite sources of enjoyment. What they derive from one is embittered by what flows from the other. And it is alike true with respect to religion and the world, they can neither be satisfied with it, nor satisfied without it. They are self-tormentors. A life of self-inflicted misery—themselves self-tormentors.

3. They have no peace of conscience.

Conscience, whenever it speaks, and it speaks often and distinctly, too, condemns them. They are strangers to its cheering testimony, that by the grace of God they have had their conversation in the world. In the prospect of sickness, or death, it never whispers peace. On the contrary, it awakens the most distressing forebodings. In such minds, conscience seldom sleeps; their whole life is little else than a conflict with this inward monitor, a course of efforts to stifle its voice, and to avoid reflection respecting God and eternity. And what more unhappy state, than to be constantly doing violence to conscience, and to be as constantly upbraided by its reproaches; a sinful being making himself wretched under the smile of God's pardoning love; and instead of the hopes, the peace, the prospects of a probation of mercy, having perpetual earnest and foretastes of the retribution of guilt!

4. This state of mind is attended more or less with a sense of shame.

Few things are more wounding to the pride of man, than conscious imbecility of purpose and character. And in no case, perhaps, is this consciousness more inevitable than in a state of indecision with respect to religion. To be convinced of the magnitude and importance of the object, to form resolution after resolution, to make effort after effort, and accomplish nothing, to be frustrated in such an undertaking, by the most insignificant causes, must bring the reproach of weakness, and the feeling of self-contempt. How constantly he wishes he had more reason, more sense, more any thing, which gives self-respect! How he must feel reproached by the kindest estimate of the wise and good—that he has none of that resolution and firmness of character, which produce results—that he is one of those light, passive bodies which, under the most powerful impulse, is put at rest by the most trifling obstacle—a floating leaf whirled and stopped by every weed or eddy in its way!

5. This state of mind is full of danger.

If such are not sooner or later discouraged, and led to abandon all thoughts of becoming religious, nothing will be effected, as the result of such a course. Indecision never did any thing to the purpose in worldly pursuits, much less in religion. Analyze this state of mind, and you will see that it must be so. An undecided purpose is the want of all purpose. And the want of a purpose to act in such a case, is a purpose not to act. A determination to do nothing. It may vary in its strength from the purpose of the openly dissolute and abandoned; but it is the same in kind, a determination *not* to be religious; and what can be the result of such a purpose but death?

At the same time it has an awfully deceptive influence. The openly profligate can hardly admit that he is either right or safe. He can at least be more easily shown his danger. But the man who imagines himself but at a little distance from

the path of rectitude and safety, who supposes at most but a few steps need be taken to reach it, and who perhaps persuades himself that he is fast approaching it, has of all men most cause for alarm. While the real danger of his condition is as great as that of any other, he is blind to the fact. He is beyond the reach of alarm. He sees not the evils of his case to be great, and therefore is satisfied that mere palliatives should be administered; every severe remedy is rejected, because it is deemed unnecessary. He is content to halt between two opinions, to stand on the brink of perdition, with his eyes shut.

6. This state of mind is highly criminal.

Whether Jehovah or Baal be God, he is the supreme good; the being who has a right to command; he ought to be obeyed. No matter which be God; no matter which be the eternal self-existent Being that made us and all things, that preserves and blesses us; no matter which is the truly excellent and truly glorious being, possessing in himself, and capable of imparting to us, all that can perfect and bless the immortal spirit; no matter to which we are under the infinite obligations which result from facts like these, be he whom he may—Jehovah or Baal, God or the world—that being, that object, we ought to love and choose and serve forever. These obligations exist somewhere. We cannot annul or lessen them. We are created, we are upheld, we are blessed in this world, we are capable of joy and blessedness through eternity. There is one to whom we owe all that we are and possess. This being is Jehovah or Baal; there cannot be more than one supreme God. There must be one. There can be no conflicting claims, no compromise of services. Who, then, can measure the guilt of refusing to decide which is God? What language can describe the enormity of indifference or hesitation in such a case; what authority does it not despise; what obligations does it not violate? What, my hearers, if the hosts of heaven should begin to doubt on this subject, and should suspend their songs, and waver, and hesitate, and delay their

homage, to decide whether the Jehovah that reigns there is the true God, and whether he or a dumb idol deserves their worship? How, then, must this conduct appear in man? What is such conduct but rebellion against Jehovah, unmitigated even by respect, or rather aggravated by proud contempt?

Such are some of the characteristics of this *indecision*. Whether the worshiper of Jehovah or the devotee of the world be right, they who hesitate are *wrong*.

II. Our text enforces the duty of *deciding* who is truly God, and of serving him, whether Jehovah or mammon, God or the world. This may be done by considering what they are in themselves, what they have done for you, and what they can and will do for you.

1. What they are in themselves.

There is a Being possessed of every perfection and every excellence. There is a Being, the very thought of whom fills the mind at once, and will fill the highest created intelligence with adoration and astonishment forever. The most daring flight of imagination, the utmost comprehension of thought, even of angels and archangels, instead of fathoming the abyss of glory, are lost in the inexhausted and inexhaustible riches that spread and multiply around them. There is a Being whose majesty and dignity no created being can describe, who is first, and last, and midst, "that is, and that was, and that is to come." He formed all things by a word; he sustains and pervades the universe he has made. Nothing is too vast for his control, nothing too little for his inspection. If we attempt to conceive whatever is great in power, comprehensive in wisdom, perfect in purity, and enchanting in goodness, we shall form to ourselves not a living picture of Deity, but a faint and shaded image, such as our mortal vision may bear to behold. What an assemblage of attributes must that be which exalts his glory above the heavens; what perfection, what excellence must that be, before which angels cast their crowns and veil their faces; what glory is that which wakes

the song that echoes through heaven's eternal arches and makes all its pillars tremble? This Being is Jehovah. Look, then, at the world, what is it! Its wealth, but glittering atoms; its honor, empty breath; its pleasure, animal sensation. Vanity and vexation of spirit is the whole amount. Who, then, is God—Jehovah or Baal? Who is worthy of the love and service of such a being as man—God or the world?

2. Consider what they have done for you.

There is a Being whose hands have formed thee and fashioned thee, who hath breathed into thee the breath of life, and made thee a living soul. His visitation hath every day and moment preserved your soul in life; you have lived on the provisions of his bounty; his constant care hath preserved you from innumerable evils; you have walked amidst sickness, and dangers, and sorrows, and death, but in God you have lived and moved and had your being. There is a Being who has borne more than a father's love to you—a Being whom you have provoked by your sins—yet has withheld his anger; and, instead of destroying you forever, has waited to be gracious. When you were lying on the verge of endless woe, beyond the reach of all created help, that being sent his only-begotten Son into the world to redeem and save you—to redeem and save you, when his enemies, by dying for you, He made atonement for your sins, brought in an everlasting righteousness for you, and opened to you, in all your guilt, the portals of everlasting life. Read the greatness of his love and his zeal for your salvation in the blood he shed, the pains and agonies he underwent for you. There is a Being who hath sent his holy Spirit into the world, that this work of redeeming love might not be lost upon you through your contempt and obstinacy—sent him to renew and sanctify your polluted soul, to enstamp on it his own likeness, and to fit it for his own eternal and blissful presence.

Now, in opposition to these claims, what pretensions can the world make? What has it done for you? If it hath administered in some degree to your comfort, still it has deceived

you at every step; it has corrupted your heart and debased you in the depths of moral degradation. It has vexed, and troubled, and almost ruined you forever. It has not, in a solitary instance, promoted your real good. Which, then, is God—Jehovah or the world? Which deserves your heart? What but unspeakable folly and madness can doubt? Who does not say, "To thee, O God, my Maker, my Preserver, my Benefactor, my Redeemer, my Sanctifier, I devote, I consecrate myself? I perceive thy right to all that I am; to thee, through him who bought me with his blood, I devote myself, my all. Had I ten thousand times more to give, it should all be thine. God's I am, and God I will serve."

3. What can the world, what can God do for you?

The world promises much, but what has it truly in its power to give? Nothing. For even the good things of this life are distributed by the providence of God, and without his leave you cannot enjoy the meanest comfort. True, the world sets before us a few images of outward pomp and grandeur; there are those among its devotees who, as it would persuade us, are happy. But it hides the thousands who die martyrs to its wretched cause. Even those who make a great and gay appearance outwardly, and whose happiness appears complete, are for the most part truly miserable within—mere objects of pity. But let it be supposed that all which the world promises it will actually perform. Contemplate, then, the value of its gifts, and give them all they possess. Suppose you live in ease, in pleasure; that you are ever exempt from sickness and calamity, from care and anxiety; that you enjoy uninterrupted prosperity; that you are rich and honorable; that you live long in this scene of unmingled enjoyment, with nothing to disturb your peace without, and the accusations of conscience silenced within, not a cloud obscuring the continual sunshine of your life. Delightful prospect! Yes, here is all that the world can give, and it gives it all to you. But how long will it last? Look at your grave, which lies open a little way before you. How soon will death spread a dark vail over

all these scenes of pleasure; how soon will a shroud, a coffin, and a spot of earth for your body, be all that will remain to you? What, then, will be your condition? What scenes will you then have to witness? The trial of the great day of account; the final sentence that will fix your endless doom; the pains and torments of eternity! There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. He died and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes and cried in vain for a drop of water to quench his thirst. Ask him what the world is worth.

Consider now what the Lord can do, and what he will do, for you. There is a Being in whose favor is life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life. True it is, in his service many things grateful to your corrupt appetites must be abandoned; much self-denial must be practiced; many conflicts must be sustained. We would not deceive you with unreal representations. After all, who will say that the good things of this life are not ordinarily distributed as bountifully to the righteous as to the wicked? Be this as it may, there is one who will give you as much of these things as infinite wisdom sees best for you. Who would wish for more? If a friend of infinite wisdom and kindness will choose for you, who would wish to choose for himself? There is one who can and will be your refuge in every time of trouble. How delightful amid all the strange and disastrous changes and calamities, to lift an eye of joy and confidence upward to an almighty omnipresent friend, to cast away all solicitude, and to lean safely on his everlasting arm? There is an infinite Being who will impart peace to your soul, give you the privileges of the children of the highest, and hold frequent and delightful communion with you in this world. He will give an interest in those promises whose length and breadth and height and depth have no limit but his own boundless goodness, and accompany that interest with a humble hope that these promises are yours. He will deliver you from the vexation and the defilement of sinful passions, create within you the moral image of his own unspotted

purity, unite you in heart, in principle, in conduct, in employments, and, of course, in bliss, with himself and with the holy universe. He will lift upon you the light of his countenance as a foretaste of heaven, cleanse you from guilt in that blood which satisfies every claim of eternal justice; he will, as the eternal Spirit, dwell in you to enlighten, guide, sanctify, strengthen, and comfort you. He will impart to you that submission, and confidence, and gratitude, and love, which are the elements of the Christian character—holy and heavenly elements that shall survive the lapse of ages and flourish in eternal beauty. He will erect and finish a kingdom that will show what infinite power, directed by infinite wisdom and goodness can do, to bless his creatures and make you a partaker in its joys—joys as pure as heaven and lasting as his throne. In a word, there is one who is the fountain and source of all good—who made the heavens and the earth—the giver of all that ministers to the good of man, whose presence diffuses joy and rapture through all the hosts of heaven—who is full of glory, bliss and goodness, and who gives them to all who love him. Who, then, can halt between two opinions any longer; what ground can there be for a moment's hesitation? Who does not say, the Lord, he is God—the Lord, he is God?

And, my dear hearers, let me call your serious individual consideration to the subject before us. Are there not some—I speak both to those who do and those who do not profess religion—are there not some among you, whose state and character have been described.

To all such I would address the words of the prophet, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Why do you hesitate in such a concern as this? Is not the question worth deciding—whether you will take God or the world for your master—your eternal portion? Is it not easily decided? Is there any thing to hinder your choice? Is not indecision a state of shame, vexation and wretchedness; is it not replete with guilt and danger? Do you not dishonor God, by standing to compare

his claims with those of a dumb idol, or this polluted world? Does not the plea of mercy grow feebler and feebler, and the demands of justice louder and louder? Can any thing be lost by a decision? Will not your soul be lost without it? As you are, are you not every moment provoking an offended God to pour out his eternal vengeance upon you? By one decisive purpose of your soul may not everlasting life be yours? How long, then, halt ye between two opinions? Oh, shame on our species! Creatures, surrounded by the proofs of the eternal power and Godhead of Jehovah—sustained every moment by his righteous hand, and blessed with the ceaseless flow of his bounties; reprieved from hell and damnation by his mercy, and invited to fellowship with him in blessedness and glory—these creatures, looking on this corrupting world, hesitate which they will serve! These creatures, knowing what the world is—what the soul is—what its doom is; knowing what sin is—what hell is, and what heaven is; knowing what Jesus Christ the Saviour is—what his love to them is; these creatures of God knowing what God is—what he is in his wrath, and what he is in his mercy—what his friendship is—what it is to go away an outcast from that friendship for eternity—what it is to live forever under the frown of his indignation, and what it is to live forever under the smiles of his love, and what it is to be happy as God can make happy, such creatures of God, when called to his service hesitate—come into his presence—hear his voice of entreaty, hear the thunders of his vengeance, and look on the bright visions of his promises, and halt between two opinions! And, my dear hearers, what more can be said? “If the Lord be God follow him; if Baal, then follow him.” Make your choice at all hazards. If this world be the only good, if this be the fit and proper object of your affections, if this world can satisfy your immortal desires, if it can support under trials, give you peace of conscience, if it can cheer you in death, and bless you through eternity, then fix your heart upon it, pursue it as your chief good, resolutely, and to the end; cast off the fear of God, silence the voice of conscience,

away with the fears of death and hell, and make the most of this object of your choice. But if the Lord be God—if he is the eternal, self-existent, glorious being whose claims upon your heart no tongue can describe, if he is the only object that can fill the soul, if without his blessing all is wretchedness here and forever; if, my dear hearers, you are immortal, if there is a judgment to come on whose throne he will sit,—if there is a heaven which his mercy hath prepared, if there is a hell kindled by his justice, if there is a God, follow him.

16*

24

XXVII.

MAKING EXCUSES.

LUKE xiv. 18.

"I pray thee, have me excused."

No man goes on quietly in his sin, with just views of the nature of sin and of his desert of its fearful consequences.

To avoid such views, and to secure to the mind some tolerable degree of quietness in determined iniquity, the most common and the most effectual expedient, is that of making excuses. Notwithstanding the clear revelation which God has made of his will, almost every one has an extensive list of pretexts, excuses, palliations and apologies to which he resorts, as occasion demands, to weaken the force of his obligations, and to hide from his own view the guilt of transgression. The practice commences so early, and is adopted so universally, that it seems to be not so much the result of habit, as itself a kind of instinct. The learned and the ignorant, the young and the old, appear alike acquainted with the art, and almost equally skilled in its application.

A propensity so universal, with a practice founded upon it so hostile to the interests of the soul, demands our serious consideration. I shall consider it as *vain*, as *criminal*, as *ruinous*.

I. All excuses for disobedience to God are vain.

It were easy to show, by an examination of all the excuses which are offered for irreligious negligence, that they are utterly false, and therefore utterly vain. I can only notice briefly, a few of those which are most common.

One is, *God makes us sinners*, either by creating sin as a substantial property of the soul, or by the laws of propagation, just as the other properties of the mind, or as the members of the body are propagated. But can this be so? God create men sinners, or make them sinners by the laws of propagation! God make that sin, which, in the nature of things, cannot be sin! God make the essential properties of the soul sin! Why not, then, the organs of the body, or the features of the face? Take care, you say, you limit the power of God. Limit the power of God! Is it limiting the power of God to say he cannot make two and two five, or a part equal to the whole, or a thing to be and not to be at the same time? Plainly it is no limitation of the power of God, to say he cannot do such things. Power, in the true sense, has no concern with such things, and for this very good reason, *they are not things*. It is time that Christians and ministers had done with claiming for God the honor of the power to create sin in the human mind. A sinner for being what God made me! God send men to hell for being what he makes them! No. Sin is man's work. Sin is moral action—the act or exercise of the heart. God creates the man a free moral agent; and the man makes himself a sinner. “O, Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself.”

Again, it is a sort of standing excuse with some sinners, when urged to perform their duty, to reply, we *cannot*. But what is the nature of the inability? Their own consciousness, and the word of God, alike testify that it is the simple inability of disinclination—the inability of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God—the inability of wickedness, and nothing else—an inability, therefore, which is itself the *essential* crime, the very substance of guilt. Can it, then, be an apology? Will God regard the very guilt of sin, the very quality which renders it worthy of his wrath, as its vindication?

Another excuse is, the Spirit of God is not ready to change my heart. And we ask, in reply, first, what if he is not ready to change your heart? Who made it necessary that this divine

agent should interpose to subdue the proud and wicked heart of the sinner to the love of God? The sinner himself, and he only—he only, by his voluntary, cherished perverseness in sin. What, then, if the Spirit is not ready will this excuse you a moment—will this annihilate the guilt of that perverseness in sin, which, as a free moral agent, you can and ought to relinquish instantly, by loving God? But I have another answer. You have no warrant to say, that the Spirit of God is not ready. I do not say that he is, or that he ever will be ready. You may be already given up to hardness of heart. But you have no warrant to say, that he is not ready. You do not know it—you cannot prove it; and, in so saying, you may be lying against the Holy Ghost. He may be now striving with you, in a manner, that would result in your instant conversion, were you not resisting and grieving him to the utmost. What if it should be so? What sort of an excuse will your resisting and grieving the Holy Ghost, and then lying against him, prove to be at the bar of God?

The multitude of worldly cares and business, and a consequent want of time, is another common excuse for neglecting religion. The apology assumes that the business of the world and religion cannot go together—that one or the other must give way; whereas, the divine requirement is, that men must be as religious in their business as in the duties of the closet, or in the house of God. He, therefore, who has time for the business of the world, has at least, all that time for religion. And, as it respects the retired and devotional duties of religion, let the hours of every man's life which are wasted, answer. Let the sinner compare the value of his interests on earth with those of eternity—let him produce the result of his incessant worldly occupation; and then ask whether God will be satisfied that he wanted time for his service?

It is often said, we are as good as those around us, at least as the majority; and why need we be thus importuned on the subject of religion? The force of this excuse depends on the fact that others around you are as wicked as yourself;

and the corrupt inhabitant of Sodom or Gomorrah, to stay the storm of fire and brimstone, might have pleaded the same apology.

Others say, there are so many hypocrites in the world, that we have our doubts whether, after all, religion be a reality. But why should there be hypocrites, if religion itself is not a reality? If there were no true bank-notes, no bank, would there be counterfeits? Do you excuse one debtor from the payment of his debts, because others have paid you in base coin? Will God excuse rebellion in you, because others mock him with hypocrisy? No; the demand is on you with additional force, "Come, and do better than they."

I might proceed to mention and expose many other similar excuses, for the neglect of religion generally. Equally empty and absurd are those which are offered for the omission of the particular duties of religion. Are we called upon to perform acts of charity, how commonly do we withhold our substance, under the plea of bestowing it upon some more worthy object, or because we are too poor, while the more worthy object is never selected, and while we are blessed with an abundance. But will God be satisfied with such pretexts? God requires us to work that we may have something to give to him that needeth—to practice self-denial, too, that in this way we may increase our charitable contributions. What, then, will it avail to say, that our property is our own, our health requires indulgence, our station demands expense, our dependents are numerous, while we hoard up a fund that ought to be consecrated to the solace of misery, or the advancement of knowledge and religion? What will it avail to say, the wants of the poor, the demands of charity are perpetual? Will God subtract from our obligation because others are always miserable—because the opportunities of doing good are multiplied? What will it avail to say the times are hard? Will God justify us in retrenching from our charities, or from our useless and criminal indulgences?

How readily multitudes excuse themselves for omitting re-

ligious topics in conversation, the neglect of family prayer, or brotherly exhortation and admonition. They want confidence or talents, or it will answer no useful purpose. Do they want confidence or talents to express their opinions on politics or on the business of the world? If not, their excuse is a falsehood; and as to its answering no useful purpose, why, then, did God prescribe the duty? Did he not judge it useful? Can he not make it useful? Will he, then, accept of an apology which rejudges and condemns his decision and distrusts his grace?

The same course substantially, and to as little purpose, is adopted with respect to the sins of life. Are we angry? We are naturally of a quick and passionate temper—as if the very business of religion was not to govern our temper, and as if the sin of not doing it, was its own apology. Are we worldly-minded? It is prudence, necessary in providing for our families—as if the religion of the gospel was fatal to the duties of humanity, and as if God would accept of the reproach thus cast upon himself as an apology for making the world our god. Are we peevish and fretful under the little crosses of life; do we murmur under disappointments, or despond under afflictions? Such things are irritating, or provoking, or trying, or hard to be borne by such creatures as we are—as if the very events of Providence which are designed to try our hearts, by detecting their depravity, excuse it. Do we neglect to profess Christ before men? We are not Christians—it would be hypocrisy in us to profess to be what we are not—as if the Lord Jesus Christ, when he shall come to judge the quick and the dead, will excuse a refusal to profess his name and espouse his cause, because we were his enemies, and never thought his cause of sufficient importance to espouse it. But it is not necessary to proceed further to expose the emptiness of the particular excuses that are offered for disobedience to the will of God. There is one principle which exhibits them in all their vanity. God has not revealed his law and precepts for men to alter. He knew the character, conditions and circum-

stances of each and every individual; he knew how to measure their exact obligations, what duties they ought to perform, and, of course, what laws to prescribe. Such laws he has prescribed. He knew all the reasons which would or could exist to impair the obligations of each, to extenuate the guilt of transgression; and as a righteous sovereign, if one such reason could exist, would have made the exception. But he has not made it. He has issued his commands as the infinitely wise, holy, just sovereign of men, without specifying a single exception to the demand of unqualified obedience. Can man make these exceptions? Can he assign reasons to set aside his obligations, or to palliate the sin of one known transgression or command of God? Can he invent reasons which will serve the purpose of an apology, which Omniscience never discovered? Will it thus appear when he shall be summoned to the bar of God, that the righteous Judge had been unreasonable in a single demand? No; after all the ingenuity of carnal sophistry, to excuse and palliate the sins of men, each will appear replete with unabated guilt, and worthy of unmitigated damnation.

II. All excuses for disobedience to the will of God are criminal. To make an excuse for what we have done is *impenitence*, and for not doing what we ought to do, is *determined disobedience*.

In the one case it is impenitence. The very nature and design of an excuse for past transgressions, is to conceal, or rather to take away, their guilt. The moment that any action becomes excusable in our estimation, it ceases of course to be sinful. Its moral turpitude is gone, and no cause or ground for repentance remains. It is not a self-excuser who repents; he has nothing to repent of. So, on the other hand, it is not the true penitent that frames excuses, for the obvious reason that in his own estimation he is guilty. What is repentance, but a deep sense of sin; and what is a deep sense of sin, if it does not involve a deep sense that we are wholly without excuse? How, then, can the holy relentings of repentance

reach the heart of him who is clad in this impenetrable armor of excuses and apologies? Shoot at him the arrows of the Almighty, they fall without effect at his feet. Array before him the demands and terrors of the divine law, force him to go alone with his God and extort the confession of guilt from his lips—but is he convinced of sin, is he penitent? No. His heart is beyond the power of truth or motives—yea, the Holy Ghost cannot reach it. He has found an expedient more powerful than the atoning blood of his Saviour; his excuses not only take away the curse, but annihilate the guilt of sin! After all that can be done he is a self-excused, impenitent rebel against God.

Again, excuses for what we ought to do are no other than purposes of disobedience. This connection between an excuse and the purpose to continue in sin is obvious. What we take pleasure in, we employ no excuses to avoid. When we are hungry, do we invent excuses for not eating? or, when we are fatigued, for not taking rest? And who that delights in the service of God, who that is not determined to rebel against him would offer apologies for disobedience? How do the hosts of heaven perform the divine will? Is it an obedience from which they shrink? Do angels rack their ingenuity to find some reason why they should intermit their songs? What if they should? Would they evince the spirit of obedience? Would God be satisfied with that reluctant service which would be looking about for some apologies to authorize the neglect of it? What, then, is the language of an excuse for disobeying any of God's commandments but a direct and avowed declaration of a purpose to disobey? What but a most undeniable proof that the service of God is abhorred?

Besides, every excuse is a direct denial of every obligation to obedience. If obligation exists, there can be no excuse; if the excuse be valid, there can be no obligation. Thus the authority of God is denied and disclaimed upon principle. The supreme Majesty of heaven and earth has no right to command. His authority is usurpation; his government a

lawless despotism; himself a tyrant. Guilt, worthy of the endless wrath of God, belongs to the sinner, or it does not. If it does not, what shall we say of the God that threatens it? If that misery is not deserved by man, infinite blame attaches to him who inflicts it. God declares that he will inflict this dreadful punishment on sinners for not making to themselves new hearts; for not repenting of sin; for not believing in the Saviour; for not submitting to his authority. The sinner arrays his excuses, and affirms that no blame belongs to him for the failure to obey. To whom, then, does it belong? To God. Yes, every excuse he offers lays the blame on God, and makes him the veriest tyrant that ever terrified the heart of man. Rebellion is, of course, legalized; the standard of revolt should be reared throughout his vast dominions, and he who should dethrone the living God—but I need not proceed; it is plain that these excuses for disobeying God, which are so common—the guilt of which is so little thought of—are enmity, war, high-treason, against the majesty of heaven and earth, in its most horrid form—in its naked aspect.

III. This practice is most ruinous.

The real nature of disobedience to God cannot be altered by any delusive covering we can give it. On its real character God will fix his own estimate; and while we cannot deceive him, in deceiving ourselves—if that be any consolation—we shall have great and lamentable success. To that heart which “is deceitful above all things,” self-delusion is an easy task. Nor is there any form in which it can prove more certainly fatal than by leading us to make habitual excuses. These persuade us to cherish faults by whispering peace; they produce complacency and satisfaction in that very conduct which God pronounces worthy of his wrath; conduct us to the brink of the precipice, and blind us to our danger. And who shall hope to conquer his sins who refuses to see them; who shall turn from and escape the danger on which he shuts his eyes? Not only is God provoked to withdraw his Spirit, but the conscience is steeled against conviction, and a fatal barrier is

raised between the soul and eternal life. This obstacle must be taken away. The sinner must take the shame and guilt of sin to himself, and clear his Maker, or nothing can be done for him. Until he shall strip himself of this covering of excuses, until he shall throw off the disguise which hides him from himself, he takes the readiest and surest way to ruin himself forever. He must lie down under a sense that he is without excuse; he must let the conviction come in and possess the soul—with all its tremblings—that he deserves hell. This is the first step that ever was or ever will be taken toward salvation. If he will not take it, if he will stand there excusing himself till he dies, he will, he must, inevitably perish.

Toward this sin, God has manifested his signal displeasure. Thus his wrath was kindled against Moses, when he excused himself from his mission into Egypt. Jonah, for a similar offense, was cast into the deep, "in the midst of the seas; the waters compassed him about, even to the soul." And concerning those who rejected the invitation to the gospel feast, by excuses, the Saviour declared, "None of those men who were bidden shall taste of my supper." For the contemptuous rejection of the Saviour by excuses, the anger of God was kindled against the Jews—he cast them off from being his people, and gave them up to blindness of mind and hardness of heart. And why should the principles of his providential administration be changed toward us? If God has expressed his displeasure against this sin, in his most faithful servants in other days—if he has abandoned sinners to final impenitence and ruin—how can we expect a dispensation in our favor, who live under the meridian light and heavenly privileges of his gospel? "He that covereth his sins, shall not prosper." The threatenings of the living God are not empty menaces. If he has executed them on sinners in other ages, he will execute on the more flagrant offenders in this. Thus, whether we consider the nature of these excuses, or the manner in which God regards them, they are among the most

fearful harbingers of his wrath. Facts show it. We have seen sinners persisting in this expedient of warding off the power of divine truth, and the force of their obligations to God and to the Saviour. Year after year, we have seen them on the verge of eternity, still palliating, in this way, a life of past rebellion. We have seen them, as far as the human eye could judge, abandoned to their delusions, believing a lie, till death placed his cold hand on the mouth open to utter its last excuse, and the soul was summoned to judgment.

REMARKS.

1. How infatuating is the power of sin!

The power of sin to deceive, is indeed, apparent in almost every thing; but how strikingly it appears, when it persuades man that he is under no obligation to his God—when, by its carnal sophistry, it persuades the mind that the demands of God are unjust. And yet this is the design, and this, in a greater or less degree, the effect of every excuse for disobedience to the divine will. It is true, indeed, that these apologies, when first invented, may be suspicious, and even known to be false; they are, indeed, for the most part, adopted from a consciousness of sin, of a weak point which needs defense. But by a little repetition, they soon become valid, as to all practical purposes: on the strength of them, rebellion against God is persevered in with a quiet conscience; the judgment-day, if thought of at all, is anticipated with reliance on these apologies, as a relief from all its terrors. In this book of God, it is written in letters of light, it is declared by the voice of eternal truth, that the impenitent transgressor is in a state of condemnation and wrath. The gulf of destruction stares them in the face, and must soon close upon them forever. And what do they hope? To convict the all-perfect God of error and mistake in his demands—to convict him, either through weakness or design, of injustice—to flatter the ear of Omnipotence, and to beguile the scrutiny of the omniscient Spirit? And

thus they are venturing onward to eternity! And this is your infatuation, my dear hearers, in every excuse, and apology, and pretext, which you invent or offer for your sins! And, if there is such deceitfulness in your heart—if it can thus seduce you into deliberate, settled disobedience to God and contempt of his Son, have you not cause for trembling? Is it not time to turn your eye inward to your own bosom, and measure the effects of such delusion? You have seen how unworthy, how empty and absurd your excuses are. Will they acquire new importance at the throne of God? Will God accept of mere insult, as the ground of exemption from his righteous curse? Dismiss, I beseech you, this thought of madness, and let your lips never utter another excuse for offending God, and rejecting your only Saviour.

2. How opposite is the spirit of excuses, to the spirit which the gospel inculcates.

The one is the spirit of treachery and impenitence—the other, of frank, open confession, and of devout contrition. The one a spirit of determined perseverance in sin, the other a spirit of prompt, cheerful obedience. The one, prays, “Have me excused;” the other, “Search me, O God!” The one owns no sin—the other pours out its confessions in no false or scanty measure—“I thank thee that I am not as other men are,”—“God be merciful to me a sinner.” The language of one is, “I knew thee that thou wert an hard master,”—that of the other, “My meat is to do the will of my Father in heaven.” The one is the spirit of determined rebellion, which the torments of hell will never abate—the other, the delighted spirit of the heavenly hosts, to be heightened in degree, and made more blessed in its effects throughout eternity. By which, my brethren, are we actuated? Do we examine ourselves to discover our sins, to detect our guilt in all its enormity? Or do we resort to shifts, and evasions, and subterfuges to conceal our guilt from our own view, or that of God? Are we frank, and free, and full in our confessions; and do we bear this mark of a child of God, a ready obedience to do his will? God will

not accept of a spirit of duplicity and evasion, but "he that confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall find mercy."

3. Let all self-excusers reflect how they must appear at the judgment of the great day.

Should they be permitted to offer these excuses at the bar of God, how will they look? You plead your inability to love God. Plead it, then, at the judgment-seat of Christ. Go there and expose your ingratitude and enmity, by telling the Judge on the throne, the Saviour that died for you, whose glories fill heaven with rapture—tell him you were so much his enemy, that you could not love him—that you could not help trampling his blood underfoot—tell the living God you could not help making him a liar, by not believing the record of his Son. Plead the incessant occupation of your time—exhibit then its results—show your bags of gold, your houses, your farms, your shops, and tell him these so occupied you, that you had no time for the concerns of your soul. Bring forward these and other apologies. Will they dazzle the eye of Omniscience—will they beguile the Judge of the quick and the dead—will these atone for the sin of the soul—will such insult and trifling avail with the almighty God, when seated on the throne of final judgment? You know it will not. Why, then, cheat your soul in thoughtless security by apologies like these? Why, hastening as you are to your last account, are you not now willing to see yourself as God sees you, and as you will then appear in your own eyes? Why attempt to mock an omniscient God—why cheat your soul into hopeless perdition? God knows your excuses are false. Men know it, and you know it. You know that you ought to love God and believe on his Son. You know that all the apologies you have ever framed are false, and that a single glance from God's all-seeing eye will dissolve them all.

Yes, my dear hearers, the season of apologies will soon be past. Death will stiffen the smoothest tongue of self-conceit, and blot out at a stroke these refuges of lies. The light of eternity will present your polluted soul in all its nakedness

and deformity before the tribunal of God ; nor will an excuse be thought of to mitigate your sin. Not your excuses, but the great decision, repeated from the throne of the Eternal, will stand—"He that believeth not, shall be damned."

XXVIII.

HARDENING THE HEART.

HEB. iii. 7, 8.

“To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

AMID all the demonstrations of the power and goodness of God in behalf of the Jews, they had still hardened their hearts by their continued and aggravated rebellions. At length, wearied and grieved by their provocations, he formed the irrevocable purpose, and confirmed it by an oath, that they should not enter the land of promise, the type of the heavenly country.

This severe judgment of God, against these ancient Israelites, was appealed to by the Holy Ghost in the days of David, as a solemn warning to unbelievers of his time. The same use was made of it by the Apostle Paul; and it is left on record as equally applicable to those of similar character in every succeeding age. “To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

The object of the apostle is evidently to enforce an immediate compliance with the demands of the gospel and the voice of the Son of God. It is as if he had said, if you ever intend to hear and obey the voice of God, no longer harden your hearts. No time must be lost. With a hard heart the gospel never can be obeyed; and if you continue still to harden your heart, you will have fearful reason to fear that after the example just cited God will swear in his wrath, “Ye shall not enter into my rest.”

In considering the exhortation not to harden the heart, our

attention will be directed to what it is to harden the heart, how it is done, and the reason for hardening it no longer.

I. To harden the heart is to cherish a voluntary insensibility to God and divine objects.

Sin consists in electively preferring (God to the world) This state of mind continued—that is, the mind, the heart withholding its affections from God and fixing them on the world, is the act of hardening the heart, the act of perpetuating this moral insensibility toward God and things divine.

The soul of man is as truly capable of deriving those affections and emotions from those divine objects which correspond with their nature, as is wax of deriving the image from the seal. That state of mind in which man voluntarily counteracts and resists this influence of truth, is what the Scriptures term hardness of heart.

Fears of punishment may occupy the soul, conscience may awake and inflict its severest pangs, and yet the heart remain hard. In the world of woe there is no stupefaction in the conscience, and yet hardness of heart reigns without the least mitigation. The question, then, is, not whether we have feeling, but whether we have any such feelings toward God, toward Christ, toward sin, as are appropriate to these objects? Have we that love to God which is due to that perfect Being? Have we that faith without which we cannot please him? If not, then it is strictly true that we have *no* feeling. The heart, in respect to divine and eternal realities, is as cold as ice, and as hard as the rock.

This state of mind is voluntary and criminal. The commands of God forbid, substantially, nothing but a hard and unfeeling heart. The threatenings of God are denounced against nothing but a hard, unfeeling heart. Is that, then, a matter of irresistible necessity, or is it free, voluntary, and criminal action, which a perfect God forbids and punishes with eternal death? The same truth is evinced by human consciousness. There are some things that do not depend on the will. Every one knows that it does *not* depend on his

will, when fire is applied to his flesh, whether he shall feel or not. But how is it, when the realities of God's revelation are presented to the mind? Every one knows that he *electively* holds his affections to his idol, to the world, and from God. He knows that it is a matter of choice with him. He is conscious of a voluntary act or state of the mind, the very object and design of which is to prevent all right feeling. He is not only conscious of insensibility, a state of wrong affection, but he is also conscious, that he cherishes, guards and protects it against an invading power that would otherwise, at least, carry agitation and alarm to his inmost soul. He retreats from that scene of manifestation, where otherwise the influence of such realities as a present God, an offered Saviour, and the realities of eternity would tell on his spirit; and he knows it. He knows, therefore, that his heart is hard, because he chooses it should be hard.

This will more clearly appear, if we inquire,

II. How the heart is hardened.

In answer to this inquiry, I remark,

1. By fixing its affections supremely on the world.

So long as the heart is supremely set on the world, there can be no true sensibility to God and divine things. "No man can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or cleave to the one and despise the other." The same heart cannot have two supreme objects, two Gods at the same time. That on which the heart is supremely fixed will engross its sensibilities, and when the world is that object there is, there can be no sensibility called forth to the glory of God, the excellency of Christ, or the joys of heaven. Accordingly *no* persons furnish more decisive proof of hardness of heart, than they who are actively engrossed in worldly pursuits. Look at the man in whose heart avarice has fixed its dominion, and who, embarking all his desires in the pursuit, and all his hopes in the acquisition of riches, makes an idol of his wealth. Or the man of ambition, who for the gaze of this world's admiration, makes an idol of fame. Or the man of

pleasure, whose every wish is directed, and every hope bounded by anticipations of sensual indulgence. You need only look at such a person, at one whose heart is thus devoted to the world in any form, to see that insensibility to the will and glory of God marks his whole deportment. A striking exemplification of this was furnished by that miser whose hand, cold in death, still held its firm grasp upon his gold, when his spirit had gone to the bar of God.

2. The heart is hardened by refusing to turn the attention to divine things.

No truth is plainer than this; that a man will not feel what he does not think of. In reproving the stupidity of his ancient people, God saith, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people *will not consider.*" The grand and only cause of hardness of heart in multitudes is just the same. The things of eternity are not thought of intensely enough; they are not seen distinctly enough to produce feeling according to the laws of our mental constitution. They are ever kept in the background of contemplation. Other objects of contemplation, other objects of thought, are suffered constantly to intervene, and thus to move and excite all the feelings of the soul. The glimpses which such persons may have of the realities on the other side of time, are so faint, and so rare, that the real nature of those objects is never seen. Their clearest perception only discovers dark, obscure, undefined shadows in eternity; while, for the most part, these great realities are thrown off into the region of complete forgetfulness. Of course, nothing is felt. The consequence cannot be otherwise. The revealed glories of God, unthought of, must leave the heart as hard and unmoved as it would be were there no God, no Christ, and no heaven.

3. The heart is hardened by excusing sin.

The object of every excuse formed by the mind is to impair or destroy a sense of obligation and guilt. This object attained, the power of every cause of right moral feeling is annihilated. For what right moral feeling can that man possess who is dead

to all sense of obligation to God, and to all sense of guilt in rebelling against him? It is true, indeed, that all sense of obligation is not easily eradicated from the human mind. But it is an easy and a common thing fatally to impair it by excuses and palliations. Whatever be the nature or shape of the excuse devised, whether it be derived from the character or purposes of God, the character and relations of man, or the pressure and necessity of worldly avocations, just so far as an excuse serves to prevent a frank and full confession of sin, and abates the influence of our obligation to obey God now, so far it hardens the heart. The reason is plain. The only cause of moral sensibility is wholly resisted, and the heart is opened to the full influence of every thing that can benumb and stupefy. Excuses for sin and hardness of heart are inseparable. This is the most obvious dictate of common sense. Is not that man a hard-hearted sinner, who even thinks of an excuse for disobeying the living God a moment?

4. The heart is hardened by presumptuous hopes and expectations from futurity.

Nothing is more common than such hopes, founded on the purpose of future repentance. Nothing has led so many thousands onward to the brink of eternity, and plunged them unprepared into it, as the delusive hope that God's patience will consult their convenience. It is this very dream that now holds this guilty world in the deep slumbers of death, while the voice of God is sounding in their ears. The effect is unavoidable, and is obvious by every such sinner's own experience. He knows that his present quiet in sin is the direct and in some sense the exclusive effect of these very hopes. He knows that without them he could not resist the terrors of his condition, and that he cherishes these hopes for the very purpose of suppressing all sensibility to divine things. He knows that they answer this very purpose, or he should not resort to them. Does he doubt on this point? Would he not then feel, did he know that this was his last hour of mercy? Should the curtain of eternity now rise directly before him, would he not

feel? Yes, and therefore he refuses to regard life as the vapor which it is; therefore he deadens all present sensibility to eternal things, from hopes of futurity. The very language of such hopes is, the authority and glory of God shall not be felt now; the calls of an inviting Saviour, and the excellence of his character shall not be felt now; the evil of sin and the awful realities of a future world shall not be felt now; an experiment shall be made how much provocation God will bear; the interests of the soul are not in jeopardy, and all anxiety shall be quieted; all sensibility shall be deadened by hopes from futurity. I need not say how fearfully inevitable is the effect designed. These hopes of a future repentance, fellow-sinner, are a shield to your heart, which the arrows of the Almighty will never penetrate.

Having thus shown what it is to harden the heart, and some of the ways in which it is done, I proceed—

III. To enforce the exhortation no longer to harden the heart, by the considerations implied in the text “To-day if ye will hear his voice.” The declaration implies,

1. That to harden the heart is a fatal obstacle to hearing and obeying the gospel.

The apostle evidently makes it indispensable to hearing the voice of God to any salutary purpose, that the heart be not hardened. The very nature of the case shows it. So long as the heart remains hard, that voice which speaks to us from heaven speaks in vain. How can man obey the command to love the Lord his God with all the heart, while that heart remains stupidly insensible to all the excellence and glory of the divine character? How can he intrust his soul, with an affectionate confidence and heartfelt joy, to the Lord Jesus Christ, while his heart is cold and dead to all the love and mercy of his Saviour? How can he repent of sin while his heart is fortified against every humble relenting, and every contrite emotion for its odiousness and turpitude? How can he be hastening a preparation for heaven, when the attractive glories of that world are repelled by a heart sordidly riveted to

the atoms of earth? Obey God with a hard heart! That God whose every demand reaches the heart, and requires its strongest sensibilities, its purest, holiest affections! It cannot be supposed for a moment. No matter what fears and anxieties may alarm the soul; no matter what convictions of guilt may harass the conscience; no matter what service may be rendered by the feet, the hands or the lips, if the heart continue shut to the holy influence of divine realities, there is, there can be no obedience to a single divine command. Whatever reason, then, there is in the commands of the living God—why they should now be obeyed—there is all that, why the sinner should no longer harden his heart. Whatever there is in the beaming glories of the Godhead, whatever there is in the claims of a creating God, of an all-providing God, of a redeeming God, whatever there is in the majesty and authority of a reigning God, why his voice should be heard and obeyed to-day, it all combines to enforce the exhortation, “To-day, harden not your hearts. To harden the heart is death to every right feeling, to every holy affection. So long as you harden your heart, you hear not the voice, you break every command of him that speaketh from heaven.

2. To harden the heart is the *only* obstacle to an immediate compliance with the demands of the gospel.

It is clearly implied in the text, that if sinners will not harden their hearts to-day, they will hear his voice to-day. To be perfectly satisfied of this truth, we have only to suppose the hardness of the heart to be wholly removed; that instead of a heart whose every sensibility is moved, and whose every affection is engrossed by the world, the mind becomes susceptible to divine realities, and opens itself to their influence, as it would were the sinner standing on the threshold of eternity? Do you say man is depraved, and has in his nature no sensibility to divine things? Depraved!—without this sensibility he could not be depraved at all. The more he has of it, if he does not love these objects, the more depraved he is. Let us look a little at this. Does not the poet tell us right, when he says,

of the fell spirit that entered paradise, and looked on the moral beauty of an unfallen fellow-angel, that "he saw virtue in her shape how lovely, and felt how awful goodness is?" And has man no sensibility to the revealed glories of a perfect God? Is not his character clearly revealed to our intellectual apprehension? And is not the character of man, of a human benefactor, an object of distinct apprehension and vivid emotion? And is there not enough in divine objects, revealed as they are in the brightness of noon-day, to secure their true and proper influence on our affections? Is not character in such a case an object of our distinct apprehension? And does the God who put life into us, who sustains us every moment, and multiplies his blessings on us and all his visible creation, furnish no proof of what he is? Can we rely on this deceitful, empty, disappointing world to make us happy; and yet can we see no security, no ground of assurance in the promises of the living and unchangeable God to bless us? Surely the difficulty is not here. The reality, the nature, and the worth of divine things are shown us in the brightness of noon-day. And as to the sufficiency of these things, is there not enough to produce the effect? Is there not enough in the worth and majesty of the Eternal—is there not enough in that assemblage of all that is pure, and holy, and gracious in the Lord Jesus—is there not enough in the joys of a blessed eternity on the one hand, and the terrors of an undone eternity on the other, to awaken every holy affection, and fix every holy purpose in such a being as man? There can be but one answer to the question. Do you say you are dependent on the Spirit of God? True. But what makes you dependent on the Spirit of God? Nothing but a *hard heart*. Cease to harden your heart. Let go of the world with your heart; turn your thoughts on God, and Christ, and heaven; give up your mind, your heart to the sacred influence that would come upon it, and you would no longer need the Holy Spirit to soften your heart. Do this, and you would no longer be dependent on the Spirit. Do this, and there is nothing in the way of your safe-

vation. Do this, and instantly would your heart go forth in sweet and holy affection to such a Saviour as Christ. The Holy Ghost surely does not prevent such affection in your heart by any thing he does, or fails to do. There is nothing in God, nothing in man, nor in the universe to prevent immediate obedience to the divine will, but every thing to secure it as an inevitable effect. What weight does this consideration give to the exhortation of the apostle? Nothing, absolutely nothing, prevents any man from now obeying the voice of God but a cherished obduracy of heart. The only obstacle to an immediate submission to the gospel and a participation in all its blessings, is a voluntary insensibility to the amazing and glorious realities which that gospel discloses. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

3. To abstain from hardening the heart, is as easily done at the present as any future time.

This is clearly implied in the urgency with which the immediate performance of the duty is pressed in the text. God has never, in a single instance, required man to obey him to-morrow. But every call, and every command, and every promise, brings duty to man with the urgency of a present business, a matter on hand; something now to be done. It comes accompanied with the proclamation, "Behold, *now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation." And is it credible that it is as well, or even better, to postpone compliance to a future day? But this is not all. As a moral agent, man has all the powers and faculties of moral agency, all he ever will possess. He has every qualification, in this sense, to perform present duty, as truly as Gabriel has; and should he be sanctified wholly by divine grace, and admitted into heaven, he would receive no new faculties; he will only use these faculties differently from what he now does.

As it respects means, the Bible has poured all its treasures at his feet, and not another truth or motive or object will ever be presented which that revelation has not unfolded. "What more could have been done in my vineyard that I have not

done in it?"—this is his own vindication, and I repeat it in his own words. As it respects the difficulties of performing the duty, these will not be diminished. Is it difficult to resist the attractions with which the world assails the heart? The world will remain the same tempting world—the same, till it is burnt up. And if you wait till the world cease to tempt, you must wait forever. Is it more difficult to resist these attractions now than in more advanced age? But the world has lost none of its power over the sinner whose locks have whitened in sinning against God. Is it difficult to overcome habits of sin already established? Such habits continued only multiply their cords and bind with a firmer grasp. Will it be easier to regard the admonitions of conscience by still longer stifling its voice? Will it be easier to fix your thoughts on the unseen realities of your future being the longer you refuse to think of them; will it be easier to abandon your excuses the longer you rely on their validity at the judgment-seat; will it be easier to renounce your quieting, presumptuous hopes and expectations from futurity, the longer you thus embolden yourself in sin; will it be easier to submit to the authority of God the longer you contemn it; will it be easier to delight in his perfections the longer you loathe and abhor them; will it be easier to intrust your soul to the Lord Jesus Christ the longer you despise his salvation and crucify him afresh? Will these things be easier to-morrow than to-day; at any future time—than now; will they be more easily done when every cause which has secured the impenitence and perdition of thousands shall have augmented its power on you a hundred-fold?

4. The last consideration is, that those who now harden their heart may never hear and obey the gospel.

This appears, if we consider, in all such cases, the increase of guilt. To harden the heart against the voice of God once, is a high measure of provocation; and if it be the tendency of sin, of accumulated guilt, to exhaust the patience of God and to provoke his speedy vengeance, what must be the effect of hardening the heart with the formal design of continuing to

rebel against him? What must be the effect of such a purpose, with all the accumulation of guilt, in hating God, rejecting his Son, grieving his Spirit, which it brings with it through successive months and years? When in its own nature it involves every act of future sin; when its whole strength—strength, too, thus to offend God—is derived from the fact that God is good and long-suffering? What purpose embodies baser ingratitude, a more direct insult to God, greater hardness in rebellion, and a greater amount of crime; and what purpose could the sinner form to provoke God's instant vengeance if this does not?

Again, there is a fearful principle of God's administration which arrays all its alarms before such persons. "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." "Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh." "If we sin willfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." "Oh," said the compassionate Saviour, "oh that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace." God, then, often abandons willful sinners to their own chosen way; and the principle is as applicable to sinners now living as to thousands who admit it in everlasting burnings. Not one who hardens his heart to-day can prove that to-morrow will not be a day too late. In connection with these things is to be considered the frailty of health, of reason, and of life. How easily, how commonly, how suddenly, are our fellow-men overtaken with disease and pain that utterly disqualify for the great work of turning to God? How common are those stupors that benumb every faculty—that delirium that extinguishes reason? How often does death come without a single warning, or at least, without the expectation of its approach? How many within our own acquaintances has death snatched away, with no thought of their state, till they opened their eyes in eternity?

Further, it is probable that he who resolves to-day to harden

his heart will continue to harden it to the end of life, because, on the one hand, there are no reasons for the resolution *now* which will not exist hereafter; and, on the other, there are all the reasons for renouncing it *now* that ever will exist. Habit will give still greater power to every cause which now operates to produce the purpose of delay and greatly diminish the influence of every counteracting cause. As to the resolution to wait for the interposition of divine grace, the tendency of such a resolution is fatal. No sinner ever was converted while hardening his heart and stupidly waiting for God to convert him. The only reasonable expectation is, that the resolution to defer will continue till death, and eternal retribution shall break it; and that he who hardens his heart to-day will go down to hell amid the fragments of his broken vows and vain expectations.

I shall conclude the discourse with one remark. The difficulty of giving your heart to God is not in the time. There will never be a better time than the present; it may be the only time; every cause of the damnation of the sinner is only augmenting its power upon you by delay. No; the difficulty is not in the time, it is in the heart. You are still hardening your heart, and you will harden it till you feel that you must do it no longer. Sooner or later you must feel that *now* is the time when this work must be done. Come, then, anxious sinner, come to-day, and see and feel the dying necessity of your case. Indulge not a hope from to-morrow. To-morrow, the Spirit of God may abandon you; to-morrow, painful disease or wild delirium may seize you; to-morrow may break upon you in the torments of hell. It will then be too late. To-day, then, as if it were your only day; to-day, as if to-morrow were known to be a day of darkness and despair; to-day, as if you knew your soul this night would be required; to-day, even now, agonize to give your heart to God, your soul to Christ. Throw away every hope from futurity, and fix the hour, fix the moment, when, with a holy desperation of effort, you will commit your soul to the everlasting arms.

Do it as you would if you already heard the noise and saw the terrors of approaching judgment; do it as you would, were you to have but one more offer of mercy, one hour more of probation, but one moment's respite from eternal damnation.

The subject addresses those who remain stupidly insensible to their eternal interest. My dear hearers, is my anxiety groundless, are my fears without cause, is my conviction without evidence, when I tell you that it is my honest belief that many of you will continue to harden your hearts and neglect the great salvation till the day of mercy shall be past? Have you not deliberately resolved still to harden your heart and still to postpone this great concern? Have not the persuasives, the reasons, and the motives, to defer no longer, been urged upon you a hundred and a thousand times, and left you with the same purpose still? On this day of God's merciful visitation you still harden your heart. Even now, all the authority of God, all the weight of eternal realities, all the love of Jesus, and all the danger of your present state, change not your purpose to delay or cause it to falter. Thus is your guilt accumulating; thus your provocations are multiplying; thus habit is fixing its iron grasp; thus, while your life is a vapor, you are treading in the very steps of thousands who have gone down to hell, and every cause of damnation is augmenting its power over you. And what sinners were ever likely to perish, if you are not? My dear hearers, I tremble for you. You may think my anxiety is groundless, and flatter yourselves that you shall repent hereafter. That is the very reason why I tremble for you; that is the very purpose which I expect will seal your perdition. And it is with such emotions; it is with such solicitude as this view of your condition is fitted to produce; it is as if this were the only day in which you can ever secure God's pardoning mercy; it is as if I knew that to-morrow you would stand at the bar of God—if I knew you would to-day cast your last look on that setting sun, and before it rises again would open your eyes on the scenes of

eternity ; it is as if I knew that you had only this day's, this hour's respite, from eternal damnation, that I say to you, in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

XXIX.

THE SINNER'S DUTY TO MAKE HIMSELF A NEW HEART.

EZEKIEL xviii. 31.

“And make you a new heart and a new spirit.”

I HAVE selected this text for the purpose of explaining and enforcing the great duty—the sum of all other duties—which God requires of sinful men.

This command of God was addressed to sinners who impeached the rectitude of his dealings by insinuating that he punished them unjustly. God solemnly declares the insinuation to be false, absurd, and impious; and, by appealing to reason and to conscience, shows them that their guilt is their own. He then calls on them to repent and cast away their transgressions, and to make them a new heart and a new spirit.

The plain and important truth which I shall attempt to establish is, that—

It is the duty of every sinner to make himself a new heart.

This will appear—

I. From the nature of a new heart.

What, then, is a new heart? Some would answer, it is a great change in the sinner. And so it is most truly. But the question is not merely whether the change is great, but what is it? Some would say, no one can tell but they who have experienced it; it is a something which we can know and understand when we experience it, but not till then. But is this so? Cannot the sinner understand God's commands and his own duty before he actually obeys God? Then, to what purpose is the command given? To what purpose is the duty

described or even named? Why talk about duty which nobody can understand? Is God such a lawgiver and the Bible such a book? God reveal, and man not able to understand? Man a moral being, and yet cannot understand what a wrong or wicked heart is, or what a right or holy heart is? Then a bad man cannot understand what it is to become a good man, even if he wished to become one, and so is destitute of that knowledge which is essential to all obligation—and whether man is holy or sinful, the object of God's love or abhorrence, none can tell. But some will tell us a new heart is a change in the very nature of the mind—in the very structure or constitution of the soul itself—or, in plainer language, God has made the soul wrong and he must make it right. He has implanted that in every mind which he only can remove, or he must implant something there which he only can implant.

Well, then, let God, I say, be responsible for his own work. If he has made men sinners, it belongs to him to unmake them. To talk of a work which God only performs, as my duty, is out of the question. If this work be to transform the very nature which God has given me, and thus to remake the very work of my Maker—whether it be to create a whole soul or a part of a soul—then I say I know, and all men know, that not even the command of God himself could make me feel my obligation to do this.

But it will be said that the Bible teaches that a new heart is a new creation, and that, whether we can explain it or not, sinful man must be literally created anew in Christ Jesus. I answer: the error is palpable, and consists in one of the grossest of all mistakes, that of supposing the figurative language of the Bible to be literal. True it is, the Bible speaks of this change in man as *a new creation*. But it also speaks of it as *a new birth*, and as *a resurrection from the dead*. All these it cannot be. A new creation is not a new birth, nor is it a resurrection from the dead. Indeed, if the change be truly and literally any *one* of these three things, then it cannot be truly and literally either of the others. And if you may say, it is a

literal creation, another may say, it is a literal new birth; and a third, that it is neither, but a literal resurrection. And what shall we make of the Bible by such interpretation? Plainly the language is wholly figurative, since otherwise it must be contradictory and false. But the case is too plain to be mistaken. The language of the Bible is the language of common usage, and of common life the world over, in all similar instances. Suppose a man degraded by his vices, idle, profligate—a victim of sensuality and crime—to become reformed—sober, industrious, respectable—how natural to speak of him as a new man—a new creature, born again; and even as raised from the dead! To describe the greatness of the change, these forms of speech are to be found in all languages, and in all ages. None so appropriate to exhibit that moral transformation by which a bad man becomes a good man. A new heart, then, is nothing more and nothing less than a holy heart, the grand element of a new moral character. It is a heart that loves, and fears, and serves God. It is called *new*, as being entirely another and a different heart from that of the sinner. The sinful heart is a selfish heart—a heart fixed in its supreme affections on the world, and opposed to God. A new heart is a heart of benevolence or love. It loves God and the sentient universe. The sinful heart rejects the Saviour, a new heart believes in him; a sinful heart loves sin, the new heart hates it; the sinful heart leads its possessor into sinful practices, the new heart prompts to a course of holy obedience to the will of God. Such is the new heart. And is not every man bound to have such a heart as this? To ask whether the sinner ought to make himself a new heart, is to ask whether he ought to love God, and not to hate him. And no one can be at a loss for an answer to the question, for one moment.

II. From the nature of man.

Man is an intelligent voluntary being. He is capable of knowing his duty, and of performing it. He has understanding; the power of knowing what is right and what is wrong. He has the capacity of feeling the motives to right and wrong action.

He has a will or heart; the power of choosing and refusing, or of loving and hating. He not only possesses these powers and capacities, but he uses them. And the only question is, how ought he to use them? Ought he to use them right or wrong?

The possession of these powers is the foundation of all accountability. Give them to the stones of the street, and you make them moral agents. Take them from angels, and they would cease to be under the least moral obligation. Let these powers be possessed by any being, and it is impossible to conceive that he should for a moment be free from obligation to love that most which is most worthy of his love. It matters not how he uses these powers, whether for good purposes or for bad purposes; the obligation to use them right remains.

Now sinners possess all these powers. And surely the fact, that they have always used them wrong is no reason why they are not bound to use them right. The fact that they have always loved the world more than God, is no reason why they should not love God more than the world. The degree of their aversion to God is no better reason. For their obligation arises not from the manner in which they use these powers of moral agency, but from the possession of them. On this principle it is that devils are as truly bound to love God, as seraphs before his throne. They have the same high powers; and the only difference is, they use them differently. They once used them right, and are bound still, and will be forever, to use them right. On the same principle the sinner can no more be excused for refusing to love God this moment, than Gabriel could be, were he now to raise a rebellion in heaven. Being as truly a moral agent, having all the powers that make a moral agent, it is as easy, in this respect, to love God, as to hate God. Man would have no more power to love God were he actually to love him, than he now has. With ample powers to love God or to love the world, he is required to love the one, and forbidden to love the other. Ought he not to comply? Ought not such a being to put away his old heart of enmity, and to make himself a new heart of love?

III. God commands sinners to make themselves a new heart.

The text is explicit. "Make you a new heart, and a new spirit." The Old Testament abounds in similar commands. "Circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked;" "Oh, Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." Our Lord directed all his precepts to the heart. "Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within;" "Make the tree good, that the fruit may be good also." In this he was followed by his apostles. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, purify your hearts, ye double-minded." The command *to repent*, so often repeated, and so strongly pressed upon this sinful world, is precisely of the same import. The very word used by our Lord and his apostles, signifies to change the mind—to change the disposition. The command is, *amend, reform*; in other words, *make you a new heart*.

The same thing is implied in every other command of God given to sinners. There is not one which does not require a right heart—the exercise of those affections in which a new heart consists. Does God require sinners to love him? It is with *all the heart*. Does he require them to believe? It is *with the heart*. Does he require them to pray? It is to seek him with *all the heart*. And so of every other command. The most distinct utterance that ever fell on mortal ears from the throne of God is, "My Son, give me thine heart;" and what good reason has any human being to give for refusing to obey the mandate? I now ask, do these commands—let any one say no, if he dare—impose no duty; or, is the sinner's duty to make him a new heart as binding as the authority of the living God can make it?

IV. The same thing is evident from facts.

The thing has often been done; and this in two forms. Thus Adam was once holy—his heart was right with God. Now, in turning from holiness to sin, he changed his own heart—he made himself a new heart. And surely, if a man can turn from right to wrong—from holiness to sin, he can

turn, and ought to turn, from sin to holiness—from wrong to right. He who can make, and has made himself a wicked heart, can make, and ought to make himself a holy heart. Whether the previous state of the heart be right or wrong, he himself has made it. And if it be wrong, he is bound to make it right. As Adam, then, made his heart wicked in turning from holiness to sin, so he was at once bound to turn back to the service of his Maker. For the same reason, sinners who have made themselves wicked hearts from the first, are bound to make themselves new hearts.

But this is not all. Every Christian has, *in fact*, through grace, made himself a new heart. Let me not be misunderstood on this point. What, then, saith the Scripture? “Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit;” “Ye have put off the old man, and put on the new man.” True, when the sinner does this, he does it through the Spirit. Still he does it. He purifies his soul. It is his act. It is an act of obedience. He *obeys* the truth. And what does God do, when by his Spirit he brings the sinner thus to act? He causes the sinner to love, to repent, to believe—to give his heart to God in the exercise of these affections. It is not God who repents, believes, and loves, but the sinner. It is the sinner—and the sinner exercising his own powers in a right manner through the Spirit—and, in the very manner in which he can exercise them, and ought to exercise them, without the Spirit. The Spirit is not given to create any new powers, or to create any new obligation or new duty; but only to secure the right exercise of powers, and the performance of a duty already existing. If it were not the sinner's duty to make himself a new heart without the Spirit, then the Spirit could not bring him to perform such a duty, for the plain reason that there would be no such duty to be done. God cannot cause stones and trees to perform acts of duty. It is the most palpable of all absurdities to suppose that God should cause a being to perform his duty, who, in his very nature, can perform no duty, and owes no duty. While, then, every

Christian has, *in fact*, through the Spirit, made himself a new heart, so in doing it, he has simply done what it was his duty to do, and what every sinner is bound to do without the Spirit.

V. If sinners are not bound to make themselves a new heart, then the law of God is not binding on men.

The sum and substance, the very thing which the law of God requires of the sinner, is a *new heart*. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." This is man's duty, and his perfection as a moral being. No other change in the sinner is desirable. God can do nothing better for him than to bring him to fulfill this command—nothing better than to bring him to love himself, with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength—*i. e.*, as much as he is capable of loving him—neither more nor less. If, then, the sinner is not bound to make himself a new heart, he is not bound to do as well as he can do—he is not bound to obey the law of God, and commits no sin in violating it; for there can be no sin in violating a law, when there is no obligation to obey it. On the same principle, man has never broken the divine law. Or, rather, there is no law of God; for a law which imposes no obligation, is *no law*. If, therefore, the sinner has not always been, and is not now under obligation to make himself a new heart, or what is the same thing, to love God, he never has sinned at all—he commits no sin now. Can any believe this? Has God abandoned his law to accommodate rebellion? Has he given up that eternal rule of right which measures man's duties by man's powers? Can any one believe or say, that that law, to magnify which God gave his beloved Son to die on the cross, is not binding on sinners? If it is not, the sinner is innocent. If it is binding, then every sinner always has been, and is now under the highest obligation to obey it—to make himself a new heart.

VI. The same is evident from the nature of the gospel.

The gospel is a system of grace from beginning to end. Its

great atonement by blood—the awakening, renewing, and sanctifying influences of the divine Spirit—is all grace. But, as we have seen, if man is not bound to make himself a new heart, he is not a sinner. Christ, then, has not died for sinners. He did not come to seek and save those who were lost—those who deserved eternal death; but those who were innocent. Christ died for those who needed no salvation. The awful scene when, at the death of the Son of God, the sun was darkened, and the earth to its center shook, was at best a solemn pageantry. This must be said, or it must be said that men were sinners, and sinners because they had broken a law they were bound to obey—because they had not, when they ought to have, a heart to love and serve the ever-blessed God.

Again. If the sinner is not bound to make himself a new heart, there is no grace in the influences of the Holy Spirit. Grace is favor shown to sinners—to the ill-deserving. If, then, man is not bound to make himself a new heart, without the aids of the divine Spirit—then he is not to blame, is not ill-deserving for not having such a heart, and of course there is no grace in giving him such a heart. Were God to withhold the aids of his Spirit, and threaten to punish man for not having a new heart—for not repenting, it would be an act of injustice. The sinner can say with perfect truth, either God must not denounce punishment against me, or he must furnish me with the aids of his Spirit, which are requisite to enable me to perform my duty. It is a matter of plain equity. If God denounce punishment against the sinner, the sinner can claim the aid of his Spirit on the score of justice, and God is bound to furnish it. And where is grace? Where is grace in a gift which God is bound to bestow—in a gift, which the sinner can of right demand? It is plain, that the whole system of grace is annihilated. Every word in the gospel about grace should be stricken out. “Grace is no more grace.” Every reason for gratitude and praise is taken away. Saints on earth, and saints in heaven, have no song to raise to him who washed them in his blood, and renewed them by his

Spirit. He was bound to do it. Convince the Son of God of this—persuade them before the throne to shout no more the praises of redeeming grace—take the crown from Jesus' head—tell the Holy Ghost, that he has done only what he was in justice bound to do; or, admit that you are bound to make you a new heart and a new spirit, and that the wrath of God is your desert for not doing it.

VII. Finally, the character of God decides the truth of our doctrine.

Here I present the simple question of reason and of equity. Ought the sinner to love the all-perfect God? God, his Maker, his Preserver, Benefactor, Saviour—God, the best friend he has in the universe—God, whose character is infinite excellence, combining all that is comprehensive in wisdom, vast in power, enrapturing in goodness and mercy—claims the sinner's heart—claims it of right—claims it under his own promise and oath to give all he can give to bless. In opposition is arrayed the world, which deceives, ensnares, corrupts, and destroys the soul forever. And can reason—can conscience hesitate as to the reasonableness and the equity of these opposing claims? See what a God Jehovah is! Behold his glory which is above the heavens! Look into that eternal temple where he unveils those glories! How angels love! How all heaven loves, exults, and sings as they behold him face to face! Such a God there is, and he claims the sinner's heart. Now, produce the objects of your affection—your wealth, your honor, your pleasures—bring forward your vanity and vexation of spirit; and say, whether this, or the ever-blessed God, deserves your heart! Let any Christian—let any sinner—let any devil answer.

REMARKS.

1. They who deny the sinner's power as a moral agent to make himself a new heart, deny the scriptural doctrine of the divine influence, or the work of the Holy Spirit.

What is the work of the Holy Spirit in changing the sinner's heart? It is that influence or operation by which he brings the sinner, in the free, unconstrained use of his own moral powers, to fix his heart on God. It is not the creation of any new mental power or property, but it is an influence which secures simply and solely, in a complete moral agent, the right use of powers already possessed, and which he has hitherto always perverted; a work which the Holy Ghost cannot accomplish in any being except in a complete moral agent; for it is a self-evident absurdity to suppose a being to use powers in a right manner which he does not possess.

Shall we, then, be told that the work of the Spirit is a literal creation of some new mental property—some new constitutional taste, relish, or something nobody can tell what; and that it is heresy—damnable heresy—to deny it? And is it so?—The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, the literal creation of a new soul, either in whole or in part? You may as well say that the work of the Spirit is building the Tower of Babel. The work of the Holy Spirit is not such a work. Every human soul, ever since the apostasy as well as before, is made in God's image, as an apostle teaches. In speaking of the tongue, he says, "Therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God." Not, indeed, that man is made holy, but made an intelligent, voluntary being, with all the mental powers in kind which pertain to God himself. Otherwise, he could not be a sinner. In creating souls, God's work is perfect, and not to be mended. And to deny this, and to maintain that the work of the Spirit consists in making a new soul either in whole or in part—to maintain that it is any thing but securing the right use of powers already possessed by the sinner—that is the heresy. No; it is moral change. The influence of the Spirit is that mysterious influence that moves upon, softens, and wins a rebel heart to the love of God—an influence under which the sinner, in the free exercise of his own adequate powers, loves, believes, and obeys God his Saviour

—a work of moral transformation—a work compared with which the creation of a new soul—aye, the creation of the heavens and the earth—shall not be remembered nor come into mind.

2. This subject shows us that ministers are bound to exhort sinners to make themselves new hearts, and to do nothing which implies that they are not to do this.

This is the sinner's duty. And if ministers are bound to call on sinners to perform their duty and not to come short of it, then they must exhort them to make themselves a new heart, and not rest satisfied with any thing in which this is not included. Thus, if sinners are exhorted to think of God, it should be in order to love him. They may be exhorted to such reflection, but it should be that they may exercise such love.

It will not be pretended that ministers are to give no exhortation to sinners, nor that they are to exhort them to wait in sloth and inaction, and do nothing. They must then exhort them either to seek a new heart, with their present heart of enmity and unbelief, or to make themselves a new heart. But shall they exhort them to go on in sin; to act from a wicked heart in order to become holy? Can this be done, and the gospel be preached? Does the gospel allow any man to do any thing, as the enemy of God, for one moment—or, to do that which necessarily implies that he is to continue God's enemy while he is doing it? Does it exhort him to do any thing *in this character*? If not, how shall the minister of the gospel do it? Rather, how shall he exhort them to do what the gospel forbids—exhort them to do what they may do, and perish when they have done it? Did Christ preach so? Did his apostles? We have told you how they preached. The very substance of their preaching consisted in exhorting and urging sinners to immediate duty, to making the heart right with God. And shall not the minister of Christ preach as he did, and as his apostles did? Does he know how to preach better than they? Shall he, on the authority of his own

speculations and vain philosophy about regeneration, *dare to preach otherwise?*

Another thing ought here to be remembered. No sinner ever did and no sinner ever will give God his heart, even through the Spirit, while he believes either that it is not his duty to do it, without the Spirit, or that he must wait for the Spirit to influence him in the act. The work of the Spirit consists in bringing the sinner, as an intelligent moral being, to perform his duty, and for the sinner to act under any other view of the subject is to resist the Holy Spirit. If he is ever regenerated through the Spirit, it will be only when he believes that he ought to give God his heart, and that through the Spirit he may actually do it, and when attempting to do it in the free, voluntary exercise of his own powers. And so the minister of Christ should tell him. He must shut him up to the act of duty, as the only hope even from the Spirit of God. If he does not, he opposes the very work of this divine agent, and unites with the sinner in resisting and grieving the Holy Ghost.

3. We see the absurdity of the sinner's plea, that he cannot change his own heart.

If the doctrine of this discourse be true, he has no inability which excuses him for a moment—no inability which God regards as an excuse at all, none but what renders him deserving of the wrath of God, so long as his heart is unchanged. What is the sinner's inability to change his heart? Is he required to create any new powers or faculties? No. Is he required to do any thing which he has not ample powers to perform? No. Is he under any restraint from without; does any foreign influence prevent him or destroy his ability? No. Is there any want of susceptibility to motives, any constitutional incapacity to be moved to right action? No. What, then, is his inability? I will tell you, my hearers. It is the perverseness of a wicked heart. He cherishes so strong a love for the world and of himself, and so strong an opposition to God and his duty, that he *will* persist in this opposition. Were the op-

position of his heart to God less—were it so small in degree that he might be actually persuaded by truth and motives to renounce it—would he not be to blame for cherishing it? And now when his opposition rises so high as to set every influence at utter defiance but the power of the Holy Ghost, is he no longer to blame? Has it come to this, that if a man commits murder once he is to blame; but if he commits murder ten or twenty times, and thus becomes immutable in his purpose of death, he is no longer to blame for it? And is the sinner to blame for hating God a little; but if he hates him so much that he will hate immutably and eternally, is he innocent? Shall he complain that he has no power? No power? Look at his power to love the world, to love sin, and to resist all the efforts which infinite love and mercy make in his behalf. No power? He has all the power which he would have were he perfectly holy—all the power in kind which an angel has, to love God. But his enmity rises so high against the living God as to defy every thing short of Omnipotence to subdue it. This is his so called inability. And is it an excuse? What more abominable object in the sight of infinite purity than such a giant rebel as this!

4. We see why the influences of the Holy Spirit are necessary to change the hearts of sinners.

I have heard it said, that it is an act of God which justice requires him to perform—that as man lost all power to perform his duty by the fall of Adam, the aids of the Holy Spirit are given to supply this loss, and to restore to man ample powers to obey God. But we have shown that man has ample power, even the power of a perfect moral agent; we have shown that it is right in itself, that he should make himself a new heart without any divine influence; that he is under obligation as a moral agent to obey the law of God perfectly; that if he is not, he is not a sinner—that if he is not a sinner, there is no grace in the gospel, and that the aid of the Holy Spirit is not grace, but debt. This aid, then, cannot be given to make man a moral agent.

He is such without it. He is able to do his whole duty, for God requires nothing but a given use of powers possessed. Nor are the influences of the Spirit given, because it would not be right that God should withhold them, and lay his wrath on sinners for not changing their own hearts without them. But they are given, because God designs to save sinners, and because sinners left to themselves will continue in sin, and perish; they are given, because the sinner is willfully blind, and deaf, and dead in sin; because no motives in the universe will ever induce the sinner to alter his purpose of rebellion—because he will persist in sin, will cherish the obstinacy of his heart, will set at naught the voice of God, will trample underfoot a Saviour's blood, will go down to hell, if Almighty power does not prevent him.

5. The duty of the sinner to make himself a new heart is to be regarded by him as a practicable duty.

Many suppose otherwise. At least they suppose that every attempt at its present performance is nugatory and vain; and that they have only to wait till God interposes, and by his grace constrains them to give him their heart. My hearers, there is not a more fatal mistake than this; nor one more absolutely groundless. Fatal, because so long as you act under it, nothing will be done to any purpose in the work of conversion. Give God your heart, while you regard every attempt to do it as hopeless as the creation of a world! Never. Under this persuasion, it is as certain that you perish, under the wrath of God, as that there is a God. If the time never comes in which you believe that you may give God your heart, you will never try to give him your heart; and if you never try to give him your heart you never will do it, even through his grace, but will only resist his Spirit till you die. Cherish this persuasion, then, that this duty cannot and will not now be done, even if you attempt it, and surely as there is a hell, you are the victim of its woes.

But the persuasion is groundless. Look at the commands of God—think of his calls, his entreaties, his expostulations,

his promises, his threatenings, his beseeching tenderness, his overflowing compassion and grace! Is not all this designed to make the impression, that what God calls upon you to do, *may be done*? Do you say, it never will be done without his grace? True. But it may be done through his grace. Yes, yes; oh, yes, fellow-sinner, through the grace of God it *may be done*. It may be done *now*—now, as well as at any future moment of your life. *Now, now, now*, fellow-sinner, you may give your heart to God, and become an heir of his glory. What, so soon? Yes, *now*, even now, through grace it may be done. But, you say, I am not even awakened. Be it so. Then it is high time you were; and how long a time would it take you to become awakened, if you knew you had but another moment to live? It is time you were awakened. It takes no time for a sinner falling into hell, as you know you are, to be awakened. If you are not awakened, it is your own fault—if you continue unawakened another moment, it will be your own fault. But you say, “I have no evidence that the Spirit of God is striving with me.” But you know that you are a sinner against God, and momentarily exposed to his wrath, and is not this enough to awaken you? Would it not, in fact, awaken you, were you not determined not to be awakened? And as to the Spirit of God, how do you know that he is not now striving with you, in all the tenderness and grief of resisted love and grace—aye, striving with you for the last time? How do you know that it is not so; and that the reason that you are not awakened is, that you are resisting and grieving the Holy Ghost for the last time? Do you not now clearly see and understand your duty? Do you not feel the firm grasp of obligation on your conscience—every consideration of right, and reason, and duty, pressing you to obey the living God? And how do you know that this is not the Spirit of God striving to bring you to instant repentance, and that you are not even now resisting and grieving him for the last time?—resisting, and resisting for the last time, an influence that would result in your instant conversion, if you

were not resisting it! How do you know that you are not thus breaking away from these arms of everlasting love for the last time—struggling to escape from the embrace of omnipotent love and mercy, that you may plunge into hell? Aye, thus—thus grieving the Holy Ghost for the last time!

XXX.

PUTTING THE HAND TO THE PLOW.

LUKE ix. 62.

“And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

THERE are few persons to whom the solemn alternative of the gospel is presented, who do not feel the importance of deciding the simple yet momentous question, *What will I do?* Its overtures must either be accepted or rejected, and that under the pressure of the most weighty obligations, and with the prospect of the most tremendous consequences. Now it is, we believe, impossible that these things should be clearly brought before the mind, without producing a state of anxious hesitation between opposite determinations, which leads the mind to incline first to the one, then toward the other.

It was to a person in such a state of mind that our Lord addressed the declaration in the text. On hearing the call of the Saviour, he said: “Lord, I will follow thee;” but, at the same time, proposed first to go and bid them farewell that were at home at his father’s house. Thus, in the very act as it were of forming the resolution, he betrayed its weakness. He discovered a purpose far below that strength of decision, and that unqualified devotedness which the case demanded, and thus virtually surrendered the enterprise in which he professed to engage.

By a proverbial mode of speaking, our Lord then most pointedly reproves this indecision of purpose in religion. *To put the hand to the plow*, is to enter ostensibly upon some undertaking, to embark in some pursuit with an apparent purpose of securing its object; and *to look back*, implies that

divided state of mind, and that irresoluteness of purpose which are a virtual abandonment of the end proposed, and are, therefore, fatal to success. We are thus taught that a wavering and undetermined state of mind in religion is as fatal as it is in any other pursuit, that it can never form that character which qualifies for the kingdom of God.

My design is to consider—

First, Some instances of this indecision of purpose in religion; and

Second, Its utter insufficiency to form the Christian character.

I. Among those who, in the language of the text, put the hand to the plow and look back, may be mentioned the following classes.

1. Those who would become religious were it not that they wish first to secure some worldly good.

The reality, the excellence, and the necessity of religion, such persons readily acknowledge. Often they feel a painful internal conflict, a self-dissatisfaction and vexation of mind that they cannot obtain some new thought, or feeling, or motive, that they have not more sense, more resolution, more any thing, which shall secure them from such disgraceful indecision, and constrain them to a course so obviously rational and so vastly important. Every such person, at times, thinks that he will begin to make religion his grand object. The end is too glorious, the interests at stake too momentous to be longer neglected. The feeling seems to be, "Lord, I will follow thee." But just when the first decisive step toward executing the purpose by a full surrendering of the whole man to God, just when the turning-point comes, new thoughts occur. Religion is, indeed, a good thing; it is too important to be finally abandoned. But, then, how can all the happy prospects which the world spreads before its votaries—how can all these promising schemes of wealth, or honor, or pleasure be abandoned, be sacrificed, by an immediate surrendry of the whole heart to Christ? Let these be first secured, and

then religion shall have an unreserved attention—an unhesitating purpose. Thus religion is not ultimately abandoned, God's dominion and favor are not finally abjured, Jesus and his salvation are not forever renounced; but all their claims must be deferred till a portion on earth is first secured. Thus the weakness of the resolution is betrayed; the object on which the purpose seems to fix as one of unrivaled importance, and of indispensable accomplishment, is abandoned. Every such person has put his hand to the plow, and looked back.

2. The same thing is true of those who are prevented from coming to a decided purpose in religion by certain eubarrassments and difficulties.

Often under the clear exhibition of its divine excellence, its high obligations and supreme importance, they resolve to make it the grand concern, and to begin immediately, or at least to resolve that nothing shall *long* detain them from so doing. Thus they are often brought to the very point of making firm resolve in this highest, noblest enterprise of man. But then there are many things to be considered. Is the present the best time; will not circumstances become more favorable by delay; will not more leisure, less care and bustle in business, or fewer worldly engagements, be found to prevent or hinder the effectual accomplishment of the purpose hereafter? At present friends are not pious, and how difficult to separate from them; perhaps the time may come, and oh that it might, when they shall be willing to enter on a religious course. What awkwardness and difficulties will be felt in effecting the necessary changes in the family, and in other departments of social intercourse! How can the society and friendship of such and such persons be forfeited, as it must be, by the proposed change in the manner of life? If friends and acquaintances were different from what they are—if others around were making religion the grand concern—how easy it would be to act more decisively. But as it is, what will people say—how many remarks, how many questions, how much ridicule and contempt, and alienation? How singular

it will appear. Thus, if the purpose is not formally renounced, there is a secret wish to renounce it. Again, however, the conviction of the wisdom and necessity of the case returns with greater force—for what are all these things compared with the loss of the soul? And now, is it practicable?—shall I become a Christian if I undertake? Perhaps if I form a determination it will be only to abandon it and to incur the shame and obloquy of beginning to build and not being able to finish. Thus, in the minds of such persons the embarrassments and difficulties seem to be peculiar and insurmountable. There are ten thousand insuperable *ifs* that rise like mountains to prevent the salvation of their souls. Thus, the strength of their purpose abates and its ardor expires. Soon the wisdom, or the necessity, or even the possibility of conversion, is made a question, and the purpose is surrendered, if not finally, only to be resumed with less hope and relinquished with less regret and concern, till it is terminated by death and damnation. Every such person puts his hand to the plow and looks back.

3. The same thing is true of those who, in times of deep affliction, sudden danger, or alarming sickness, have formed resolutions to become religious, and who abandon them on a change of circumstances. Such cases have fallen under the observation of almost every one, if they have not been matters of fact in his own experience.

Under affliction the sensibilities of the soul are softened, the influence of the world to seduce and blind and harden is diminished, the need of a more enduring substance is seen, and the powers of the world to come are felt. At such a season, it is as easy as it is common to form resolutions and purposes to renounce the world and sin, and to make religion and the concerns of the soul the grand object. The countenance, the conversation, the abated ardor of worldly pursuits, the suspension of worldly pleasures, all seem to say, "Lord, I will follow thee." But scarcely, in many cases, is the rod of chastisement withdrawn—scarcely has

the wound time to heal, or its first anguish to abate—scarcely does health again smile in the family, business assume its successful course, and the world invite to its accustomed pleasures, before the first rising tide of prosperity rolls back with it the same indifference to the soul, and buries it in the same sottish devotion to the things of time and sense.

In seasons of danger, how many have resolved on amendment, should deliverance be granted. Then no more is expected from the world; then no space for delay remains, the world vanishes, and but a moment, perhaps, remains for preparation for eternity; or, if life should be preserved, then it is seen how frail it is, how near death always is, and how presumptuous have been the confident expectations cherished in the day of health and apparent security, and how wise, when so liable to be met by death at every step, to be always ready. Who in the hour of peril has not felt all this, and, under its influence, resolved to devote his life if prolonged, to diligent preparation for meeting his final Judge? But oh, how frail the purpose! In the moment of danger there are resolutions, vows, prayers, tears, solemn protestations, deep relentings, promises, every thing to secure a life of future piety. But the danger past, how soon is all forgotten! How easy and common to tremble amid the terrors of the tempest, and yet when it is over, to blaspheme the Creator of the storm!

Under the alarms of dangerous disease, when death is seen in the mourning countenances of friends, in the desponding efforts of physicians, and in every symptom of the disease—what tears of sorrow, what self-condemnation, what strong resolutions, what fair promises, what solemn vows have been witnessed. But when health returns, what then, in most cases, becomes of these hopeful plans of salvation? The condition of such persons changed, and how is every thing changed with it; prayer into presumption, and terror into security! All this piety has subsided with their fever, all this devotion vanished with their disease, and all these promises, and vows, and resolutions have lasted only with their inability to break

them. This man of prayer, this soul of sanctity, what is he? A bolder rebel against God than ever—a faithless, may I not say, a hopeless apostate. He also has put his hand to the plow, and looked back.

4. The same charge lies against those who have been the subjects of special religious awakening, and who afterward return to stupidity in sin.

Instances of this kind, in places blessed with the revival of religion, are commonly not rare. Few can stand by the displays of mercy made during such a period, without some secret wish that they may be included in the number, or at least without occasional fear and trembling that, while others are taken, they shall be left. Conscience now pleads with irresistible power in behalf of religion and the soul, the world sinks to something like its true insignificance, eternal realities weigh on the spirit. Every thing, to the eye of external observation, looks fair and promising. The purpose to make religion the grand concern, and that at every sacrifice, and in defiance of every obstacle, seems to have taken possession of the soul. Means are used with apparent diligence. Christians pray, conscience urges, the Spirit of God strives, and in anticipation we seem to see the humble, happy, devoted disciple of the Lord Jesus. But, alas, the change! He has been, perhaps, relying on the efficacy of his impenitent, heartless doings, and flattering himself that, though unsuccessful, he has done all he can do; the failure disappoints and discourages, and the purpose is abandoned. Or, perhaps, he persuades himself, and on the authority, as he thinks, of his own experience, that religious awakening is not a difficult attainment, and that he can discard his present anxiety, and recall it at a more convenient season. Or, perhaps, reluctant to encounter the shame and mortification of making known his religious fears and disquietude, he has in fact remained willfully ignorant of the instruction and direction which would have issued in his conversion. Or, perhaps, wearied with his unsuccessful efforts, and with a heart still longing for the world, and yet unable

to resist the power of truth on the conscience, he listens to false instruction that quiets his alarm, or even becomes the victim of some strong delusion, and is left to believe a lie that he may be damned. Or, perhaps, he changes his associates—one laughs, another frowns, another assures him that all this anxiety is useless enthusiasm and gloom, far beneath a man of sense, kindly regrets that he should have been thus deluded, and persuasively invites and artfully charms his unwary steps to scenes of amusement and pleasure, where his feet take hold on hell. Every such person has put his hand to the plow, and looked back.

Having thus attempted to trace some of the operations of an undecided purpose in religion, I proceed, as I proposed, to consider—

II. Its utter insufficiency to form the Christian character.

1. An undecided purpose in religion is sure, sooner or later, to abandon its object.

Strength of resolution is requisite for every purpose of human life. Show me a man destitute of it, and I will show you one who never did well in any thing. A divided purpose never secured wealth to the merchant, nor victory to the conqueror—least of all, can success be expected to crown such a purpose in religion. This path is beset with difficulties, with temptations, with dangers, with terrors, and with death; and he only can hope to enter upon it with success, who has that determined, self-decided spirit which is prepared to act, to suffer, or to die as duty may require. The path is so obstructed that no other spirit can pass. With any other purpose the man yields to whatever may assail him; and amid the innumerable things that will occur to arrest his progress, as he tries to go onward, with a heart easily seduced in its affections, and yet, in fact, supremely devoted to the world, what chance is there that he will not, like the floating leaf, yield to every current, and be whirled on every eddy? If one is to become a Christian only when difficulties, and temptations, and obstacles of every kind shall be cleared from his path, when the world, in all

its endlessly diversified forms, shall acquiesce and bid him God speed, in kind accommodation to his wishes—what is to be hoped for? Nothing at all. No. He must set up a firm resolve, taking things just as they are. He must look well to the emergency, he must count the cost before he lays down the resolution; but when he has resolved, he must be immutable. He must become the master of his own mind, and thus rise above the world, and through prosperity and adversity, fame or persecution, life or death, go from conquering to conquer. Instead of being governed by events, he must govern them, and like the providence of God take a steady direction, and make the course of things bend to his purposes, and terminate in his glory. Do you say such a purpose is from the grace of God? Be it so, as it undoubtedly is. But come whence it may, you must have it, and you must form it too, or you never will have it. Nothing else constitutes discipleship to the Lord Jesus, nothing short of it qualifies for the kingdom of God. Without it, whatever other resolutions you may form—if you do not settle it as a question of life and death, if you do not resolve on heaven as your object in God's appointed way—you will never see it; the world will tempt, and seduce, and ultimately draw you down to perdition.

2. An undecided, fluctuating purpose in religion greatly impairs the energies of the mind, and thus defeats its object.

This principle of the mind is seen in every thing. Whoever knew a man that was always forming and revoking his resolutions, I do not say that ever accomplished any thing, but who had the requisite mental energy to accomplish any thing? The very feelings are expended, and the sensibilities impaired, which are necessary to firmness of purpose and vigor of execution. These principles not only hold in the concerns of the soul, but have here their most alarming application. The whole measure of sensibility which pertains to the soul, is here required to give energy to the purpose. All its practical sensibilities are on the side of the world and of sin, heightened by habit, and made as it were omnipotent by indulgence. The

first feelings of the soul toward religion are always the most powerful. Every exhibition of motives which is counteracted, renders the same exhibition more and more hopeless as to all effect. Familiarity only produces stupidity; resistance, obduracy. At the same time, all the opposite tendencies of the soul are strengthened. Thus every broken resolution gives the world new strength of dominion, invites and welcomes temptation, impairs all the susceptibilities of the mind toward spiritual realities, and binds the soul in the iron chains of exhausted energy, deep discouragement, and determined sin. Do you doubt it? Many a gray-headed sinner, who, in youth or even in advanced age, formed again and again resolutions to begin a holy life, scarcely thinks of such a purpose, but abandons the concern in sullen inactivity, as if he had read the counsels of heaven, and found his perdition sealed.

What, then, is to be hoped for from such a process? What to be expected, when the judgment is put in requisition to produce excitement which only exhausts and wastes all the energies of the inner man, and thus reacts only with augmented obduracy in sin? What is to be expected, when conscience is summoned to act, and roused to feel and resolve, only to blunt and benumb its sensibilities as if seared with a hot iron? Nothing but death. No—when the judgment decides with a strong preference toward religion, then must be roused along with it all the moral sensibilities of the soul. The intellect, or the power to see, must carry with it the conscience and the heart—the power to feel. When the judgment is convinced, then the conscience must be yielded to the power of obligation as to the pressure of great mountains, and the heart applied to objects of holy affection as if heaven with its glories beamed on the sight. No part of the energy must be lost till the purpose is formed. And it must be formed not for an experiment, to see what results may follow; but it must be formed for eternity, and thus insure its results by the promises of God. Without some such intenseness of mind, and decision of purpose, there can be no discipleship to Jesus. Thousands,

in a series of unsuccessful resolves, have wasted feeling and energy enough to have secured their salvation had it been concentrated on a single purpose. They resolve and re-resolve, but, never bidding the world farewell, never going so far away from it that they cannot go back, every purpose fails, and the end of it is, they go down to hell amid the fragments of broken vows and broken resolutions, to bewail their folly in the horrors of despair.

3. That an undecided purpose in religion cannot form the Christian character, is evident from the fact that it still leaves the soul as completely under the dominion of sin as if it had no existence.

It is nothing in any case but a convinced judgment, and a troubled conscience struggling with the heart. The former summons to the service of God; the latter refuses submission, and still maintains its devotion to the world, and its opposition to God. And what fitness is there for the kingdom of God in all this—what of the spirit of loyalty to the Eternal in a convinced judgment and an opposing heart—what qualification for the service required of his subjects here, or for the joys to be awarded to them hereafter? Was it a mere struggle between an enlightened conscience and a rebel heart that led prophets, and apostles, and martyrs to resist unto blood, to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and to rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ? Is it a mere fluctuation of purpose, which results from a conviction of duty on the one hand, and opposition to it on the other, which serves and enjoys God in the heavens? Will such a purpose prompt the disembodied spirit to fly on errands of mercy from heaven to earth, or to fulfill the holy services of that temple, whose song is, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty?" Could such a spirit associate with beings whose love is as a flame of fire? Could it strike the harps of angels, or shout the hosannahs of the redeemed? And what would such a spirit of hesitation do in heaven? It would still hesitate, and still revolt, and oppose and hate, and sink and die

under a sense of perpetual dissolution and anguish. To qualify, then, for the kingdom of God, as it exists on earth or in heaven, there must be a full purpose of soul. Without it, nothing is done—nothing can be done. There is nothing but absolute, perfect fitness for heaven, or fitness, absolute, perfect fitness for hell.

4. An undecided purpose in religion grieves the Holy Ghost and fearfully exposes to judicial abandonment of God.

The very object for which the Holy Spirit strives with the sinner, is to bring him to a full and decided purpose of soul in the service of God. To form, therefore, these half-way resolutions, and still to maintain a hesitating purpose, to refuse and hold back the surrendry of the whole man to God, is a direct resistance and counteraction of the work of the Holy Ghost. And how long can this be safely done? How long can the Holy Ghost, whose principle of dispensation is not to strive always, be safely resisted? How long can the sinner, thus constrained by conscience, make resolutions, and through the influence of an opposing heart revoke them, and yet expect the Spirit of grace to visit that heart with his influence? Who are the sinners whom he abandons but those on whom the experiment of his grace has proved thus ineffectual? Who, if not those whom his influence has brought again and again, as it were, to the very point of submission, and who have there, again and again, with the spirit of unconquerable rebellion, withstood the efforts of his grace? If there be any sinner whom God abandons to hardness of heart—if there be any who is left to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath in hopeless impenitence, and that there is the Bible clearly asserts—then of that sinner, who forms and revokes resolutions, who resolves to make religion his grand concern to-day, abandons the purpose to-morrow, who has been often brought to feel that he must begin, and will begin, and yet has really never begun the work of turning to God—I say, if there be any sinner whom God abandons to inevitable perdition, of this sinner it may be said, “Thou art the man.”

And now, my dear hearers, in conclusion, let me send the question to all of you who are yet out of the kingdom of Christ, have you not often put your hand to the plow and looked back? Have you not, in some one or more of the ways which have now been pointed out, formed and revoked purposes of repentance and salvation? Have you not, by the power of truth, been brought to a stand, and, as it were, forced to resolve to take care of your never-dying soul—and has not the world still seduced and drawn you back into former forgetfulness and neglect? And tell me, what has all this availed; are you not yet in the gall of bitterness? Does not your own experience tell you that every new resolution is weaker than the former, and does not reason, does not the Bible tell you that continuing in this course there is for you absolutely no hope? Come, then, fellow-sinners, to a full decided purpose. The Saviour calls, “Come and follow me; take up your cross and come after me.” Deny thyself, give up the world as an object of supreme affection, and with a purpose that will lift you out of this materialism around you, and place you high above every temptation and every obstacle the world can interpose, with a purpose that shall hold out through time and through eternity, now resolve to be the Lord’s.

Do you say it will do no good to resolve; that it is better not to resolve than to break resolutions, and therefore you will make no resolution? Then you are undone. Never to resolve is death. Never resolve, and all the mercy of the Saviour and love of God are in vain, and as sure as there is a hell you are the victim of tribulation and wrath and anguish without end. Do you, then, say you will resolve? When? Do you say to-day—even now? But *how* will you resolve? Will you resolve to abandon some vice, resolve to become more thoughtful, resolve to enter the service of Christ with your heart glued to the world? Better not resolve at all. Will you resolve to consider, and read, and pray, and thus to wait and see if God will not convert you? Still you have not come to the point. All this you may do and still

determine to withhold your heart, and thus grieve the Holy Ghost in your very prayers. Your resolution, if this be all, will come to naught in this world but confirmation in sin, and perdition in hell in the next. Do you now ask what you shall do? Resolve on an interest in Christ and devotion to his service at every sacrifice; come to the point of giving up the world *once* for all; come to the resolution that, whether saved or damned, the world shall be no longer the object of your affection. Turn your back upon it and bid it farewell forever. Your soul and all its eternal interests are at stake, and something must be done, and done soon. Now is the time, the best time, perhaps the only time, to provide for those interests. Now, then, begin; begin with a purpose which neither earth nor hell can shake or cause you to abandon. Resolve, and resolve for eternity, to be the Lord's. See to it that your decision is final and unchangeable. If the first attempt fail repeat it. Repeat it now—repeat it in your closet. Repeat it again and again. Go where you shall be *alone* with God, and there repeat it. Here is the pivot on which your eternal destiny turns. If you make no resolution you are damned; if you form none but undecided, wavering purposes, you are damned. Form, then, the resolution that shall endure throughout your immortality—that this shall be ever the great concern—that, saved or lost, you will ever be the Lord's.

XXXI.

A P O S T A S Y.

JOHN VI. 67, 68.

“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”

NONE of us wonder that vast multitudes attended the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Such was the sanctity of his character, so heavenly and powerful was his preaching, and so amazing were his miracles, that the natural curiosity of the human mind, would lead great numbers to follow him. But we have wondered—as often as our thoughts have recurred to the fact—that while thousands and ten thousands followed him from place to place, heard him preach, and witnessed the displays of his omnipotence, few, very few became his real disciples.

The multitude had just witnessed the miracle of our Lord in feeding the five thousand. With high expectations from a leader who could do such things for his followers, they crossed the sea to Capernaum, and came after him to make him their king. Here, he took occasion to deal plainly with this multitude, charging upon them their selfish purposes, correcting their mistaken expectation of finding in him a temporal prince, unfolding the great purpose for which he came into the world as an atoning sacrifice, and declaring unto them that they believed not. At this they took offense, and vented their emotions in murmurings and complaints against the doctrines which he taught. From that time, many even of his professed disciples went back, and walked no more with him. It was with this melancholy instance of apostasy, that “Jesus said

unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”

I propose to consider—

First, Our Lord's question; and

Second, The disciple's answer.

1. This question of our Lord, was the language of affection.

It was designed and exactly adapted to lead those whom he addressed to reflect on the happiness promised to his faithful disciples, and the misery of those who had just forsaken him. The former were his friends, his brethren, those whom he had loved with an everlasting love, and for whom he had come to die on the cross. Our unbelief, our wayward affections and fond attachments to our own selfish indulgence, often lead us to distrust the kindness of this our best friend, and give even to the injunctions and warnings of his kindness, which the benevolence of a God dictated, the aspect of severity and unnecessary rigor. Like froward children, we count nothing kind in a benignant parent which crosses our inclinations or defeats our wishes. How false is such an estimate, how ungrateful such a thought! When or in what did the Lord Jesus show any other emotion, toward his disciples, than that of love? Whether he intercedes with the Father of all mercies in their behalf, or faithfully utters divine denunciations against apostasy by unfolding its woes—whether he enjoins the strict, and pure, and holy precepts of his gospel on the authority of him that sent him, or invites and entreats by the blessings of his grace—whether he counsels or admonishes, warns or reprovcs, the same affection glows in his heart. See it in the tears he shed at the tomb of Lazarus. Hear it as it blends the accents of compassion with the severest denunciations of justice. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” An exclama-

tion uttered with more tenderness than human bosom ever felt. Behold it in that look of energy and love which he cast on Peter, and which melted him into repentance. Behold it taking away the scruples of the unbelieving Thomas, by permitting him to thrust his hands into his wounded side. Hear it in the fervor of that prayer, even for his murderers, poured out in the agonies of death. Nor can we doubt, though he is invisible to us, that still, we have a high Priest who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and whether he invites or threatens, intercedes or commands, blesses or rebukes, that he does it with a heart as warm, as gracious, as endearing as when he allowed the beloved disciple to lean on his bosom. He loved us enough to lay aside his glories in the heavens, and die for us on the cross. When we were yet enemies, he reconciled us to God—he sought our restoration with a love stronger than death—he could not bear to leave us in hopeless alienation from God; and when he has restored us, brought us back, and made us partakers of the full purchase of his atoning sacrifice, how can he consent that we should forsake him, and go away into eternal exile from God, from mercy, and from hope? It is with such emotions he says to us, as to the twelve, “Will ye also go away?”

2. The question of our Lord implies a solemn warning.

He had just been forsaken by thousands of professed followers; and with such a fact before the twelve, the question from their Lord, whether they would also forsake him, could not fail to come to their minds as a solemn admonition against similar apostasy.

The propriety or fitness of such admonitions and warnings which are so frequently addressed to the professed disciples of Christ, rests on two grounds: *the possibility, so far as they know, that they are not real disciples; and the possibility that, if real disciples, they may apostatize.* The former consideration our Lord powerfully presented to the minds of the twelve. Immediately on hearing the answer of the confident Peter, as in the text, and with the addition, “We believe, and



are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus answered them, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" How must the declaration have thrilled in every bosom, and with the deepest solicitude for his own personal safety, have constrained each to make the inquiry, "Lord, is it I?"

Nor is there any reason to doubt that, in any similar number of professed Christians in our age, there is at least one hypocrite. No human eye may be able to distinguish him—his real character may be, and probably for the most part actually is, unknown to himself. Still he is a hypocrite, and, sooner or later, his open apostasy will probably proclaim the fact to his own conviction, and that of the world. At least the judgment-day will reveal it. The Scriptures constantly exhibit this truth. The church is represented as including both good and bad men, and with such a resemblance that no human discrimination can separate them. The institution of discipline in the church, shows that there will be a necessity, in certain cases, for an open separation between the true and the false followers of Jesus; and not only during the ministry of Christ, but in the churches planted by apostolic labors, and in those of every successive age, there have been constant defections calling for the application of gospel discipline—defections enough to settle the point, that visible members of the church may go to hell as well as other men. There is also often a measure of false confidence connected with a profession of religion, which the most solemn admonitions and warning cannot disturb. A delusive hope produces a stillness in the conscience, removes misgiving fears, creates a reluctance to self-examination, and a deliberate purpose not to have their good opinion of themselves shaken. It is in this way that, with confident expectation, "*Many* will say, Lord, Lord, open unto us;" to whom he will answer, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I never knew you." It is, then, on the ground of this mistake, into which any one may fall, that the propriety of warnings against apostasy are addressed to all the

professed followers of Christ; that the mistake, if it exist, may be discovered, before it is too late; that we may fear, before we are past all hope; that we may see—if we have built on the sand—the weakness of our foundation, before the storm and the ruins shall declare it. Oh, the surprise and the horrors of such a mistake, first discovered at the foot of the judgment-seat! “Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” And when the Lord Jesus puts the question, through his written record to us, “Will ye also go away?” let us remember that all our past confidence may be but the hope of the hypocrite, and that our open apostasy here, may yet be a prelude to our eternal condemnation hereafter.

But it is not merely on the ground that professed Christians may mistake their real character and apostatize, that we are cautioned against apostasy. Real Christians *may* apostatize. As moral agents they have the same power to sin which they had before they were Christians. They have power to sin and to continue to sin, till their breath stops and perdition overtakes them. What they will do, or what they will not do, is a question not to be taken into the account at all. The only question is, can they apostatize?—and the answer is, they can; they can go away from Christ and walk no more with him. The consequence is, they are in danger of apostasy; and what better reason can be given for warning them against it? What other reason was ever thought of by a parent or a friend in warning others against danger, but the possibility of its proving fatal? Nor is this inconsistent with the certainty of the saints' perseverance. For it may be certain that a man will not do many things which, nevertheless, he has power to do. It may be certain that you will sit still when you have power to walk. Even the greatest danger is consistent with the certainty of escaping it. Were not Paul and his company in danger in the storm and the shipwreck, and yet had not the prediction of God proved the certainty that they would not be lost? And so in any case of danger from which there has

been an escape. Did not God know that it would be escaped? Does not this fact prove that the escape was certain? But does it prove that there was no danger? Have those who have escaped from the winds and the waves and the tempest been in no danger because they have escaped, and because the Omniscient knew they would escape? No more does the certainty that saints will not be lost, prove that they are in no danger of being lost; and that, therefore, the warnings of God against apostasy are impertinent and useless. Christ said unto the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" because they were in danger of apostatizing, and because, without being warned against it, they doubtless would have apostatized. And he puts the same interrogatory to us for the same reason. True it is, the fact that the Christian can apostatize is no reason for the conclusion that he will apostatize; neither does the fact that he *will not* apostatize, authorize the belief that he cannot, and that he is in no danger of apostasy. He is; and on this account we should open all the sensibilities of the soul to the warnings of God against it. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." "But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him," should tell on the Christian's spirit in watchfulness, and prayer, and labor and diligence, till he enters heaven.

3. The question of our Lord is the language of anxious concern in view of abundant reasons for it.

Many professed disciples had already forsaken him; one of the twelve was a devil, and would, as he knew, afterward betray him; all of them whom he addressed were the subjects of much weakness and prejudice; they were to be exposed to many temptations, enemies, and dangers, and they were ignorant, to a great extent, of the real nature of salvation through his atoning sacrifice. He might justly regard their situation as furnishing cause for deep anxiety and concern in their behalf. It was to make this impression on their minds that their Lord said unto them, "Will ye also go away?"

Similar reasons exist for anxious concern respecting the pro-

fessed followers of Christ at the present day, and it may be useful to consider some of the sources of their danger.

One principal source of danger and reason for anxious concern, is the deep depravity of the human heart. Its endless operations and its powerful influence we can attempt to describe only in a few particulars. How easily does this depravity lead men to deny or disregard the great practical truths of the gospel! How revolting to the natural heart is that system of truth which humbles man as a guilty, condemned sinner—which calls him to self-renunciation, to self-denial, to communion with God, to fix his heart on the glories of heaven! How many have made shipwreck of this faith! And yet this truth is the light by which God is seen, by which Christ is seen, by which man's obligations, duties, conditions, and dangers are seen; and he who is not willing to stand in the midst of it and let in its full blaze upon his conscience and his heart will stumble on in darkness to eternal ruin.

How easy is it, through the same influence, to lose all just impression of the broad distinction between Christians and the world! There is a broad distinction between the one class and the other, like the difference in the eternal destiny which awaits them. But how easy to form a low and vacillating judgment of this distinction, and to lose sight of the fundamental difference between spiritual life and spiritual death, till a heedless conformity to the world begins and progresses, till the professed follower of Christ partakes, in character and hopes, with a world lying in wickedness!

How easy also to disregard the comparative worth of temporal and eternal things! Convinced as we are of the low and fading nature of earthly objects, compared with the realities to which the stupendous mercy of God invites us, how easily do we lose all practical sense of it, and with it our solicitude to escape the contagion around us! Instead of pursuing with eager step the prize of our high calling, and rising above the temporary scene around us by the discovery and attraction of

heavenly things, how easily we give our affections to the world and sink in the love and pursuit of its vanities! Thus, multitudes are drawn away from Christ.

How easily, too, do we become insensible to the dangers of small departures from duty, and go over the line of safety—descend the downward way till we come to the place of trembling and dismay! How easily do we lose a just estimate of the necessity of continual effort in the divine life, and this when the exertion of the candidate in the race, the wrestler in the struggle, and the warrior in the combat, is our only safety in the contest in which we are engaged!

How easily we fail to keep death and eternity in view, and that when the love of this world is never overcome but by bringing near the pure and unfading glories of another!

How common to become more solicitous to preserve appearances before men than the reality before God; to become solicitous to palliate and justify questionable courses of conduct; to become irritable under reproof; to find more time for amusements, dress, company, indulgence, than for active co-operation in plans that aim at the promotion of the glory of God!

How easy to neglect the means of grace, and that when we know that the grace of God is the Christian's only strength, and that if the enemy of our souls can keep us from the appointed means of obtaining that grace, he will strip us of our armor and make us an easy prey!

If we thus reflect on the power of indwelling corruption to beguile, to ensnare, and to stupefy the soul—if we remember what weak, fallen beings we are, how quickly we are occupied by sensible objects, how feeble our principles of resistance, how irresolute of purpose, how continually losing sight of our duties, our obligations, our privileges, our dangers, and the great end of our being—what reason is there for deep solicitude lest we incur the guilt and the doom of apostasy from the Saviour!

Another principal source of danger is the power of the

temptations without us. The world comprises these. The people of the world are enemies to religion. How pernicious their maxims, their example, their influence! How seductive their smile, how intimidating their frowns! How powerful the fear of censure and the love of applause! How sure the influence of familiarity and friendship of worldly men, to chill and freeze the Christian's heart!

Every station, every condition, has innumerable temptations. Wealth flatters our pride; feeds the passions; draws off our dependence from God; furnishes substitutes for the consolations of religion; multiplies diversions; excuses obstacles. Poverty, too, has its perils; it tempts to envy, to repining—to many overt crimes. The world has the advantage of constant contact; we cannot avoid its influence; it presents itself to the eye, to the ear, to every sensibility; it is within us and about us, and on our right hand and on our left. It does not ask us to deny ourselves, but to indulge. It has every diversity of means adapted to every variety of taste and disposition. If we are not grovelling enough to be tempted by money, it has its honors to give. If we despise sensual gratification we may pursue knowledge that puffeth up. If one temptation be resisted another or another may prevail. In how many forms can it assail us—how many aspects assume to deceive, ensnare, and ruin us! How many like Demas; how many like Felix; how many like Herod; how many like the young ruler; how many like Hymenæus and Philetus; how many like those who received seed among thorns, have been seduced, and ruined eternally by the varied forms of temptation which the world presents! What inward peace it has destroyed; how it has benumbed the spirituality of the soul, obstructed communion with God, and planted the dying pillow with thorns! Oh, what spoils of truth, of conscience, and of duty, can the world display—what trophies of ruined immortals can the world boast! The current flows strong and deep on every side of us, and who shall not be concerned for his safety! Who can reflect on the multitudes that have been lost, con-

sider the progress of their decline and the gloom and terrors of their end; who can survey the wrecks that everywhere float around us—look at the rocks and shoals and tempests that infest the path to the haven of our hopes, and not see cause for alarm and even for consternation? Shall we wonder that the compassionate Jesus, with deep solicitude and concern, says to all his professed followers, “Will ye also go away?”

I proceed to consider briefly—

II. The disciples' answer to this question: “And Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.” The question bespeaks a just sense of his wants as a sinner, and of his dependence on Christ as a Saviour.

As sinners we need the forgiveness of God, and can obtain the blessings only through Christ. We have broken the laws of God and are exposed to its awful curse. The law knows no mercy for the transgressor. It has nothing to give but its fearful curse. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” The whole world is guilty before God. There is rebellion against heaven's law and heaven's Sovereign, and the soul that sinneth it shall die. The eternal God hath said it. There is but one way of escape. “There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” Neither men nor angels can save. Creation can furnish no deliverer. If we set aside as naught the atoning blood of Jesus, hell must be our portion. Out of this hiding-place, all that is just and holy and immutable, stands in threatening array against every son and daughter of our species. The living God looks upon us only in the aspect of a stern, insulted, unappeased sovereign, and throughout the universe the attributes of God will bear in terror on the soul. To whom, then, shall we go? Who—if we forsake the only Saviour—who shall deliver us from death and hell?

As sinners we need sanctification, guidance, support, and

consolation, which none but Christ can give. Think, for a moment, of the corruption of the human heart, and think what that heaven is for which we must be prepared. How must the soul be purified and raised to be meet for that world of glory? The perfect image of God must be given it. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," is the anthem of each inhabitant of that place. But how can we share in such delights with all our affections fixed on the vanities of earth, and our whole character formed by their influence! As surely as these bodies must be changed to avoid pain amid the fires of the pit, so surely must these souls be transformed, before they could find aught but disgust and weariness amid the halleluiahs of heaven. But who shall effect the mighty transformation? Who, if we forsake the Lord Jesus, and thus forfeit the grace and power of the Holy Ghost—who, then, shall give to the soul its purity and its capacity for the raptures of that world of holiness and glory? In our exile from him, and from the blessings purchased by his death—and which can flow to us only through the channels of a Saviour's love—to whom shall we go? Oh, how forlorn—how wretched!

Who shall guide, and support, and console us in this pilgrimage of tears? We live in a world accursed, and the clouds rest dark and deep on the face of it. Oh, how must the mind sink under its calamities without support! How can we meet poverty, the loss of health and friends, and the countless ills of life, with no Saviour to sympathize with us under our infirmities, no God to befriend us, no heaven to hope for! To whom shall we go? Have we known what it is to have the friendship of God in our trials—what it is with quietness and assurance to commit all our interests to his keeping—what it is to understand that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, to enter into his plans, to incorporate our interests with his pleasure, and to say, as the source of firm support and of richest consolation, "Thy will be done?" And, oh, if we forsake the strength of that arm, and the light of that countenance, and

shut ourselves out from such fellowship with God our Saviour, to whom shall we go?

And when we come to lie on the bed of sickness, and know it to be a sickness unto death—when we witness the despair of friends, who can only turn pale at the sight of our expiring agonies—when the resistless summons to meet God in judgment shall come—what, then, shall charm away from us the terrors of anticipated vengeance? Did you ever see the dying man who could prop his hope and sustain his tranquillity on a death-bed, by the retrospect of his own virtues? Did you at that hour ever see an undaunted eye fixed on God as a law-giver about to render to the soul according to its deserts? Oh, no; this is not the support of death-beds! This is not the triumph of the departing spirit! It is the hope of forgiveness through the great atonement of the Son of God, it is an entire reliance on the righteousness of Jesus, and this only which gives peace, and elevation, and joy to the soul in the severest agonies. It is this which can fix a steady eye on the great white throne, and the God who sits thereon—it is this, and only this, which lights up the languor of the dying eye with celestial brilliancy, and wakes the shout of salvation on the brink of eternity. And, oh, if we go away from Christ—if we refuse a dependence on him who alone can present this immortal spirit holy, unblamable, and unreprouvable in the sight of God—on whom shall we depend, to whom shall we go?

We need eternal life. Christ has the words of eternal life; not only as his word is the means of that spiritual life which prepares the soul for future blessedness—not only as he only has brought life and immortality to light—but as this eternal life is in him. God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Nor can we be at a loss what this life is. It is that perfection of spiritual life which we attain in the heavens—it is the blessedness of that world's employments, of the worship of God, of fellowship with him, of activity as co-workers with him, of union and intercourse with the happy throng be-

fore his throne—it is the blessedness of being with Christ, whose presence brightens and cheers the mansions of the redeemed, and gives to heaven its highest extasies, and wakes its most rapturous songs—it is *eternal* life. Its elements in the soul, its affections, principles, capacities, partake of its own immortality. Its objects, the sources that feed, and nourish, and animate its vigor, and impart its joys, are eternal, for these are God and Jesus, and all the fountains of joy which spring from the throne of God and the Lamb. And to enter the world of spirits, and not be heirs of this life—where are we? What the character, what the condition of an immortal in that spiritual state, whom nothing in God, nothing in Christ, nothing in heaven can bless! Yea, what the character, and what the state of that immortal, who can find nothing in God but cause of terror and of hate, nothing in the song to the Lamb but disgust and weariness, nothing in the society of angels and glorified spirits but cause for enmity and loathing! How forlorn, and solitary, and wretched an outcast is such an immortal! Whither shall he go? Earth and its works are burnt up. In heaven, with all its fullness of joy and rivers of pleasure, there is not a drop for him. In hell, there is only lamentation, and woe, and chains, and darkness, and fire, and tribulation, and wrath, and anguish forever. Depart from Christ? “’Tis death—’tis more—’tis endless ruin, deep despair.”

Have not some of you, who have professed to be followers of Christ, forsaken the Saviour? Be not reluctant to hear the question, nor to apply it. Carry the search through all the chambers of the heart, look over the department of your life, and say honestly, as in the presence of God, are there not some sad and decisive marks of apostasy from your Saviour upon you? Have not the truths of God, which are the food of the divine life in the soul, lost their influence by unbelief, by indifference, by denial? Has not the broad distinction of character between Christians and men of the world faded, and dwindled, and become almost nothing?

Has not the comparative value of temporal and eternal things become faint and unreal? Is not death placed at a distance? Are not the means of grace neglected? Has not temptation prevailed? Is not an habitual dependence on your Saviour lost? Are these things so, and yet have you not forsaken Christ? These things so, and you not an apostate? Bring, then, the inquiry home, and answer it? If the Saviour felt such tender concern for the twelve—if, with such tender solicitude, he warned them against apostasy, the same anxiety and the same admonitions may be justified in your case. If of the twelve one was a traitor, it would be no cause for surprise if some one of you should be already an open apostate, or a real apostate at least. Let the question, then, go round, "*Lord, is it I?*" Think of the tremendous nature of this concern. It is nothing less than the everlasting salvation of your soul; and dare you trust your state without trying it? Think of the deceitfulness of your heart. How often has it deceived you! And, oh, why may it not deceive you to your eternal undoing! Think how many live and die in the delusion and security of false hopes. Why may not you thus dream away your probation, till the last sentence of the Judge shall wake you from the dream in the horrors of condemnation! Put yourself, then, to faithful self-examination. Be willing to know the worst of your case. Ask, whether the first symptoms of apostasy do not already appear. Ask your Bibles and your closets—search faithfully your hearts in the light of God's unerring truth! See if the plague is not begun, and if the very vitals of your religion are not infected! "And, remember, if your hearts condemn you, God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things." But, beloved, we hope better things of you. For how can it be—how can it be, that ye who so lately tasted the wormwood and the gall—who so lately trembled before the terrors of God—should forget the hole of the pit whence ye are digged? How can it be that ye who so lately tasted a Saviour's love—and with your feet on the rock of ages, had the song of salvation put in your mouth—should

have forgotten your deliverer from hell? And, my dear friends, will you—can you ever forget him? Will you—can you go away from Christ? Oh, spare the Saviour the wounds you would give him! Has he forsaken you—will he forsake you, if you forsake not him?

XXXII.

THE HARVEST PAST.

JEREMIAH viii. 20.

"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

THIS is the language of the Jews under the impending judgments of God. Abundant means of securing the divine protection and favor had been offered them. Faithful prophets had warned them of their danger, and urged them to make God their refuge. Instead of trusting in the Almighty—instead of "breaking off their sins by righteousness," they obstinately rejected the appointed means of security, and persisted in disobedience and rebellion till the season of deliverance was past, and the threatened destruction was ready to burst upon their heads. With this prospect of speedy and inevitable ruin before them, they are convinced of their past folly and madness in having wasted the season when the divine favor might have been secured, and lament, in the anguish of despair, that "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

There is scarcely a more painful reflection to the mind of man, than that the season of avoiding great calamities, and of securing great blessings, has been neglected, and is irrecoverably gone. The distress will be heightened in proportion to the magnitude of the evil which might have been avoided, and of the blessings which might have been secured. Accommodating the language of the text to the interests of the soul, and to the season in which deliverance from endless woe, and its future glory and blessedness may be secured, how ex-

cruciating to be forced by the reality to say, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." A season in which salvation might have been obtained has been granted—means wisely adapted to the end have been abundantly possessed, but these only opportunities have passed unimproved; means are no longer granted, or if granted, are useless—the last moment of mercy is come, is gone, and deliverance from hell is hopeless for eternity. It is in relation to this subject that I propose to apply the mournful reflection in the text.

I propose to consider—

First, Some of those periods at which the day of grace ends, and leaves no hope of salvation to the sinner.

I. Viewing man as an accountable being, it is strictly true that the whole of life is the season of probation and of mercy.

It is true that pardon and salvation are offered to his acceptance till death, and that as a moral agent he may accept, and that, if he will accept, he shall be saved. But viewing man as dependent on the grace of God, as a being who, by perverseness of heart, has rendered his salvation hopeless, except through the power of that grace which transforms the heart and brings to repentance, there are several periods during his continuance on earth which truly limit his day of merciful visitation—periods at which his future repentance and salvation become hopeless, and when, with exact truth it may be said, "The harvest is past, and the summer is ended."

1. The season of youth passed in impenitence, is to multitudes such a season.

Youth is emphatically the season when the character of man is formed for eternity—the season in which those who do not embrace religion are almost sure never to embrace it. Religion to the depraved heart of man is never an easy acquisition. But the difficulties which attend it increase with age. In youth we are exempt from a thousand obstacles that beset the path in future life. Schemes of business, the cares of life, the countless perplexities and pursuits of manhood which occupy and engross, and fatally hinder thousands, are now un-

known. The thoughts are not, by habit, confined to one channel; not fastened to worldly objects, so that they cannot be diverted to religion. The sensibilities of the soul are more easily touched, conscience is more susceptible and faithful, the affections are more easily moved, the soul is capable of receiving more permanent impressions—the whole inner man is peculiarly accessible to the influence of eternal things. Every one who, in early life, has been blessed with the faithful instructions of a Christian parent can testify to all this by experience. With what interest and emotion did he then listen to the great truths of his salvation, which he can now hear with an almost absolute insensibility. The testimony furnished by the providence of God conducts to the same conclusion. Inquire after the age of those who become hopefully pious. Who are they? Young people almost without exception. Look over the list of those who have been the subjects of the revival in this place or in other places. Comparatively few can be found above thirty, still fewer above forty; and above fifty, it is believed, not one in a hundred. You may make your estimate on this subject as you will, and you will come to substantially the same result. The conversion of an aged sinner is an event that justly strikes the mind with astonishment. The providence of God is a complete comment on the awful interrogatory of his word, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" Thus, whether you consult the providence of God, or reflect on the nature of the subject, youth is the season peculiarly favorable to the commencement of a religious course. All that there is in the character and circumstances of man to awaken hope is to be found in this period of life. All that follows is cause for fear and anxiety, and in the case of multitudes, as God sees it, for utter despair. They waste the season so favorable for making provision for eternity. Its precious hours are spent in sloth, in accumulating difficulties and obstacles, in resisting and defeating the efficacy of those means which divine mercy furnishes. God abandons them—the winter of age, with all its

frost, and cold, and death, comes on—their “harvest is past; their summer is ended, and they are not saved.”

2. The same precious season is often terminated by some single acts of wickedness, or by yielding in some single instance to temptation.

That there are those who have given up themselves, and who are given up of God, to perpetual sin and final impenitence, cannot be doubted by a careful observer of man, nor by the believer in the declarations of holy writ. To this dark and fearful course there was some first step. Behold an abandoned, hardened murderer; you are shocked at his daring profligacy, his avowed defiance of God and man, and relinquish the monster of criminality as beyond the reach of mercy. Could we unvail his history, we should see that some one act, by its connection with consecutive acts, became the turning-point of future character, the first step of that career which terminates on the scaffold, his day of mercy. Take the confirmed drunkard; his hopeless, downward way began in some place of gay festivity—some hour of thoughtless mirth. Take the man who scoffs at the Saviour and his atoning blood, and is given up to “strong delusion, to believe a lie that he may be damned;” his way to death began, perhaps, in some single purpose to excite a laugh in impious companions, at that religion which he thus fatally abjured. Another, whose life is marked by no open immorality, has indulged a spirit of hostility toward some of the humbling doctrines of the gospel which he heard from some faithful preacher—he resolves to hear that gospel no more; and never will, till he hears its final curse pronounced upon him. Another, causelessly absented himself from the house of God, or some other place of religious instruction, when, had he listened to the suggestions of conscience, he might have heard the sermon which had been to him the power of God unto salvation. Another, has yielded to the influence of an irreligious friend, who has enticed or threatened him, and for the sake of his friendship has resolved to forego the friendship of his God, and permitted his soul to

be murdered by the very hands which should have saved it. Another, intimidated by reproach or ridicule, has checked, and concealed, and stifled the monitions of truth and of conscience; and because he is ashamed to think of that which is of highest esteem with angels, and Christ, and God himself, of him the Son of man will be ashamed when he comes to judgment. Another, to banish the thoughts of religion, to dispel the gloom and the forebodings of conscious guilt at an hour when had he resorted to retirement, and consented to be alone with God, his soul might have received his image, resorts to vain conversation, to diversion, which in other circumstances had been harmless, to a party of pleasure, to the gay assembly-room, to something which diverts the thoughts and feelings of the mind, and thus grieves away the Spirit of all grace, and seals his final ruin. Thus eventful are many of the acts of man. They become the infallible occasions of future continuance in sin. What memorable examples are furnished by the young ruler going away sorrowful from the Saviour, because "he had great possessions," and could not part with them; by Felix saying to Paul, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Could we draw aside the veil that conceals the providence of God, we should doubtless see, in the history of every soul that is lost, some act, some purpose, some state of heart, some violence done to conscience, which was the fatal step away from the grace of God—the commencement of that downward career, in which mercy was never to reach him—the turning-point of life and death eternal—the hour in which his day of grace terminated, and from which the only result of his protracted life, was the accumulation of wrath—the hour when the harvest was past, when the summer ended.

3. The same precious season is often terminated by the abuse and perversion of distinguishing grace.

There is no law of nature of more infallible operation than that the gospel, when it does not soften, hardens the heart—when it does not save, damns the soul. It is a "savor of

life unto life, or of death unto death ;” and, in exact proportion to the abundance and power of the means resisted, are guilt and hardness of heart augmented. Thus it is that the sinner’s measure of iniquity is often rapidly filled up and his perdition made certain, long before death overtakes him. “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” Thus he wept over Jerusalem: “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.”

On this principle of providential dispensation many a youth who has persisted in a wayward course of sin, amid the counsels, the exhortations, and entreaties of parental piety, has early reached that profligacy and hardihood in sin, which evinces the utter inefficacy of all the means of grace and salvation.

Others, and those of every age, who have sat under the plain, pungent preaching of the gospel, and who have thus, in order to continue in sin, been obliged to resist the clearest dictates of their understanding, to maintain a constant conflict with conscience from Sabbath to Sabbath, and who have perhaps resisted a degree of moral influence which has resulted in the conversion of many around them, often reach the point of hopeless obduracy of heart and fatal abandonment of God.

Every faithful minister of the gospel is thus the occasion of perdition to multitudes. It is credibly related that in a place where Mr. Whitefield preached, and was greatly opposed by many, that not one of his opposers was known afterward to give evidence of piety, and that nothing like a revival of religion was known there, until every such opposer was dead. When, in addition to the more ordinary means of grace, opportunities of hearing the gospel preached, are multiplied—when religion and the concerns of the soul become extensively the topics of conversation in families and among neighbors—when

the professed followers of Christ awake to a faithful discharge of these duties and converse with sinners, solemnly and pungently, about the neglected concerns of the soul—and when these extra opportunities and means are resolutely shunned and neglected, or when, in any way, their influence is resisted, then it is that multitudes put themselves beyond the influence of the most powerful means that will ever be used for their salvation, and live only to “treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.”

I might dwell on many other particulars under this head. Every event of Providence in the natural world, from the opening of the flower of the field to the sweep of a tornado—every event in the moral world, from the admonition of a friend to the heavens opened above us in showers of grace and salvation, is an effort to save the soul of man. The hand of Providence, is the hand of God. The voice of truth, is the voice of God. The whole system of events, is a system of experiment on the heart of the sinner to bring him to God and life again. But when the experiment has been fully made, and made in vain, then does God himself take up the lamentation over him: “O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?” “Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone.” The God of grace despairs, and well may it be said, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended.”

4. This season of mercy often terminates with a season of peculiar divine influence.

There are periods in the life of almost every one when the truths of religion have peculiar efficacy. The Spirit of God carries those truths to the conscience with a power which cannot be wholly resisted. Such intervals of conviction may be longer or shorter, the conviction itself may be more or less pungent, but let the subject resist and grieve away the Spirit of God, and the last state of that man is worse than the first. God, when he thus awakens the sinner, does the most that God can do to bring him to repentance, short of actual regeneration; and no act of the sinner so jeopardizes his salvation as to

stifle such convictions and grieve the Holy Ghost. The sinner struggles away from this grasp of omnipotent mercy, and God puts into execution that awful denunciation, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." It is, however, there is reason to believe, peculiarly true that such judgments are executed on sinners after seasons of the outpouring of the Spirit on the community where they dwell. At no other period of their probation are such diversified and powerful efforts made by the Spirit of grace for their salvation. Then it is not only that the ordinary means of grace are greatly multiplied, but then also many are used which are peculiar to such seasons, and all have a peculiar efficacy. Then it is that a peculiar divine unction attends the preaching of the word of life—the attention is fixed, and the solemn assembly is moved by the Spirit of God as the trees by a mighty wind. Then it is that the fervor of effectual prayer takes hold of the counsels of God and draws down the blessings of his grace. The false glare of earthly objects fades, the realities of eternity come near and rise on the mind with their real magnitude. Then it is that every sensibility of the soul is touched, and obligation puts its firm grasp on the conscience. Then in the mother, the child, the wife, natural affection draws with all its tenderness, sympathy awakens and softens and melts to kindlier emotions, the voice of friendship and entreaty wins, the beauty and excellence of religion attracts, hope animates, fear alarms. Then it is that the scenes of apostolic days pass before us again, the tears of contrition and the joys and songs of hope, the love of brethren and their sweet communion, in gladness and singleness of heart are witnessed. The prince of life, in actual conflict with the grand adversary, multiplies his victories. The majestic goings of a sovereign God are seen and confessed, as in the execution of new purposes of grace and mercy, angels exult, and the powers of the world to come, rest with deep and awful pressure on every mind. Varied as the effects are, none are indifferent; and oh, I have seen it here—that silent, solitary, engrossing agony which each will feel amid the surround



ing millions of the last day. The scoffer and the blasphemer are compelled to new efforts of resistance; the skeptic beholds, despises, and wonders; the grave and prudent wait with affected composure, but with real solicitude, to see whether the work be of God or of man; the speculatist summons his pride of intellect and reasons away the Holy Ghost; the procrastinator in religion half relinquishes, but scarcely retains his purpose of delay; the worldling immerses himself in new cares and hurry and bustle; the men of pleasure multiply their feasts and amusements; youth seek for laughter and mirth where it is not; and thus all, in varied ways of counteraction and resistance, evince the presence of the Holy Ghost no less really than the sinner who, pricked in the heart, bows at the feet of mercy.

What is the result of such a season of divine visitation? As many as are ordained to eternal life believe, while other multitudes, as the reward of their voluntary obduracy and impenitence, are left to seal their own damnation. At such a season, God seems to make his last, highest efforts to save; and those unhappy men who resist them, and still persevere in impenitence, of all others run the most fearful risk of final abandonment of that God who has done so much to save them. It is of such that God says, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." Make the appeal to facts. Of those who had arrived at manhood during the outpouring of the Spirit in this town, in the years 1807 and 1808, how many have since, in the two successive revivals, been brought into the church, or dare hope that they are Christians? So few, as to make the heart of every one "meditate terror," who has witnessed and outlived in sin a revival of religion.

Let every such person reflect on the principles of God's dispensations; let him reflect what peculiar influences from God he perverted, what a scene of divine wonders he has witnessed unmoved; let him think of the frailty of his life, the little probability that these efforts of grace will be repeated, the still less probability of their efficacy, if they should be; let him

ask, if God is ever to interpose by his grace in his behalf, why he has not done it already; let him remember that he persisted in his impenitence with his eyes open on the awful hazard of doing it, and with the warnings of God sounding in his ears; let him remember, for he may know the fact, that he has attained to a hardness of heart that can resist all that the God of mercy ever does for the conversion of men, and then let him say, if there is not in his case one of the most decisive proofs, short of death itself, that his harvest is past, his summer ended, and he not saved!

5. *Death* ends the day of grace to all.

Often wild delirium, or a benumbing stupor, or the violence of disease terminates these precious hours of mercy before the spirit departs. It is far the most frequent effect of fatal disease, either in the ways just specified, or by giving only doubtful indications of its fatal termination, or through the false hopes excited by the desire to live, or by the deception of friends, that it wholly incapacitates for the work of repentance. Did you ever see a dying sinner? Consider his weakness, and his pain, and say what power has his poor departing spirit to work out his salvation. Thus, instead of a faithful monitor to rouse the soul to the great work of preparation for eternity, it becomes only a decisive index that the day of mercy is over. But death itself is to all the close of probation. It ushers the soul that is unprepared into the presence of its Judge to receive its unchangeable doom. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment." The end of probation must come. The mighty angel standing on the earth and the sea shall lift his hand to heaven, and swear that time shall be no longer. Then all will be eternal, unchangeable retribution. The day is near when these Sabbaths will no more rise upon us with this heavenly light, when these doors of the sanctuary will no more be opened to us; when no sermon will be heard, no prayers offered; when God will invite no more, the Holy Ghost strive no more; when these accents of mercy will no longer follow the listening ear; when cries, and tears, and

groans will no longer avail, and when the unforgiven sinner, either under the certain anticipation, or actual reality of ceaseless and unmitigated wrath, shall be forced to say, the day of merciful visitation is past.

And now, my dear hearers, has not this subject, in some or all of its parts, a direct and solemn application to many of you? Are there not some from whom the precious season of youth has passed away, or is just passing, who, instead of availing yourselves of this season of promise, have only spent it in resisting the instructions, and warnings, and prayers, and entreaties of Christian friends? Instead of improving the advantages of this period of life, have you not wasted them all, and surrounded yourselves with all the disadvantages, and hindrances, and hopelessness of more advanced age? Are there not some of you who have reason to tremble, lest you have taken that first and fearful step in the downward way to ruin, which you will never retrace?—been guilty of that single act, which was the fatal harbinger of those successive steps which take hold on hell? Inquire whether you have not done some deed of open and decisive contempt of God, of direct oburgation of his Son, of despite unto the Spirit of grace, which marks you as one who is to die, not only without mercy, but under the sorer punishment of a despised gospel.

Have you not all been favored by distinguishing means of grace? I venture to say, there is not a spot on the globe more signally blessed in this respect, and of course not one where those who neglect and abuse the means furnished, more rapidly ripen for perdition. And yet are there not many who, before God, are chargeable with such neglect and abuse; many who have not only disregarded the calls of the gospel, a thousand and a thousand times repeated, but many too, who, with a determined hardihood in sin, have stood entirely aside, and most studiously shunned all the peculiar and abundant means of a season of divine visitation? And have not that number just cause to fear that all the means which may be used in their behalf will be equally vain? I go further. Is there one among

us who, during the season of this outpouring of the Spirit, has not felt the sacred influence? I do not ask in what effects that influence may have appeared; whether in more decided hostility to the gospel, toward Christians and religion generally, or in deep conviction of sin, and a thorough conversion to God. But is there any one who has not had thoughts and feelings peculiar to such a season? Have not peculiar fears and anxieties at times disturbed you? Has not conscience administered louder and sharper reproofs? Has it not cost you a measure of resistance, in order to avoid religious seriousness, which at times is not necessary? And have not the artifices of the devil to blind and stupefy the heart, and to enable you to resist the Holy Ghost, been peculiarly welcome? And have you not made use of them to a degree that is both strange and shocking?

Have not some of you who are now quiet in sin, at times, trembled at the thought that God should pass you by—have not others, now equally stupid, been actually constrained to secret prayer, and to ask what you must do to be saved? In a word, are there any who have not felt the solicitude, the awe, and the agitation of witnessing the power and the grace of a present God; and yet are not many forgetting, or have they not already forgotten it all? These are questions, my dear hearers, which each one can answer for himself. And, oh, could we take off all concealment from the divine counsels, and see what God sees, what lamentation, and despair, and horror would possess even now many a soul, at the prospect of his remediless abandonment of God! It is true that we cannot specify these unhappy victims of folly and of sin; but can we doubt that there are such? Can we think what God has done on this theater of his mercy, and what they have done, what they are now doing, and then reflect on the revealed methods of divine providence, and not believe that on many the grand experiment of eternal mercy has been made, and that the only result is hopeless impenitence and hopeless perdition? And were an angel to go from seat to seat, and disclose what the

eye of Omniscience sees, what bursts of horror might be heard in the cry, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!"

But the time is not remote when what is now unknown, shall be made known. Let me assure the man who can now bid the stoutest defiance to the message of the gospel, whose heart rears an insurmountable barrier to the grace of God, and who rejects every truth of this discourse upon the plea of fanaticism, or of strange peculiarity, or severe and gloomy views of the gospel, that the time may come, even in this world, when he will do homage to the truth he now despises. Such a one may despise it while in the vigor of health, amid the activity and occupation of life, and while he feels his mountain to stand strong on the foundation of earthly good. But will he despise it on the bed of death? Is he sure that, with the same firmness of nerve, he can think of it when death comes to look at him in earnest? Will he be able to cast an undaunted eye back upon his probation, even upon this auspicious hour of it, wasted in rejecting the great salvation, and forward on the coming judgment of a righteous God? Oh, who can tell the anguish of such a one, when on the bed of sickness—a sickness which he knows to be unto death! And when finding within him a heart that has despised a Saviour's mercy so long, that it rejects it still—a heart so hard and so stubborn, that it yields not, but remains as stubborn and unmoved by a Saviour's glories as ever, even when the terrors of death and the grave have taken hold of him! Oh, who can tell the anguish of such a one when, under all the weight of breathlessness and pain, and on the brink of eternity, he is forced to cry, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved!" Such horror, such anguish has been witnessed. I have seen a fellow-man die thus, and heard this exclamation from his lips. I heard him say, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved." He said it, and died. And, fellow-sinner, you may die thus. And that which shall give peculiar poignancy to your anguish, may be the remembrance of these

bright hours of mercy. *May* feel it?—you *will* feel it, should you die in sin; if not at the hour of death, at the judgment-seat, and through the ages of eternity. On the day of the second death it will be found, that not the imaginations of man, but the sentence of God will stand.

When the sound of the last trumpet shall be heard, calling the dead from their graves—when, amid a burning world, dissolving elements, and rolling heavens, the Judge shall be seen, then it will *be felt* that what God hath said, God will do. On that day each will mourn apart; and, oh! what must be his lamentation, when in the unchanging decision from that throne, and in the certain, dark, and woeful prospect of a ruined eternity, he learns that his probation is over forever.

Then, to think of the thousand solicitations of his God to accept of pardon and glory eternal—the glowing entreaties of a crucified Saviour's love; then to think of this place where so many accepted these overtures of grace, of the thousand sermons, and prayers, and Sabbaths—this gate of heaven, which so many entered—of the friends and companions that entreated and urged acceptance of the great salvation—of the compassion and long-suffering of God, that waited and wooed and threatened and almost forced acceptance—of the riches of that grace that pardoned and sanctified and fitted others for eternal bliss—and then to look up to that bright world and see them there—to see them high in those realms of bliss—the full inheritance of the Redeemer's purchase, the trophies of a Saviour's love—their raptures, and crowns, and fullness of joy, and to say, *once it might have been mine—once it was freely offered to my acceptance—but, oh! I slighted it all when placed within my reach. Oh! that day of mercy and of hope!—could I call back but one hour of it to ask for mercy! But no; God has closed the ear of his compassion, so long abused. Jesus has no sacrifice for sin to proffer; the entreaties of his love are heard no more; the grand catastrophe of my immortal being has come; and now these chains, this darkness, these fires forever and ever! Oh, my dear hearers, can*

you bear such a hell as this? Can you bear even this thought, that there *was* an hour when *heaven* might have been yours, and *hell* was chosen? The present may be such an hour. It has all the value now, which it would have in your estimation were you rolling in the lake of fire. Improve it, then. Per-adventure it is a last hour of mercy. Awake now, or soon you may awake in the horrors of despairing guilt, to say, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved."

But venture on the way of determined sin, and what can you expect? In that path stands death, with which you have made no covenant. On that path an angry God pours only the darkness and tempest and fire of his indignation. Aye, at the next step in it, a reprobating God may say, "He is joined to his idols; let him alone." *Let him alone*, ye ambassadors of God's salvation. *Let him alone*, ye angels of mercy. Prayers, entreaties, calls of Christian love and friendship, *let him alone*. Thou, only Saviour of the guilty and the lost, *let him alone*. 'Tis done. Heaven is lost. Hell is his certain doom. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and he is not saved."

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