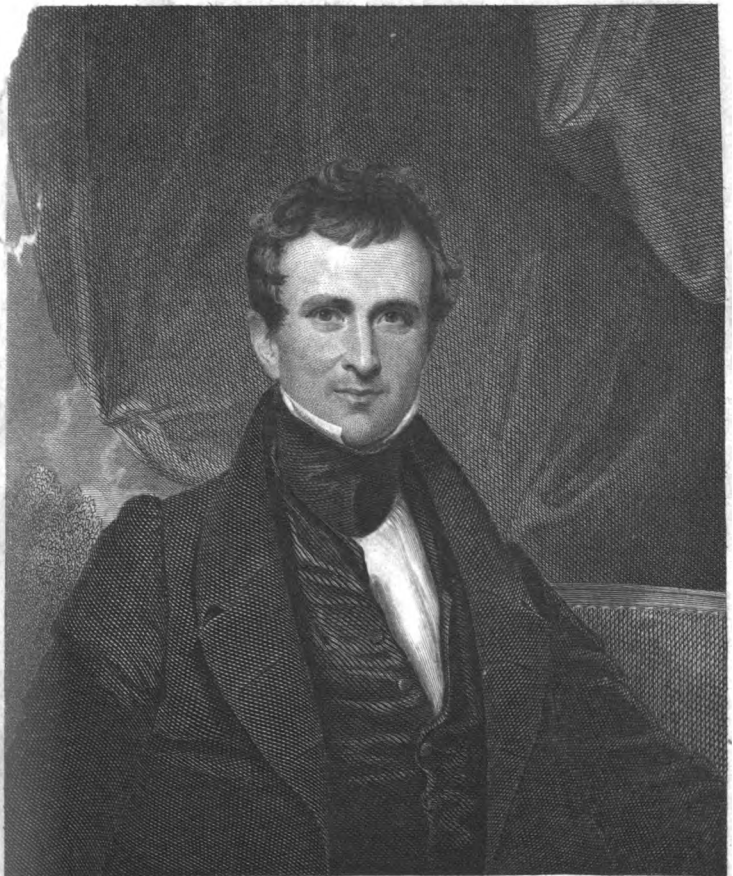


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SERMONS.



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*William Nevins "*

SERMONS,

BY THE LATE

REV. WILLIAM NEVINS, D. D.

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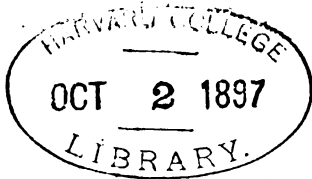
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*Rev. J. P. Briggs*

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following discourses were not prepared by their author for the press. They are given to the reader precisely in the form in which they were found among DR. NEVINS' papers, with only such corrections or alterations as were required in printing. May the great Head of the Church bless this volume to thousands of souls, and to His name shall be the praise.

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## SERMON I.

Without God in the world.—EPHESIANS ii. 12.

I AM going now to attempt the demonstration of something which I most sincerely wish were not demonstrable ; and I ask your close and considerate attention to what I am about to advance if for no other reason, yet that you may sit as judges and critics upon it, (I mean the matter,) sifting every argument and scrutinizing every illustration, that, if possible, you may disprove my assertions, and clear your race and yourselves from that heavy accusation which I bring against them and against you.

My object will be to show that what the Ephesians are declared to have been in their natural state, the great majority of the human family, and I fear that I must add, many of you are now—without God, or, to render the original still more literally, atheists in the world. It is not speculative atheism that I lay to your charge ; I am far from asserting or supposing, that you are intellectually without God. No, you *believe* that there is a God ; you have risen by a short and easy ascent through nature to nature's great intelligent author ; and sometimes, when conscience is under special excitement, you *feel* that

there is a God, and you are shocked at the denial of the doctrine. But of practical atheism, of being virtually without God, I must and do accuse mankind and some of you ; and what if I say that I think the charge of practical atheism no lighter than that of speculative atheism ; on some accounts the former appears to me a more weighty accusation. If I were arraigned at the bar of God, I think that I had rather stand indicted for having disowned my Maker's existence, than to be put on trial for having disregarded his acknowledged existence. There is more of mental infatuation often in the first. The last is a case of moral and more culpable infatuation. Judge ye between the subject that denies the existence of his sovereign, and the subject who, owning his existence and his authority, lives and acts in utter disregard of both. Which is the more guilty ? Decide ye between the child that stoutly denies all filial obligation, and the child that confessing it cherishes no filial feelings towards the father and renders none of the obedience or gratitude which is due from a son or daughter—which is deeper in sin ? Oh, it is dreadful in face of the united declarations of heaven and earth that there is a God, and in contradiction of conscience affirming the same, to say that there is none. But whether is it not *as* dreadful, I have it on my tongue to say *more* dreadful, a thing to assent to the testimony from without us and from within us that there is a God, and then to forget him and disregard him ? In the one case God is disowned in word, in the other in works. Is consistency a virtue ? The speculative atheist has it. But, alas !

the practical atheist to all his other crimes adds the most awful inconsistency. But it is high time to adduce the proof of that on which I am expatiating. By practical atheism I mean the believing that there is a God, and yet thinking and feeling and acting just as if there were none. The propriety of this, I suppose, no one will defend, since, if I mistake not, the very statement of it is revolting even to the beings who are guilty of it. Who will say that a bare faith in his existence is the only duty that we owe God, and for which he holds us responsible. If such a being exists and he is our creator, and our preserver, to whom we are indebted for all that we are and have and hope for, infidelity herself must acknowledge, yea she has acknowledged, that he ought to be remembered and worshipped by prayer and praise and confidence and obedience, and that he is entitled to the supreme and undissembled homage of the heart and the mind. Few men have ever dared to stand forth the advocates and abettors of practical ungodliness, and I am sure that none of you will. There is not one of you, I am confident, but will admit all that I have assumed. I proceed, therefore, to submit my proofs—and,

1. I adduce *forgetfulness* of God as a *proof*, or rather as one *form* of practical atheism. Sinners chargeable with this crime did formerly exist. David expostulates with such “now consider this ye that forget God;” and he mentions it as one characteristic of the wicked, that God is not *in all his thoughts*; and what stronger evidence of the offensiveness of this sin could we have, than his inspired

declaration, "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that *forget* God?" Would to heaven the same sin were not extensively prevalent now. This is a subject on which, as I have not access to your minds, I must appeal to your consciences. What report bears that faithful witness within you? Does it not testify, in many of you, that you forget God? Are there not some here in all whose thoughts God is not? who wake in the morning without thinking of him who has preserved them through the darkness and dangers of the night, and go through the business of the day and the recreations of the evening, and sink to sleep again without once calmly and considerately reflecting on him in whose hand their breath is, and whose are all their ways, and who from day to day and from year to year, unless the unpleasant idea of God be forced upon their attention by some serious mention of his name, or by some striking act of his providence, live in utter unmindfulness of him who is ever mindful of them; and when occasionally they are obliged to think of him, think of him as simply existing, and without any of that emotion which the dependent creature ought to feel, when he contemplates the being from whom he was derived, and by whom he is supported? Ah! I know how it is with you, for there is in every natural heart the same dreadful propensity to exclude God from its thoughts, and I remember well and I trust with some sorrow, how once it was with me, (and on such a subject as this may I not be permitted to make use of my own experience?) when, though I believed in the divine ex-

istence and could demonstrate it, I knew not God, nor loved him, nor retained him in any of my thoughts, and the language of all my life was, "depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways ; what is the Almighty that I should serve him ;" "and what profit should I have, if I pray unto him ;" if thy heart could speak, oh wicked man, and thy actions had a tongue, would not this be their language to God? But what if you should stand acquitted by conscience of the charge of absolutely forgetting God, it does not clear you of the general accusation of being without God in the world. It does but set aside one count, or rather one specification, in the indictment against you. If you think of God, *how* do you think of him? It may be you have had thoughts of him, as unjust in his requirements, or unkind in his dealings ; your thoughts murmur against him ; or you think of him, as the slave does of his oppressive master, with servile dread. Perhaps it is not the *true God* that you think of, but some deification of your own fancy, a combination of imaginary attributes, which has no real existence, and this, peradventure, is the being that you sometimes meditate upon with sentiments of veneration and gratitude, which you mistake for the emotions of true piety. When you contemplate the divine character, as he has revealed himself, is it with deep feeling? do the affections of the heart go forth towards him with the thoughts of the mind? do you think of God as an affectionate child does of a fond father? how many and frequent are your thoughts of him, and do you love to think of him? These are questions that

must be canvassed and appropriately answered before it can be proved that you are not without God in the world. I mention,

2. As an evidence of practical atheism, *a neglect to worship him and to maintain friendly and filial intercourse with him.* How many there are, (the very individuals, it does not belong to me to designate, but God knows them, and conscience points them out,) who offer no adoration to the God they acknowledge, who allot no portion of each successive day, that he metes out to them, to the sacred employment of thinking of him, reading of him, praising him, and praying to him, who never enter the closet to commune with him who seeth in secret and maintain no sort of communication and intercourse with him. Is not this to be without God in the world? Is this the manner of one friend with another? Is this the way of the child to his father? What would you think of a son or a daughter that should treat you so? Does this look like spending an eternity in the delightful intercourse and worship of God? Is this making preparation for heaven? Yet many who answer to this description are confidently expecting to go to heaven; without another heart they *cannot* go thither, and if they knew what heaven is, they would not go there.

Shall we enter the family now to see what acknowledgment of God there is there. Here is the hearth, and the table, and the bed; but where is the altar and the offering unto God? Alas, they are no where to be found. There is not even a brief pause before the repast as for the expression of gratitude, and the

invocation of blessing ; and there is not a word heard or an action seen, from which you could infer that the existence of any superior being is recognized in that household. All is as if they were self-created, self-supported, and self-protected. Who would think them dependent beings or that they acknowledged that fact when questioned about it ? You would say of such a house—" Surely they are atheists that live here." But no ; they believe there is a God, and that he spreads their table, and is about their path by day and their bed by night, but they are living without God in the world.

Let us go to the sanctuary. This, it must be confessed, looks like worshipping him, to be here in his house, on his day and among his people. But didst thou, fellow sinner, as thou wast approaching this place, reflect on the awfulness of the presence into which you were coming, and the solemnity of the purpose for which this assembly is convened, and were you so taken up with these thoughts, that every thing of minor importance was forgotten by you ? Did you come hither to worship God ? Have you been worshipping him ? You have heard them sing and me pray, but has heaven received from you to-day a sacrifice of praise and prayer ? What, if with apparent reverence, you have engaged in these external formalities of worship ? God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth. What is the thought that now occupies the largest share of your attention ? Is it that at this present moment the piercing eye of God is upon the secrets of your soul ? And are you hearkening to me



with the simple desire that your heart may be benefited by what the Almighty may say by me? Is God in your thoughts even here? I know, these are trying questions to all; some, I fear, they convict. Oh could your hearts be laid open now, and your motives be disclosed, would it not be found that some have come hither from mere habit, others for example's sake, and still others to while away an idle hour, one to gratify a vain curiosity, another to display himself, and some *stranger* perhaps in the expectation of being entertained, (for those of you that know me, know full well that I have done entertaining you, if ever I did it,) and many more are here, they scarcely now why; and were the thoughts of every heart revealed, would not the subject of them in many cases be found to be foreign altogether to God and the things of God, a purely secular concern? Say; let conscience speak, didst thou come here to worship God? What didst thou come to God's house, on his day, with his worshippers, but to worship him? Do you honestly think you have ever acceptably worshipped him? and hast thou not then lived hitherto without God in the world?

3. I state as another evidence of practical atheism, *the general conduct of mankind under the various dispensations of divine providence*. The believer in revelation knows, and he who admits a particular providence (and, by the way, the man who does not believe in a particular providence, does not really believe in any providence at all,) must acknowledge that it is the Lord that killeth and maketh alive, that bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up, that

maketh poor and maketh rich, that bringeth low and lifteth up, and doth all things according to the counsel of his own will. Yet when among your fellow creatures, how little do you see that looks like a practical recognition of this doctrine. Does not the rich man say in his heart, "*my* power and the might of *my* hand hath gotten me this wealth?" Or, if he cannot ascribe it altogether to his own industry and prudence, he divides the credit of it with fortune, and speaks of the lucky throw, the fortunate speculation, or the prosperous voyage, to the success of which many things conspired, but he whom the winds and waves obey is not supposed to have contributed anything. I wonder, if among you merchants, when you hear of your ships, there is any lifting of the eye or bending of the knee in gratitude to God. You are glad, and you may, perhaps, mistake that feeling for gratitude. But between gladness and gratitude there is all the difference that there is between atheism and theism. It has ever been the fact that the possession of a large share of the glory or wealth of this world has had an atheistical tendency. "Who is the Lord that I should obey him?" said Pharaoh; and Nebuchadnezzar asks, "is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" Aware of this tendency; Agar prays, "give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say who is the Lord?" How few men of wealth regard themselves as stewards of God. Do they not rather for the most part look upon what they possess as in the most unqualified sense of the expression their

own, and employ it as if they were not beholden for it to any being in the universe. Yet saith the Lord of hosts, the silver is mine and the gold is mine. But it is God that maketh poor, as well as he that maketh rich, and hence, every discontent and repining on the part of the poor is as atheistical as pride and self gratulation in the rich. Or, if these dispositions argue not a denial of God, they argue what is still more an opposition to him.

The sovereignty of God in health and sickness, life and death, is also very extensively disowned in deed, if not in word. The Lord killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth men to the grave, and bringeth up again. The devout Psalmist enumerates among the benefits of God, which he charges his soul not to forget, that he healeth all our diseases, and redeemeth our life from destruction. We do not object to your ascribing disease and death to natural causes, and your employing human means to cure and to prevent; but then these causes and these means must be regarded as in the hand and under the direction of the Supreme Efficient of every thing, or you run into practical atheism. The fault is not in recognizing physical causes; it is in making them independent of God. There is no objection to speaking of the kingdom of God, as a kingdom of means; but there is great objection to your ascribing the sovereignty to the means. If you are raised up from the borders of the grave, you may be as grateful as you please to your physician and your nurse, if you will be still more grateful to God. But is it not a fact, that, in most cases, and by most of man-

kind, God is forgotten, and the preservation of life, and the recovery of health, are ascribed altogether to the skillfulness of men and the inherent efficacy of means ; and God is not glorified as he in whose hand our breath is, and as determining the bounds of our habitation ? Let the ordinary language of the world on this subject bear testimony, for there is no surer way of coming at the sentiments of men than by their language ; how very rarely is a thing said to be *providential* ; it is fortunate or unfortunate ; how infrequently you hear men speaking of the hand of the Lord being in any occurrence. "It so happened," is their way of speaking. What business has such a word as *chance* in the vocabulary of the creatures of that God, who numbers the very hairs of our head, and without whom the most insignificant bird does not fall to the ground. Yet what word is in more common use, and that not merely from necessity, as is sometimes the case, but as accurately expressing the meaning of him who employs it ? When one of you is surprisingly saved from some imminent danger, how is it spoken of ? Not as a merciful deliverance, but as a lucky escape. We hear a great deal said of what Nature has done, and can do, and of her wisdom and power. What mean they by nature ?—some female divinity ? If they mean God, why not say God ? It is the language of atheism. But I must omit these details. I mention,

4. As another proof of practical atheism, *that men are in the habit of forming their plans and purposes, without respect to their dependence on God for the*

*accomplishment of them, and without consulting him.* They resolve with themselves where they will go, what they will do, how much they will accomplish, just as if they had life in themselves, and were independent in wisdom and power. They tell us what they intend to do, what they mean to be; nor do they throw in any such parenthesis as, "if the Lord will," or, "God helping me;" nor do such thoughts enter into their minds. Yet we are commanded to acknowledge God in all our ways; and it is promised that he will direct our paths, for "the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." With what severity and solemnity does James rebuke this infatuated conduct:—"Go to now, ye that say, to-day, or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow, for what is your life; for that ye ought to say, *if the Lord will*, we shall live and do this or that.

5. The conduct of many, *in seasons of affliction*, evinces that they are without God in the world. Though man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward, yet affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground. The rod of affliction is held in the hand of God. Nevertheless, how many regard it not as the work of the Lord, neither consider in it the operation of his hands, and, consequently, make no inquiry into its meaning and object, and feel no anxiety that it should answer the purpose for which it was sent. They philosophically submit to it, or impiously complain of

it, or, whatever they do, they overlook its meaning and they defeat its intent. Oh! how frequently is this painful means of grace entirely ineffectual! Sinner, how much thou hast suffered, and suffered from thy God, too, in vain. It has awakened no serious reflections in thy mind; it has drawn thee no nearer to thy Maker. Thou lovest life as well as though thou hadst never tasted its bitterness, and art as strongly attached to the world, as if its vanity had never been made to pass before thee. Thou hast been desolate and in darkness; and thou hast felt the insufficiency of human consolation and inadequacy of earthly resource, but it has not put thee upon inquiring after God. Thou hast not said, "where is God, my Maker, who giveth songs in the night;" thou hast not submissively asked him what he meant in troubling you, and what he would have you to do. You have not bemoaned and forsaken the sins for which you might have presumed he was chastising you; you have not kissed the rod; you have not gone to him to heal your wound, and to bind up your bleeding heart; you have applied to philosophy to stanch it; you have waited for time to cicatrize it, or you have suffered the world to charm you into a forgetfulness of your sorrows; and some have undertaken to drink up their griefs in a cup whose dregs are death and hell. Is this childlike? Doth not a suffering son or daughter fly for refuge and relief to the parent's bosom? And God's ample bosom has ever been open to you; ah! you have been living without God in the world.

6. Finally, mankind, in their *pursuit of happiness*,

evince their practical atheism. Whither should a creature in quest of joy go to obtain it, but straight to him, who made, and who sustains both that which enjoys and that which is enjoyed, his maker and preserver, and the world's. Yet men fly from God for happiness. Oh! could they fly to the dominions and the creatures of another equal God, it might do; but they fly to his creatures for it; they look to his world for it, as if God could not make us infinitely more happy than his world can; as if he would not imbitter its every stream, and poison all its fountains; as if his creatures could make us happy any longer than he permits. Oh! what awful infatuation!—and yet is not this what many of you are doing? You are seeking and finding your happiness in the violation of his laws, and in the enjoyment of his creatures! What do you get? How long will it last? Can such a state of things be long permitted to exist? Will God be able to endure it forever? Oh, no; the end draweth nigh, when all the sources of your present happiness will be dried up, and the fountain of living waters, which you like not, will alone remain. Whence have you your joys and comforts now?—from your family?—it shall be broken up; from your business?—it shall be discontinued, and you shall leave the world, and the world itself shall be consumed, and nothing will be left but the soul and God. You cannot be happy in any thing else; and, if you love him not, you cannot be happy in him. Eternity will be but a blank without God; and yet you that are without him in this world, will be without him in that to come. Now you are contented, though

without God, because you are not, in every sense of the expression, without him. You are not without some tokens of his favor ; you are not without many fruits of his beneficence. He is mindful of you, though you are not of him ; he is kind, though you are unkind ; but it will not be so when the period of probation is closed, and the offer of mercy withdrawn forever. You will be, in every sense, without God, without his favor, his fellowship, one token of good, or word of comfort, or ray of hope from him, forsaken of him, and, but that he remembers your sins, forgotten of him forever.

Oh ! live not any longer without God in the world ; recognize him ; return to him, and attach thyself to him ; "acquaint thyself now with God and be at peace : thereby good shall come unto thee." When shall it be said of you, "but now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ ?" Shall it ever be said of you ?

Will you be an orphan, a voluntary, guilty, unpitied orphan forever ; fatherless, friendless, helpless, hopeless, wicked, wretched, hateful, and hating, through a tedious and tiresome eternity ? You are in danger of it. The probability is strong that you will be all this ; and yet you need not be. Christ can save you. "He is able to save unto the uttermost." He is able, willing, ready, waiting, anxious, What more do you want ?



## SERMON II.

God is Love.—1 JOHN iv. 8.

IT is a fact, and one worthy of very particular observation, that those truths, which are most certain, and most easily and generally received, are, at the same time, the most mysterious, and hard to be understood. Those doctrines, in support of which there exists the most complete and irrefragable evidence, in demonstration of which there can be adduced arguments of unanswerable and irresistible cogency, are the very doctrines which are attended with the greatest difficulties, and most exposed to cavil and objection. The evidence in favor of truth seems to be clear and satisfactory just in proportion as the truth itself is dark and incomprehensible. Some men say they do not and cannot believe mysteries. They do believe them. If they do not, they do not believe anything, and it is unreasonable that they should believe anything, for in refusing to believe certain mysteries, they reject clearer and better evidence than is presented in favor of any other class of truths. Now, the only ground on which it is reasonable to refuse assent to any proposition, is defect of evidence in support of it. If these propositions, expressive of mysterious truths, are sustained by the

greater amount of evidence, and yet are not believed, there is increased reason for disbelieving other propositions, supported by a less amount of evidence. There is nothing, therefore, more indispensable than the rejection of mysteries or truths which lie open to some objection, while there is enough of positive proof in their favor. There is no prejudice more unreasonable. Indeed it is so unreasonable that no man is, or can be, uniformly controlled by it. It may prevail to the rejection of some mysteries, the mysteries of the Bible, for example ; but there are others which, in spite of this prejudice, are, and must be believed. Men cannot get rid of facts, simply because they cannot understand how they should be. The mind, when not under some undue bias from the heart, will yield its assent, where there is proof, and the proof is contemplated and weighed, without waiting for explanations, even though it should be manifest that the explanations cannot be given.

That there is a God, a self-existent, intelligent, and supreme first cause, is a proposition more easily, promptly, and universally admitted, than perhaps any other. And nothing is more reasonable than the belief of it. The positive proof in favor of such an existence, amounts to absolute demonstration, than which nothing in mathematical science can be more exact and unanswerable ; and it is a belief, without which the mind perceives it could not get along. This it must believe, or else admit the greatest absurdities and the veriest impossibilities that can be conceived of. And yet what difficulties attend this first great doctrine of religion, and how vain the at-

tempt to unravel them ! That there is a God, a mind of infinite intelligence, independent, and uncaused, without beginning, or change, or end ; a being of absolute omnipresence, whose perception is omniscience and whose will is omnipotence, whose vision of the future is as distinct as that of the past and present, who searches hearts and understands the thought of man afar off, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. What an admission this for the human mind to make ! Yet it makes it, and tenaciously adheres to it. But how there should be such a being, it is not only impossible to answer, but almost presumptuous to ask. How many interrogatories, in regard to this being, the athiest might put, to which none of us know how to reply. How promptly he can object to our belief, and how plausibly cavil at our doctrine, how ingeniously suggest its attendant difficulties ; and yet we are not and ought not to be shaken in our belief. Some reject the doctrine of the trinity, as too mysterious and incomprehensible to be believed. But that a Supreme Being should exist, is more mysterious than that he should exist in three persons. The former is a greater admission than the latter, after the former has been made. To speak far within bounds, not to tread on the limits of truth, the unity is equally open to objection as the trinity. The difficulty, whatever it be, lies in the admission that there is a Supreme Being. But there is, and we admit it, and that is enough.

But, what is God ? who can answer that ?

Dionysius once asked of Simonides, *what is God ?* The philosopher was aware that it was a difficult

question. He, therefore, asked the indulgence of a day for deliberation. But though difficult, he thought that he could answer it, therefore asked only *a day*. But at the close of the day, he found that instead of unravelling the difficulties he had seen at first, he had only involved himself in greater, and he begged to be allowed *two* days. At the end of the two, convinced that he wanted still a longer time, he required *three*; and so it went on. He never gave the answer. The more he studied, the more was his mind perplexed. The deeper he penetrated, the deeper he perceived he had to go. "Can'st thou by searching find out God! can'st thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is, as high as heaven; what can'st thou do? Deeper than hell, what can'st thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." There is no searching of his understanding. It is infinite.

The question, "what is God," if it have reference to the divine essence, or the reason and mode of the divine existence, is absolutely unanswerable, and as unanswerable with as without a divine revelation. It is something which not only is not, but cannot be revealed. "The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God." There is only one mind that can comprehend God, and that is the divine mind itself. It alone can take in its own dimensions. Our knowledge of God is confined to facts. These are the subjects of revelation; and the results of our reasoning go not beyond bare facts. Nor need this be regretted. The knowledge of facts is here all which we want, and all that we could make use of, if we had more.

What if we understood the reason and principle of magnetic attraction, could the magnet be applied to any other uses than those which it subserves now? Could the mariner's compass be a more accurate or useful instrument than it is at present? Suppose the farmer were capable of knowing and actually knew how the seed in the earth vegetates, and the grain springs and grows, would he, in consequence of that knowledge, have larger or more useful crops? There is no possible use that he could make of this knowledge. It is but a few centuries since the true theory of the solar system has been unfolded, but were not the influences of the sun as cheering and benign before, as they have been since that knowledge? I employ these illustrations to show a truth often lamentably overlooked, that a knowledge of facts is alone practical; that this knowledge of subjects is all we ever have occasion to make use of; so that for every practical purpose, it matters not whether the mode of an existence or the reason of a fact be known or not. Now apply these remarks to the facts and doctrines of revealed theology. The Bible instructs us that God is omnipresent, exists in three persons, and was manifest in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. It announces these facts. These we know, and this is all the knowledge on these subjects that we can make use of. If it had told us, and we could understand how God is omnipresent, and exists in three persons, and was manifest in the flesh, we should be no better off than we are now. It is the fact of the divine omnipresence, not the manner of it, that exerts the influence. The doctrine *that*

God *is* every where, is the practical doctrine, not *how* he is every where. So if I believe the fact that Christ is both God and man, that belief is just as operative as if I knew and saw how the two natures are united. A person will sometimes say, "such a doctrine is of no use to me, because I do not comprehend it," when in fact it is, or might be, of equal use to the man as if he did comprehend it. All that is necessary to the use of any doctrine, is to understand and believe it as a fact. But men are ever for carrying their knowledge beyond facts. This, however, so far as theology is concerned, they will never be able to do. They shall never know how the divine nature exists in three persons; certainly never on this side the grave. They must be satisfied with the testimony that God has given.

Among the facts which the Bible reveals of God, this is one; "God is Love." The statement is at once simple and sublime; intelligible and affecting; *God is Love*. The sentence is inspired. The conception is divine. It must be. It could not have originated in any other mind. There are several things in this announcement worthy of notice; *first*, the use of the abstract term *love*, instead of the concrete *lovely* or *benevolent*. In our descriptions of character we always make use of the latter. We say of a person that he is friendly, not friendship, that he is loving or lovely, not love. But this were too feeble in speaking of God. He is more than lovely or benevolent; these terms do not denote qualities; but the abstract love defines the nature in which these qualities inhere. And this God is. He is love, essential

love. Benevolence is not a mere quality or attribute of God. It is his very nature. It is not something which exists in him. It is himself. *Then* it is worthy of notice that, in selecting the abstract term to describe him, the term made choice of denotes not any natural, but a moral excellence. God is all powerful, and all wise, and of infinite majesty, but it is not said that he is power, or wisdom, or greatness. Such a definition would only have excited terror and awe. But God is Love. Power belongs to him; and wisdom, but these are not his nature; these are not what he is; He is Love. Power and majesty rather repel, but love is the great principle of attraction in the moral universe, and God is Love.

*Again*, let it be observed that the term selected is not *justice*, nor *truth*, nor *mercy*, though these are all moral in their nature, and all belong to him. He is merciful, and just and true; but he is not mercy, nor justice, nor truth. He is love; love is the general exercise; mercy and justice are the particulars under it. Love is the essence. The others are but modifications of love. God is never unjust, never cruel, never false, but justice, mercy and truth are not seen prominent in every thing. But love shines forth and is seen in every thing. God is love; I can find no terms in which to express adequately my admiration of this wonderful definition, and my attachment to it. God is love—God is love. What means it? And what follows from it? I will tell you some of the things it means, and some of the consequences that follow from it; in doing which I shall not draw largely on the resources of my own reason, but be instructed by

the Scriptures. God is his own interpreter ; he alone can reason from propositions which regard his nature and attributes. We are entirely incompetent to pronounce upon the conclusions that may and ought to be drawn from the truth that he is love. It is not for us, it is only for him to say what is and what is not compatible with his being Love. Yet how prone are men to take the decision into their own hands, and to put in their own unauthorized and unscriptural inferences. Perhaps they doubt in their hearts whether he is love ; they will admit that he is in some degree benevolent, (for they cannot be blind to the numerous indications of benevolence that are visible in his plans and doings,) but that he is essential benevolence they hesitate to admit, for how, if he were, should evil have existence, how should sin have been permitted to enter among his creatures, and so many of them become the subjects and victims of such an amount and variety of wretchedness ? What they say, is God love ! and man so miserable ! Can it be ? is the secret, unuttered interrogation of many a heart. But they more commonly admit that God is love, and taking up this truth, they, instead of consulting the Scriptures in regard to what does, or does not follow from it, proceed to make such inferences as they say seem to them reasonable, and in them they live and perhaps die complacently and securely reposing. "God is love," they say, "therefore he will not punish sin ; certainly he will not punish it severely ; it is impossible he should punish it eternally ; there is no hell, or it is but a purgatory, a place of discipline for heaven ; he cannot be wroth with his creatures ; im-



penitence in sin is unreasonable to be sure, but it is not so very dangerous ; we shall all be happy, and get to heaven at last ; God is love." These are some of their conclusions from the doctrine that "God is love." How unlike the conclusions deduced from the same doctrine by the men who spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and which are authorized by this very being, who is love ! He says that he is love, and his word is true, and yet he says that the soul which sinneth shall die, that except men repent they shall perish, that they who know him not and obey not the Gospel of his Son shall be punished with everlasting destruction, that he is angry with the wicked every day, and hath prepared for them a place where is weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, separated from heaven by a great gulf, across which there is no passage. Now does God speak, or will he act inconsistently ? You see how your fond inferences conflict with the conclusions which the Bible authorizes. Which are correct ? Which will prevail ? If yours, then either the Bible is not the word of God, or he is untrue ; and if the Bible is not the word of God, or his word is not to be depended upon, then none of its statements are worthy of credit, and consequently the statement that God is love is not to be believed. If you give credit to the Bible when it says that God is love, (as you are all willing enough to do,) on what principle and by what right can you refuse assent to it, when, with equal explicitness and authority, it asserts that this same God will punish with everlasting destruction all such as obey not the Gospel ? Is there consisten-

cy here? Is this acting honorably? What! Will you cull out of the Bible what you like, and retaining that, reject all that you, a poor, finite and depraved creature, may happen to dislike; and then profess to be a believer of the Bible, when in fact you believe only just so much of it as you please to believe? Oh shame! to treat God and God's word in such a manner.

That God is love implies that and no more than that which the Scriptures allow that it does. It means,

1. That God regards all the genuine moral excellence in the universe, with a complacency proportioned to the degree in which it exists. His standard of moral excellence is different from that of men, but wherever he sees what he regards as such, (and his estimate is according to truth,) wherever he sees holiness, wherever he sees anything that morally resembles himself, on it and its subject he looks with ineffable delight and satisfaction; and on that being he smiles benignantly and sends blessing, and with him he evermore dwells! and this is true of every real Christian, though he be now but imperfectly holy. God looks complacently on him, and his complacency is in proportion to the Christian's holiness. God delights to do him good; God is his friend, his almighty and unchangeable friend; God cares for him; yes, for you believer, God careth. What a reflection this to raise your drooping spirits, and to cheer your melancholy hours; why should you have any such hours? Why if at times you have not other things to rejoice in, do you not yet always rejoice in him, whom you al-

ways have, who is always the same? Once I wondered at that direction, "Rejoice in the Lord always," but now I see how it may be, and why it ought to be obeyed. The Lord reigns, and he is love, and he is the Christian's fast, almighty and unchangeable friend. Why should poverty, sickness, bereavement, disappointment or even death interrupt your joy in him? Behold he is love, and his dominion is universal, and he is your friend! what a ground is here for confidence unwavering, and perpetual rejoicing! But if you are not a subject of holiness, if you are not in the most strict and spiritual sense a Christian, I cannot speak this language of consolation to you. I can say no more than that God has a general good will towards you, for

2. That God is love implies that he has a benevolent regard, and good will towards all his creatures. "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." It means that he delights in the happiness of his creatures and has no pleasure in their misery. But it does not, therefore, follow that he will not permit evil to befall his creatures nor that he will not himself inflict it upon them, for he has permitted it, and has inflicted it, and in so doing, has done nothing inconsistent with a nature of benevolence, and what consistently he has done, he may consistently do hereafter. Because God delights in the happiness of his creatures, it does not follow that he will exert his omnipotence to secure the happiness of all of them. There may be reasons of infinite wisdom why he should not do that. He is the best, indeed the only judge of that. It does not follow that

he will be deaf to the demands of justice, that he will forbear to execute the penalties of his law, or that he will make every one the object of his mercy, whom sin has reduced to a state of misery and ruin. Every man that reads the Bible, and every man that exercises his reason must perceive that these conclusions do not legitimately follow from the doctrine that God is love. What ! does the exercise of justice infer a defect of benevolence. Is not justice a modification of love, not a contradiction of it ? Does a benevolent being never exact rigid justice ? If love dictated and sanctioned the penalty annexed to the law of God, can it be contrary to love to execute that penalty ? May not divine benevolence permit, and even demand its infliction ? Does not a forbearance to execute, and the remission of a penalty often imply a want of benevolence ? Do we not see it to be sometimes the part of benevolence not to spare ? It is a grand mistake to suppose that love and mercy precisely answer to each other ; and that therefore because all are the objects of the general benevolence of God, all will be the objects of his special and saving mercy.

3. That God is love implies that benevolence is the principle and motive of all his designs and doings ; and that the end he proposes in what he designs and does, and the means he employs to accomplish that end, are in the highest degree benevolent. Love is not a quality of the divine character, which only occasionally comes in to influence his determinations and acts. It is that very character itself. It is his nature, he cannot purpose or act without it. It is present to approve every plan, and to prompt every

movement and act. Every thing which God designs and does is characterized by benevolence. He is benevolent in his threatenings, as well as in his promises ; in his judgments, equally as in his mercies ; in inflicting evil, as in conferring good ; when he frowns, as when he smiles ; when his dispensations lower, as well as when they look out of a clear and cheerful heaven ; at all times, and in all things he is benevolent, because his nature is benevolence ; he is love. This I fear is not believed by all ; certainly all do not consider it as they ought. They believe that God is, on the whole, a benevolent being ; but they do not see and acknowledge his benevolence in every thing ; and their feeling is, that he might have afforded stronger and clearer proofs of his benevolence, if sin had not entered the world, and misery overspread mankind ; and if there were no punishment in reserve, they feel as if God would have been more benevolent. But they are altogether mistaken, and they ought to correct this mistake. God is infinite in benevolence. God is Love. What more could he be ? He could not have been more benevolent than he is. He could not have acted more benevolently than he has done. There is nothing that God has done, that is to be regretted. It is only for what man has done that there should be regret ; and God's permitting even that, is not to be regretted ; for his permission implies no approbation, no sanctioning of it. It is not for lack of benevolence in God that anything is as it is ; and though clouds may intervene now, yet the time is coming when his goodness in every dispensation and doing shall shine conspicuous to

every mind. He will make all things, ultimately, to promote his grand design, his own glory, and that which is coincident with it, the greatest good of his extended and populous universe of intelligent beings. That will be infallibly and eternally secured; and there will be no more punishment and suffering than he sees to be necessary, as a testimony to his justice, as a token of his hatred of sin, a memorial to the redeemed of the ruin they are saved from, and as an example to the whole moral creation. Hell will be just the prison-house of the universe, and its inmates, taken from two, and probably from only two of all the numerous families of creatures, will bear the same relation, and possibly about the same proportion to the free and happy beings of the creation beside, as the inmates of our penitentiaries bear to the communities, for whose security they are established; and will any of you consent to be of those who shall throughout eternity stand in this relation to the holy and happy universe of God, monuments of his displeasure against sin, sacrifices to his justice, beacons to deter others from sin, suffering as an example and warning, the vengeance of eternal fire? You are in danger of being this; and your danger arises in part from your sceptical disregard of the very statement and appeal which I have been making. This evil may come upon you, just, because you will not believe that it is real, and feel no inducement, therefore, to take measures for avoiding it.

How dreadful will be the penal sufferings of the impenitent in a future world, when it shall be seen that not only justice sanctions, but benevolence approves

and requires them; when it shall be seen that the indignation which burns against them is the indignation of love; not like the wrath of man, rash, furious, inconsiderate, transient; but calm, deliberate, determined, steady, unchangeable! And will ye run the risk of being the objects and victims of such indignation? Will ye tempt the wrath of the Lamb, the wrath of a nature so mild and so meek? When that is once roused, what can ever lull it to sleep again, and who can stand before it? Will ye not repent and betake yourselves to Christ? Will ye not trust in him and turn to God, now, while yet ye may?

The subject affords you encouragement; for if God is love, certainly he will welcome and forgive the returning penitent. He will in no wise cast out the sinner that comes to him through Christ. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn and live. He is long suffering to usward, because he is not willing that any should perish, but come to repentance. Why then will ye die? Why will ye hold out in enmity and opposition to a being whose nature is very benevolent, a being who is love? Ah! how this subject illustrates the depravity of human nature, the wickedness of the human heart! "The carnal mind," we read, "is enmity against God;" not an enemy merely, but the abstract term is used, enmity; and it is against God; and God is Love; and so it is enmity against love. The heart of the unregenerate man has for the object of its enmity and opposition, not merely a being who is lovely and benevolent, but a being who is love itself; for God is Love; and yet ye will persist

in enmity to him. Ye are not subject to the law of God, submissive to his will, attached to his cause, interested in his worship. "I know you that you have not the love of God in you."

Is it not reasonable that he should be loved, and loved universally and supremely ; with the heart and the whole heart ; when he is not only lovely and benevolent, but each infinitely ; yea, essential love itself ? Ought he not to be loved ? Shall he not be loved ?

And ought not his will to be submitted to, when it is the will of one who is love ? And his law obeyed, when it is a law of love, its object love, and the sum of all its enactments love ? for love is the end of the commandments, and the fulfilling of the law ; and yet men break through this commandment, and trample upon this law, despising its obligation, and defying its sanctions.

And is it still so with any of you ? and will you persist ?

God is Love. Oh ! when shall man be ; love, holy, heavenly love ; akin to angels ; like God ? when shall the last root of enmity be removed ; and love reign in the heart, from which it has been banished by sin, not only dominant, but alone ? In heaven, Christian, and in the transition from earth to heaven ; never till then ; and can you not say, then, "I would not live always ;" and sing "there shall we see his face, and never, never sin ?"

But every one will not realize this. Are you likely to realize it ? How is it with you now ? Has love commenced its reign in you, and is it now subduing all its enemies under its feet ?



## SERMON III.

He delighteth in mercy.—MICAH vii. 18.

**T**HERE are statements in the Bible which, to a superficial observer, seem to proceed from erroneous views of human nature. But on investigation it will be found that they rest upon a thorough and profound knowledge of man, his condition, wants and exercises. Many illustrations might be given of the correctness of this remark ; but my purpose admits the suggestion of only one. A careful and considerate reader of the Bible will perceive that great and unwearied pains are taken by its writers to persuade sinners that God is a merciful being, a very merciful being, entirely worthy of their confidence in this respect ; that he has no pleasure in their death, that he is quite willing and altogether disposed to save them ; and this, however inveterate their sinful habits, however depraved their hearts, accumulated their guilt, deep their unworthiness, multiplied and enormous their transgressions. We find God assuring men on this subject in every variety of language, inviting them to reason with him about it, and for the sake of securing their confidence, actually condescending to asseverate under oath that he has no pleasure in their death ; and we find Christ not only in the most affectionate and earnest manner inviting sinners to come to him,

but assuring them that he will in no wise cast out any that do come. Why this? say some; what need of these repeated assurances, these strong asseverations, this oath? Is any one disposed to distrust the mercy of God, or the willingness of him who died for sinners, to save them? These declarations appear to proceed on a mistaken view of human nature. They seem to imply that there is in sinners a proneness to doubt on these points; to fear that their sins are too many and great to be pardoned and that they have carried them beyond the reach of mercy's most extended arm; whereas, say these objectors, there exists no such proneness in human nature, and there is nothing that men are more ready to admit and acquiesce in than that God is merciful and salvation easily attainable. Truly in some of mankind it must be confessed this proneness to call in question the mercifulness of God does not appear. They do not doubt in the least the mercy of God. They even exercise a most presumptuous and unwarranted confidence in it. They believe that God is so very willing to save, that he will save them in their own way; that he is not only willing to save men *from* their sins, but will even save them *in* their sins; so ready to pardon, that he will pardon them whether they repent or not; and that he will not let them perish, however obstinately bent upon perishing they maybe. These I own, need no such statements to assure them, as those I have referred to; and for them they were not made. They were designed for quite another class of persons, in whom there does exist the very tendency to doubt, which they are calculated to meet. They were intended for convinced and

concerned sinners. These need them ; and the Bible would be an incomplete work, did it not contain such statements. I appeal to those who have been convicted of sin, who have seen and appreciated the evil of sinning against God, and have been introduced to an acquaintance with their own hearts, if they have not been troubled with these doubts, and subject to unbelief in this respect. Before you were illuminated you found nothing easier of belief than God's ability and willingness to save you. Indeed you saw no reason why you should perish. But since you were enlightened, have you not found the greatest difficulty in persuading yourselves that God can and will save such as you are ? You have not doubted that he is merciful, and that he can and will save some sinners, but that he should save such a sinner, as you perceive and feel yourself to be, one so vile, so unworthy, so rebellious, that there should be mercy and forgiveness for you as well as for them, this is what you have found it difficult to believe. Nothing is more common, where the spirit of God is, than these doubts and this unbelief. I hear them expressed almost every day. "I fear that my sins are too great to be forgiven ; that my day of grace is past ; that there is no mercy for me ; I see clearly that God might most justly withhold his forgiving mercy from me, and I fear that he will do it." Expressions such as these I hear, not from all of you, not from those who have greatest cause to use them, not so frequently from the elder portion of the congregation ; the more criminal class ; but generally it is from those who have sinned least, and who have been the shortest time

engaged in sinning. Those who have least to fear are almost the only ones that entertain and express fear. The reason is, God has opened their eyes to see, what the others have closed their eyes, that they might not see. I recently conversed with a person of sixteen, and shortly after with one past sixty. The first said with agitation and weeping unfeigned "I fear that I have sinned past forgiveness." The other said "it is true, I have been a sinner, but" and here followed a long string of apologies, exceptions and extenuations. The youth of sixteen had no apology to make. Here is a phenomenon. What is your explanation of it? We are at no loss to explain it. The former had been awakened and enlightened by the Spirit of God; the latter had not been. To him and such as correspond to him a discourse intended to persuade them that mercy belongeth unto God, and that they may hope in it for their salvation, would be inappropriate and worse than useless. I speak not to them therefore, but to those, if any there be here, who in conviction and feeling answer to the description given of the other individual; and my aim shall be to persuade them now without further delay and without any mixture of doubt to confide and hope in the revealed mercy of God, however many have been their sins, and however crimson be their guilt. May God enable me to reach their case.

For the proof that God is merciful we are entirely dependent on revelation. The deist is challenged to produce one valid argument in demonstration of the divine mercifulness. The light of nature discovers nothing beyond bare forbearance; and for-

bearance does not necessarily imply mercy. A being may forbear to punish for other reasons than that he intends to forgive the transgressor. A respite is not always granted as a preliminary to a pardon. But be it admitted that God is merciful; we lose nothing by the admission; for it does not follow, because a being is *disposed* to show mercy, that he *will*, in every case, exercise it. There may be considerations of paramount weight forbidding its exercise. In the case of the fallen angels, such reasons existed, we needed a revelation, therefore, if not to assure us that God is merciful, yet to assure us that, and how he can and will exercise mercy towards fallen men. Such a revelation God has given to us; and,

1. It announces to us that God is merciful, and this repeatedly and in terms the most explicit; and that he is disposed to show mercy to men, and can do it in perfect consistency with the other attributes of his character, and to the full extent, too, of forgiving all their sins, relieving all their wretchedness, and supplying all their wants. Thus the *fact* is declared, that God is merciful; but there is something very peculiar in the *manner* in which this doctrine is taught, to which I would solicit your notice, as well worthy of it. Observe, *first*, the words synonymous or nearly so with merciful, which are used in connection with it, *gracious, long-suffering, slow to anger, pitiful*; and, not satisfied with the positive, the superlative is used *very* pitiful and *very* *gracious*, too. Observe, *secondly*, that the inspired writers, not content with the singular, *mercy*, by a felicitous fault of style, adopt and employ the *plural*

form, *mercies* ; they speak of the *mercies* of God ; nor are they content with a *simple* plural ; but they speak of these mercies as *manifest* ; yea, they speak of the *multitude of his mercies*. This is strange language. It expresses a conception not of human origin. And to denote that there is nothing uncertain about these mercies, they speak of them as *sure* mercies ; and they speak of them as not only many, but great ! ay, and *great above the heavens*, they say ; and they speak of the *greatness of his mercies*, in *magnitude* equal to what they are in multitude. Many, and great, and sure mercies. Think of that. But they are not *mere* mercies, but *tender mercies* ; and these mercies they speak of, not as *derived*, but as *original* with God. Him they speak of, as the *Father of mercies* ; and they take care to tell us that mercy is not *accidental* to God, but *essential* ; they speak of it as *belonging* to him ; and Daniel goes farther still ; he says, “ to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness ? no ; but forgivenesses, you may say, that is not chaste composition, but it is glorious doctrine. *Thirdly* ; there is another set of phrases they use ; they speak of God as *rich* in mercy, *plenteous* in mercy, and *full of compassion* ; they speak of his *abundant* mercy ; of the earth as *full of his mercy*, to denote its amplitude ; and in respect of its continuance, they say *his compassions fail not*, and there is a psalm in which twenty-six times it is said that *his mercy endureth forever*. Oh, sinner ! if you become a Christian, and once get into heaven, you will be kept there, be assured of it. There is still other phraseology used. They speak

of God's *kindness*, his *great* kindness, his *marvellous* kindness, his everlasting kindness; but they are not satisfied to speak of it as simple kindness; they call it *merciful* kindness, and speak of it as *great* towards us. They call it *loving* kindness, too, and we read of God's *marvellous* and *excellent* loving kindness, with which it is said, also, that he *crowneth* us; here, too, they use the *plural* form, loving *kindnesses*; and they speak of the *multitude* of his *loving kindnesses*. What more could they say? *Fourthly*; we find the mercy of God compared to certain human exercises; for example, to a father's pity, which it is said to be like; and to a brother's friendship, than which it is closer, and to a mother's love, which it is said to exceed; finally, it is said that no being is like it. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?" and in Isaiah lv. after the proposition is made, "Let the wicked forsake his way," it is added "for my thoughts are not as your thoughts," don't wonder at this mercy; don't suppose it a thing impossible, because there is no parallel to it among men. Expect great things from God, "for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways."

But there is one mode of speaking of the mercy of God, which I have yet to refer to. It is that of the text. He delighteth in mercy. It is very expressive. There are some things we do by *constraint*; others we do from a sense of duty; others we *delight* to do. Now, with how much confidence we ask a person to do for us, what we know he takes the greatest pleasure in doing; we feel sure that he will do it; we do

not ask him to perform a painful task, in order to show us a favor ; we ask him to do what gratifies him no less than it benefits us. He delighteth in it ; so God delighteth in mercy. It is not by constraint that he shows mercy ; it is not a *task* to him. It is a pleasure. He loves it. Sinner, consider this ; you do God great injustice when you suppose mercy is a thing reluctantly drawn from him, a something which he exercises unwillingly ; no, he loves it ; and here consider the difference between *showing* mercy and *loving* mercy. Any one can show mercy. It is but to shed a tear, or put one's hand in his pocket ; but to love it, is another thing. Now, God loves it. This surely should inspire confidence in the sinner. Can you not now venture on him, since he delights in mercy ; takes pleasure in doing what you desire him to do for you ?

But, though his assertion should suffice, yet I will offer some proofs that God delights in mercy. And,

1. I infer it from the fact that he has made mercy a part of our moral constitution ; has made pity natural to us, and the exercise of it agreeable to us. Now, would he have done this, if he had not himself delighted in it ?

2. He has made it a part of our duty, not merely to show mercy, but to *love* it ; he requires us to delight in it. Why ? but because he delights in it. This is being merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful.

3. He expresses the highest displeasure against the unmerciful ; he says "they shall have judgment without mercy, who showed no mercy ;" while on the other hand, he says, "Blessed are the merciful,



for they shall obtain mercy." All this goes to prove that he delights in mercy. But,

4. I infer it from the manner in which God exercises mercy to sinners of the human race. This proves, not merely that mercy belongs to him, but that he delights in it. And here the particulars that might be referred to for illustration, are many.

1. He shows mercy without waiting to be asked to do it. He does not wait for the objects to present themselves to him and solicit his compassion. He goes after them, and searches them out. He *loves* mercy. We say of a man that seeks out opportunities of doing good, and relieving wretchedness, he is truly benevolent, he delights in mercy ; while of another, that waits for the opportunity, and must be solicited before he does any thing, we may say he shows mercy, but we cannot say he loves it. Ah ! there is little of the love of mercy among men. He has no great compassion for the condition of the heathen, that does nothing for them unless some one comes and humbly asks him for a small donation to aid in evangelizing them. He does not delight in mercy ; we do not wait to be asked to do a thing we delight in. I hope no one will be offended with me, if I ask how much good you would do in the course of a year, if you were not asked to do any ; how many dollars do you annually give unsolicited, to advance the cause of christianity and to help it on to its final and triumphant dominion over the whole earth ? Ah ! is not your's a benevolence that stands still ; how, then, are you like him who *went about* doing good ; your's, a mercy that must be solicited, before

it begins to act? How, then, are you merciful as God? It is a sad state of things that prevails now among Christian professors, that there is no benevolent enterprise that you can get them to take hold of, without repeated and most earnest solicitation, and even then many of them will not engage in the work. What shall we say of such? The Bible says, "if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Surely this is not the spirit of Christ. What then? Why, they are none of his. Oh! that there were more volunteer benefactors among you; more spontaneous good-doing; more unsolicited contributions to the great charities. Do you think Christ ever avoided an object of misery, ever tried, and was glad to escape a solicitation of charity? I have said what I did not intend, but do not at all regret.

2. He shows mercy at great expense to himself. He *spared* not his own Son, that a way might be opened for the exercise of his mercy.

3. He lets us see *how* it is that he can consistently exercise mercy towards us; discloses to us the *plan* of salvation, as well as the fact of its possibility.

4. The first moment that sinners manifest a willingness to comply with the terms on which he exercises mercy, they are met by his mercy. He shows himself ready to pardon. He waits long for their repentance; but does not keep them waiting for his forgiveness; between their confession and absolution he allows no interval.

5. The *terms* of mercy are brought down as low as they could be. God has dispensed with every

thing he could ; makes no arbitrary demands upon us.

6. To those very terms his mercy brings us. He even fulfills in us the conditions of salvation. Surely he would not do this, if he did not delight in mercy.

7. He waiteth to be gracious ; spares us long, and overlooks many provocations ; is long suffering, because not willing that any should perish. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."

8. He makes many offers of mercy to us, though we spurn them ; repeats his proposals of reconciliation, which shows that he is desirous we should come to terms with him.

9. He shows mercy to *many sinners*. In each case he pardons a great multitude of sins. He shows mercy to *great sinners*. No magnitude or amount of sin precludes his mercy.

10. He shows mercy to his enemies ; and thus *commendeth* his love towards us. But there are other proofs still that God delighteth in mercy. Would there be joy in heaven when a sinner repents, if he did not ? Would heaven be such a place as it is ? But there are living proofs. *You* are one. *I* am one. Every *Christian* here is a proof, and every *sinner*, that God delighteth in mercy. There are several hundred, then, in this house.

And now, what use shall we make of this doctrine ? Shall we infer that God is not just, not holy, not faithful, because he is merciful ; that he is nothing but mercy ; that all will be saved ; that there is no danger in sinning ; no wrath, no hell ; that re-

penitance is well enough, but not absolutely necessary? If any one is foolish enough to do that in flat contradiction of the very Bible from which he learns that God is mercy and so merciful, he must do it; and if he will thus play the fool, he must reap the consequences of his folly. No; but we infer that sinners, sensible of their sins, have the greatest encouragement to hope in God's mercy. If he were only merciful, there would be hope for you, how much more now when you have his word for it, and so many practical proofs that he *delighteth* in mercy. Then go forward with thy confession and prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Venture on, ye even unto him. When you ask him to be merciful to you, you ask him to do what he delights in. It is a mercy seat he sits on. It is a mercy sceptre he has in his hand, and he extends it to thee. Touch it and live. Go to Christ, never for a moment giving entertainment to the thoughts that he will cast you out. Be not unbelieving; wherefore doubt? Are your sins many? his mercies are a match for them; so are his mercies many more. Are your sins great, suppose they are, his mercy is great too; do your sins reach unto the heavens, what if they do, but his mercy is great above the heavens; therefore believe.

What use will *you* make of this doctrine? *Some* use you will make of it. Will you go now and break the Sabbath, because God is merciful? Will you practically say, "what is the use of going to church; of praying; of poring over the Bible; God is merciful; why make so much ado about sin; what if I do go on to indulge my lusts, God is merciful; God

is so good, it is not necessary for me to be very good." This is a specimen of the way in which the doctrine is *used*, or rather abused, by many. "I need not give up the world; concern myself about my soul; make much ado about religion; God is merciful; Christ died to save sinners." Yes, but he died to save them *from* their sins. Would you make him the minister of sin? Should ye continue in sin, that grace may abound? There is mercy, but there is wrath too. This is the day of his mercy; but the great day of his wrath will come, and who shall be able to stand?

Because he is merciful, and has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, what does he say? "Turn ye from your evil ways." And will you say, "for that very reason I will not turn from my evil ways;" "I will not return to my father, because he feels a father's pity for me?" Oh! what reasoning! what conduct! Are you not ashamed of it? Will you argue and act thus? If you will, you shall find that, though *mercy* belongs unto God, *weakness* does not; that though he may be entreated, he may not be trifled with. No, God is not mocked; merciful he is; nevertheless, what a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

What use, Christians, will you make of it? Will you say, "since God cares so much for sinners, it is not necessary for me to care for them. God is merciful, then I may make myself easy. Christ is interceding, why need I be? What necessity that I pray, watch, toil, deny myself, strive against sin; God is merciful. I have an interest in Christ, what need I care about consistency of conduct. What if I do live so that the world shall say that I am no better than

they ; what if I do bring a reproach on the cause of Christ ? God is merciful, and he can wipe it off. The blood of Christ can take it away ; what if I do grieve God's people, and give the enemy occasion to blaspheme ? What if I be a stumbling block to many, the grief of good men, the jest of bad ? God is merciful."

Oh ! remember, he, who has called you, is holy ; and he calls you to be holy, as he is, holy in all manner of conversation, and you must be so ; without holiness you cannot see the Lord. He says, "be not conformed to the world ; come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing ;" will you disobey God, because he is merciful ? Will you disregard what Christ says to you, because he died for you ? Will you ? Take care you don't do it. If there be a single Christian sensibility in you, an appeal to the love of Christ will reach it. Beware of so relying on the promises of God, as not to care for his laws. Such error will be terribly fatal.

If God so delights in mercy, why do so many fail of mercy ? One reason certainly is, that they are so *conceited*. They do not feel their need of it. They are so proud they will not bend to seek it. They are unwilling it should be shown them. Therefore justice takes its course even on many, who hear the Gospel. And, oh ! how dreadful must be the wrath of one who delighteth in mercy, and yet finds some who refuse mercy.

If God delights in mercy, what can be plainer than that men should ? We are required to be merciful as God is merciful, and to love mercy. Do

you thus act? Oh that we were more merciful! What a blot on the Christian name, that it should ever designate the cruel, and yet it does. There are cruel Christians; Christians in name. They are oppressors; grinders of the poor; traffickers in ardent spirits; yea, in animal spirits; yea, in immortal spirits. "Slaves and the souls of men," were a part of the merchandise of the Apocalyptic Babylon, Revelations xviii. 13. Let the cruel and unmerciful read and ponder well, 2 Samuel xxii. 26; Psalms xxxvii. 26; Matthew v. 7; and Luke vi. 36.

## SERMON IV. \*

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity ?

MICAH vii, 18.

AN, my hearers, if you only believed the truth, if you did but give credit to the statements of the Bible, if you even believed what perhaps, you profess to believe, if you held such views of yourselves as the Bible expresses, and such as accord with the matter of fact, and such as your Creator entertains of you, how deeply interested you would all be, in what I am going to say to-day. How would you be all eye, ear, attention and interest! God regards you, and the Bible describes you as sinners; and so you are. It is seen. Is it not sometimes *felt*? I am certain it is confessed. Yes, sinners condemned and needing pardon; for condemnation follows sin as a matter of course, and to say that condemned persons need pardon, is almost superfluous. When a man has sinned, there remaineth only the alternative of pardon or punishment. He must receive a pardon, or suffer the penalty. This is a perfectly clear case. I defy any body to get away from this dilemma. Therefore you, as having sinned, need pardon. You can have no expectation but from mercy, unless that pre-

\* Dr. Nevins' last sermon.



rogative is exercised by the proper authority in forgiving you, you are gone and lost inevitably and irrecoverably; you must suffer the penalty. Your reason teaches you this.

Now one great object of revelation is to tell you that you may be pardoned. It was always known that God had the power of pardoning. It could not be lodged elsewhere. The legislative, judicial and executive authority of the universe meet in him. But revelation informs us that God will and does exercise the prerogative of pardon. Nor does it merely reveal the fact, but declares the ground, the manner, and the conditions of pardon; *why, how and when* he pardons. Now, how a discourse on this subject would interest you, did you really believe yourselves condemned, and did you duly appreciate your need of pardon!

But my object is not merely to present God before you as a pardoning God, but to show you what there is peculiar and distinguishing in his exercise of pardon. "Who is like thee, pardoning iniquity?" There are not many points in which creatures resemble God. In intelligence and in holiness we bear some faint resemblance to him. But the attributes and ways of creatures are for the most part in contrast to those of God. God is from everlasting; we are of yesterday. *His* understanding is infinite, we know nothing. We are unstable in all our ways. He without variableness or shadow of turning. But in nothing is God more unlike other beings than in pardoning. I would call your attention to an illustration of this truth.

1. No being pardons with such honor to the law broken, and with such security to the government offended, as God. The considerations which induce others to pardon are totally different from those which move God. It is not any thing which does honor to the law. The government that pardons is weakened. Justice is not satisfied. Its satisfaction is dispensed with; the penalty is not executed, but remitted. There is no atonement made. But God lays a foundation for pardon which involves the exaction of the penalty, and the full satisfaction of justice. He magnifies the law whose violation he forgives; and honors the government, while he spares the rebel against its authority. He is as just in showing mercy, as in exacting righteousness. Our iniquities, in being taken off of us, are laid on Christ. They are none the less borne, though not borne by us. We are not made a curse, but he was made a curse for us. We are healed, but it is by stripes inflicted on him. The Christian mind delights to dwell on this theme. Nothing inspires the mind with such confidence as this. It is this chiefly which gives us boldness in approaching the throne of grace to obtain mercy. If we had to reflect that justice is not satisfied, while mercy is exercised, and that God's character and government suffer in our being saved, we could feel no such confidence. But now we have not only mercy to appeal to, but merit, the merit of Christ to plead. We bring a righteousness, though not our own, yet all the better for not being our own. If God would not accept us, yet he will not fail to ac-

cept Christ for us, especially when it is his own plan and proposition.

2. No one pardons at such an expense to himself as God does. With others it is but saying the word, or signing the name, and the person is pardoned. And the reason of this facility is that no attempt is made to reconcile the exercise of pardon with the claims of law and justice. If any satisfaction is required, it is not made by the power that pardons. It must be made by the person needing the pardon. But God while he requires satisfaction, sees to the making of it. He takes the whole business of atonement into his own hands. He takes the pains. He bears the expense. The problem to reconcile the claim of justice with the exercise of mercy he undertakes to solve; and he does it. The idea of pardoning originated with him. The preliminaries of pardon were accomplished by him. Nothing was left to the sinner. Nothing now remains to him but gratefully and cordially to accept the pardon. "God spared not his own son." Suppose we had been assembled and it had been announced to us that we could only be pardoned on condition of God's sending his own dear Son into the world to be insulted and despised, and to die ignominiously on the cross. We should have had no hope. We would have said "He will never do that." But he did it. Who is like him?

3. No one pardons with such a good effect on the sinner pardoned. Men can pardon, but they cannot do it in a way to reform the criminal, and to secure his future obedience; and therefore they have often

to regret that in particular cases they did not let justice take its course. They are not unfrequently sadly disappointed in those they pardon. But God was never disappointed in a sinner he pardoned. Every one he pardons becomes his servant, and though subject to many imperfections and fluctuations, perseveres in his service to the end. Whenever he remits sins, he reforms the sinner. This result he secures in part by *motives*. There is much in the fact, and more in the manner of our being pardoned to bring us to repentance. There is a softening and melting influence in the cross, as well as a saving one. It is hard to go on sinning against such love and pity; to continue in a course which rendered such sorrows necessary. But chiefly he secures this result by his *spirit*, by whose influence the heart of the pardoned sinner is renewed and sanctified. It is a part of God's compassion to subdue our iniquities, as it is said in the next verse. We see then how it is that he has never to regret an exercise of pardon and that he never loses a soul, whose sins he has forgiven.

4. No one pardons so many as God. The prerogative of mercy among men is exercised generally with respect to a few. A selection is made out of a number of criminals, generally on the principle of inferior guilt or circumstances of mitigation in their cases, and not even the offer of pardon is made to the others. The reason is obvious; justice must have its satisfaction, if not of all, yet of some. No human government ever proposed to pardon all its offenders. But God's proclamation runs, "Whosoever will, let

him come and take of the waters of life freely." He offers a universal pardon. He excepts no one. Those who are not pardoned except themselves. And many, many are actually pardoned; what proportion will be finally, I do not know, and never thought calculations on that subject productive of any good. But there is an immense multitude in heaven already; and a great company on their way thither; and the reason that there is yet room both there and here, is that the accommodations are magnificently ample.

5. But not only does God pardon many sinners, but he pardons each many sins. A second offence is not often pardoned among men, much more a third or fourth. Men soon get weary of the exercise of mercy. But God pardons numberless offences; *all*, as many as they may be, and they are very many, as any one may easily calculate; "more than the hairs of mine head," David says his iniquities were. He speaks of one of a thousand. He seems to have divided them into thousands. There are a great many *kinds* and *classes* of sins, to say nothing of the individual sins under these classes. Oh! how many sins and kinds of sin God has pardoned some of us. How many we can remember, and how many more he has pardoned than we can remember! How it would astound us, could they be set in order before us, as they are in the light of his countenance! Well is it said that he *abundantly* pardons!

But he not only pardons many sins, but the same sin many times. How often we have repeated some sins! and yet as often he has pardoned. Men deem

it derogatory to their self respect to forgive the same offence often. But God appears not to be influenced by that consideration. Peter came once to our Lord with this question, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? until seven times?" He thought he proposed a large number. But Christ replied, "I say not unto thee, until seven times; but until seventy times seven." So often are we to forgive, four hundred and ninety times, that is, for so, doubtless, it was intended, as often as he sins; and in another place we are directed to forgive seven times in the compass of a day. Now does God direct us to out-do him in pardoning? May it not be inferred that he pardons at least as often? Yea more! for who is a God like unto thee?

6. Something ought to be said of the peculiar character of the sins which God pardons. He does not merely pardon our sins among ourselves; but our sins immediately against him; our impieties; our sins against his Spirit and his Son. He pardons, what who ever did? the very sin of rejecting the terms of pardon; pardons after the offer of pardon has been many times despised. How much unbelief he has pardoned in all who are now his people!

7. He *forgets* as well as forgives. Men remember the sins they pardon. But God remembers our sins no more. It is with him as if it had never been committed. None so effectually puts out of the way the sins he forgives. "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." There shall be no finding them any more. He pardons without *upbraiding*, which parents and others, we know, do not always.

8. God makes provision for the pardon of future sins. It is as certain that your future sins will be forgiven, as that your past sins have been. God never condemns after pardoning. When he begins to pardon, he goes on.

8. God more than pardons. He *justifies*, which, besides pardon, includes gracious adjudication to eternal life; and he subdues our iniquities. He *adopts* us and *sanctifies* us, and, ultimately, *glorifies* every pardoned sinner. Who is like him?

10. God pardons on the most reasonable conditions. They are such that, without them, the pardon could not be used by us. To dispense with them, would defeat the very design of the pardon. No pardoned sinner would have them dispensed with. He acquiesces in them equally as in the pardon itself. The conditions are privileges. What are they? To repent, to believe in Christ, to approve of the plan of salvation, and what makes angels happy, to love and serve God. Do you not pronounce them reasonable?

11. There is one thing more. These very conditions of pardon, God fulfils in us. He gives us repentance; and our faith is the gift of God. If a person says, "I will forgive you, provided you do such and such reasonable things," we think that enough. But God even inclines and enables us to do these things. "Who is a God like unto thee?"

And now in making use of this subject, the first thing I have to say, is,

1. How glorious a subject we have here! If God's ways in pardoning were like ours, what hope could

there be for us? If we stood related to any other government, however clement, as we do to that of God, our case would be desperate. Under such circumstances, we could not expect any civil power, or even a father to forgive.

2. How worthy of our supreme attachment and love is the God who not only pardons, but *so* pardons, *so abundantly*.

3. Does any sinner here desire pardon? We may learn hence the encouragement he has to seek it, and the probability of his obtaining it. He can have it. There is no difficulty unless he chooses to make one. He can have it without any injury to justice. Why should not God pardon you? Because he would honor his law and justice by punishing you? But that he had done already. There is nothing *in* heaven in the way of your being pardoned, nor *under* it, unless you will put yourself in the way. If you will submit to the terms, or even seek them, you will succeed. Surely we ought to submit to God in the prescription of the terms of salvation, as in the dispensations of his providence.

4. We see from this subject how unnecessary it is that any should be lost. Justice does not require it, nor truth. There is nothing rendering it necessary. There is no limit to the power of God to pardon.

5. How very dreadful it will be to be lost under such circumstances; lost when pardon was tendered and salvation offered; lost by one's own obstinacy. What an effect it will have, when, on the day of judgment, it shall be made known to the universe,



that all the sinners in Christendom had the free offer of pardon made them, and that those who perish, perish because they rejected it. What a hallelujah of praise to God will follow that disclosure, in which even the consciences of those who are about to be cast away, though not their hearts, will unite.

6. It appears from this subject, that religion is not so very gloomy a thing as is sometimes supposed. No ; but irreligion is a very gloomy condition. To be in a dungeon, as it were, under sentence of death, unpardoned, is gloomy. But to be released, and to breathe the air of liberty, and to have the freedom of the universe, and the privilege of calling God, Father, I should say, was rather cheerful.

If a man is condemned, nothing can require his attention more immediately than to secure a pardon. The idea of a man, under sentence of death, putting off efforts to obtain a pardon, is preposterous. What should he not rather put off ? This is not only first, but every thing in his case. Suppose a person, when in prison under sentence of death, when urged to apply for a pardon, should say, " Oh, I am young yet. Don't press me on that subject." What has his youth to do with it ? Cannot he die young ? or, " I am strong and hearty ; don't trouble me about pardon." You would take him for a mad man ; or, " I have something else which I must do first ;" the idea of such a man's putting any thing before pardon ! or, " I cannot give up this prison ; I am so attached to it ;" or, " I'll plead for pardon when I am on the scaffold ; or, " I don't like the terms," as if they could be as bad as death. Sinners are doing the like of all

this. They are young ; they are strong ; have something else to do ; or they are attached to the world ; or they don't like the terms. Well, then they must put up with the other part of the alternative, punishment. How will they like that ? They cannot decline pardon and punishment both. The latter will come. God will pardon, but he will by no means clear the guilty. I would like to ask you why you suppose God, in proclaiming his name, (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7,) after declaring himself merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, concluded the account with, "and that will by no means clear the guilty ?" Did he not intend to put the reader on his guard ? It is as if he had said, "I am well disposed to pardon, but do not infer thence impunity in impenitence." Pardon or punishment is the alternative presented to-day. Choose ye.

## SERMON V.

Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God.—ROMANS xi. 22.

**I**F there is no man of us who chooses to deny that he is a subject of the great government of God, there is no man of us but will admit that it is of the very last importance that we should know so much of the character of God and of the principles of his moral government, as will enable us to infer in what manner he will deal with such creatures as we are; when we may calculate on his favor, if favor he will show, and under what circumstances we have every reason to fear his displeasure, if displeasure he ever feels. We are all passing rapidly through this twilight state of existence; before us hangs a cloud black and heavy, and impenetrable to the keenest vision of the mind, beyond whose shadows we all expect to come into a nearer communion with our Maker, and the spirit disembodied and disenthralled will have to do immediately with the great Father of Spirits. Yes, it is the belief of every religion, and it is the sentiment of every heart, that beyond that cloud, and in the vestibule of eternity, is the judgment seat and the revealed presence of our God.

Now, all men and all nations ascribe to the Su-

preme Being infinite perfection. It is abhorrent to our nature to suppose that any thing imperfect can enter into his character or government, and we, therefore, confidently conclude that the principles according to which he will deal with us, are most just and right, and that whatever becomes of us and of our fellow creatures, he will be clear from every imputation, and we shall not have one word to say in answer. But this does by no means satisfy the mind. It is only innocence that findeth refuge in that conclusion; it is no resting place for guilt. We want to know farther in what manner his infinite perfection will induce him to act, that we may know whether with fear or with hope we ought to look forward to our meeting with him, and how we shall go about to prepare ourselves for appearing before him. We know that God in dealing with us and disposing of us will do right, but in doing right how will he deal with us and dispose of us, that is the remaining question, and the only one in which difficulty is involved, and by which anxiety is created. By what means are we to arrive at the solution of it? by following the lights and leadings of our own minds? Can we reach it by our reasonings? There are many that think to do so; but that they attempt an impossibility is evident from this, that men who follow the leadings of the mind are found to arrive at different and even opposite results, which evinces that the mind has undertaken to teach when she needs herself to be first taught, and that the intellect has essayed to apprehend that of which it needs to be apprehended by God. Nor is this mode of coming to

the knowledge of the character and government of God in accordance with the spirit and principles of the modern philosophy, a philosophy which deserves to preside over and direct our investigations in theology, no less than to guide us in our pursuit of the physical sciences. That tells us that there is but one way in which the human mind obtains any certain knowledge of the nature and attributes of any being or substance ; and that is by observation of facts and phenomena. It is not by any course of reasoning, however profound or ingenious, that we can acquire the slightest knowledge of the qualities and powers either of mind or matter ; it is not by reasoning that any advancement has ever been made in the sciences which relate to them, but only by observation, by a careful studying of nature as it is, and by giving heed to the changes that are ever going on in the material world around us, and the phenomena that are ever exhibiting themselves in the spiritual microcosm within us. We know not how it will be hereafter, but for the present this is the only way to truth, and we must not think to pursue theology by any other path. It has been sought after in a far different manner. Men have reasoned when they should have read and observed, and the result has been, that upon no subject whatsoever has there existed such a diversity of opinion among them, as upon theology. For their knowledge of God, instead of taking up with what he hath declared of himself, and what his works and ways declare of him, they have entered into the dark chambers of the mind, and they have descended even to the kennel of the heart ; and the testimony which

God gives of himself, and which his providence gives to him, has been set aside, because this two-fold declaration of what God is, agrees not with their opinions of what God ought to be ; and in spite of the absurdity and impiety of supposing that the God who is in heaven must answer to every idea of him in a sinner's sinful fancy, the divine testimony has in ten thousand cases been rejected, and men have clung to their own unsupported opinions, obstinately living in them, and sternly dying in them ; and never undeceived until it was far too late, and they have discovered that the foundation on which the hope of the soul was raised was sand, only when it was too late to effect a substitution. Oh ! I wish I could expel from your souls this most ruinous delusion, that God is, of course, just such a being as you conceive him to be, and that there is nothing more to be dreaded from him than your own prejudiced self-love suggests ; and that his opinion of what is right must needs coincide with your own opinion of what is right. I am making this introduction long, but suffer me to state a case that is in point. If you were anxious to know the character and principles of any human government, with a view to ascertain what the subjects of it might expect when their actions should be scanned, what course would you pursue ? Would it not be the most absurd thing imaginable to set about demonstrating it ? Does not common sense dictate that you should repair first to the book containing its constitution and statutes ; and if the character of the ruler was identified with the principles of his government, as is the case in the government of God, but

not in any human government unless it be purely despotic, that you should then study out his character, and finally, that you should peruse the history of that government, to see if its decisions and doings accorded with the principles laid down in its constitution. If you should find an agreement between them, you would be satisfied ; and no preconceived opinions of your own would be suffered to shake your confidence in the result to which you had thus arrived. Now this is just the manner, and the only manner, in which you must learn the principles of the divine government, and what you, as subjects, will have reason to expect when your actions shall come to be scanned. This is the book of the constitution and statutes of the divine government, and the character of the great governor with which it is identified is here revealed ; and this contains also a portion of the history of God's government, and all faithful history is but a history of it. Pursuing this plan of study that I have sketched, the result will be the truth, and by no other method can you arrive at it. What the result will be, and the truth is, I shall now tell you. Hear the proposition which it shall be my object to establish ; that the government of God, under which we live, whether we regard the character of its head, the principles of its constitution, or the history of its administration, is characterized by two leading attributes, which, though perfectly consistent with each other, are in appearance, and in their effects, opposite the one to the other ; call them *grace* and *justice*, the utmost mildness, and the extremest rigor, they are here denominated *goodness and seve-*

*rity* ; and we are asked to behold an example of the severity and goodness of God, in the excision of the Jewish nation from the church of God, and in the receiving of the Gentiles into it, the one an act of the sternest severity, the other of the highest benignity. Here is one case in illustration of my position, but it is only one of many, and I shall mention it in its proper place. The reason that I have selected this subject for our meditation at this time is, because very many of mankind, and perhaps many of you are thinking and acting as if there was nothing but mercy and forgiveness to be expected from God, and as if in no case he puts on the sterner and severer attributes of his character, and taketh vengeance while he showeth favor. Now, if they and you are right in your views of God and are not to be disappointed of your expectations, I shall be content ; but if you cherish a most dangerous delusion in thus thinking and expecting, woe is me if I do not take measures to undeceive the souls of which I have the charge, lest any of you perchance dying in the error, should be ruined by it, and you meeting me in eternity should upbraid me that I did not undeceive you in time ; not telling you as plainly as I should have done, that God punishes sin, as well as forgives it, and executes wrath while he shows mercy, and that faith, and repentance and obedience have not more to hope from God, than unbelief and impenitence and disobedience have to fear from the same. Men are willing enough to believe that God will perform all his promises of good, but there has been ever since the world stood a disposition among them to believe that he will not fulfill



his threatenings, and we would take the part of revelation and providence, and most strenuously combat it.

Let me pursue the method that I have conceived for myself. The character of God, I repeat, is identified with his government; his law is the transcript of his attributes, the pure emanation of his nature. Now, what account does revelation give us of the character of God, but one in perfect harmony with my position. Hear what himself said, when once upon the awful top of Sinai, he had an interview with the man he had chosen, "he passed by and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." And again, by a prophet, he says, "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth his wrath for his enemies; the Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked; the Lord is good, a strong-hold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him; but with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies." I give you these two specimens, the first that occurred to me, of a mode of speaking which runs throughout both the Testaments. If you have ever read the Scriptures you must remember that the representations therein given of his justice are as many and as strong as those made of his mercy; and that he is set up before us

as a God of wrath, equally as a God of grace ; as determined in certain cases to punish, as in others prone to forgive ; as enveloped in a terror that appals, as well as clothed around with a benignity that attracts.

The study of the character of God out of the Bible leads to the same conclusion. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." St. Paul says this when speaking of those who had not the written revelation. Natural religion has always been a system of terror, in which justice and vengeance have ever had the greatest prominence. The impression, which the character of God has made upon the pagan mind, has been uniformly awful ; and I should be glad to know how they, who, in defiance of the Scriptures, affirm that God is only good and merciful, can explain it that as many as have studied the volume of nature only, have been so egregiously and universally mistaken. And why does this that is within us, which he, who made us, planted there, and to which he gave a voice, why does it threaten us when we offend, and torment us with the remembrance of sins that have never been known or felt beyond the privacy of the heart, and tell us plainly, as if it could articulate, that there is a God who taketh vengeance and punishes iniquity? Does it tell a lie, or is it so? Look now at the *constitution* of the divine government over man. See it in the garden of Eden. How munificent was God in his goodness to our first parents ; how lavish of favor ;

and it was a mild sceptre that he swayed over them. It was but one thing he denied them ; but if they trespassed upon that, what then ? "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." They ate ; they died. Was it an idle threat to terrify ?

Hear it declared from the mountain that burned with fire ; the law in ten commands ; the promise unto obedience, "Do this and thou shalt live." Was that all ? What is that that I hear in addition, "but the soul that sinneth it shall die." Hear it from Zion, which no blackness envelopes, which no thunders shake, where Jesus sits in human form, and proclaims his Gospel to mankind, and bids the laboring come, and drives despair from its fearful rest in the heart, and begets hope with his gracious declaration, "He that believeth shall be saved." Is that all ? Is there nothing to fear ? "But he that believeth not," it is added, "shall be damned." In other words, an apostle of Jesus has expressed the same sentiment, "To them who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will render eternal life ; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." This is said under the Gospel ; and hath unbelief, then, and impenitence, and disobedience nought to fear ? Shall ungodliness come off unpunished ? Hear the same once more speaking of Christ's second coming and the judgment, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and

that obey not the Gospel, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." Behold in all this at once the goodness and the severity of God. Or will you only behold the goodness, and shut your eyes upon the severity, believing all that God promises, but disbelieving all he threatens? That were to be worse than an infidel who believes neither.

But we have yet to consult the *history* of the divine government for its testimony; and we shall do it with all possible brevity. The first case in point concerns another order of creatures and is more ancient than man and this world, but it belongs to the same unchanged and unchangeable government, and by no less than two inspired writers, is it referred to for illustration and enforcement of that which concerns men.

There was a period when all were happy and every where was heaven; the benignity of God was beheld in every work, and felt through every heart; but the choir of heaven broke harmony; and God endured it not a moment but cast the rebels down to hell.

I have remarked upon the case of Adam, how he was blessed, how he sinned and death followed close upon sin, and has been transmitted to all the generations of his posterity.

The world as it became populous became insufferably wicked. God was good or he had not waited so long with them; but that goodness consisted with sterner attributes; and he determined to

destroy his work. Yet after that determination he waited longer than any man now lives and sent to that devoted people preachers of repentance and righteousness inspired with the spirit of his own Son. "Behold his goodness." But he waited in vain, the years were accomplished, the deluge came, the earth was unpeopled, and the sea hath now the innumerable bodies, ready to give them up when to all the depths of earth and ocean the redeeming voice of the second Adam shall call. "Behold his severity."

It was reported in heaven that five populous cities had abandoned themselves to outrageous and unnatural wickedness, and God went down to see; he found it so, and was on his way to destroy them, but one good man arrested him in his progress, and long and kindly did God listen to his intercession, and if but ten righteous persons could be found in all those cities, he said he would go back and would not destroy; "behold his goodness." Even ten could not be found, and Sodom and her sister cities have been set forth an example to all ages, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire; "behold his severity."

Look at the case of the Jewish nation; how partial Jehovah was to them, how loth to give them up, how long he bore with them, how much he did for them, how great was his goodness, but even them he spared not. With a tremendous overthrow he destroyed them; "behold his severity."

In this enumeration I have omitted many less familiar facts, desiring only to afford you a specimen. Will any object that they are all taken from the Bible?

What if they are, and what if their credibility rested only on its testimony, though it does not? Why is not the history of the Bible to be believed? Why is not Moses as credible an historian as your Herodotus or Livy? But who is so ignorant of profane history, as not to know, that it is full of the accounts of building up and casting down, of rise and ruin, though less miraculously accomplished, yet all under the eye and at the will of the same providence, and that there are monuments of wrath every where close beside monuments of mercy?

I have but one more testimony to add. It is from the very plan of salvation, and arises out of the principles on which that plan is constructed. If God had not been infinitely good and gracious, no plan of redeeming man had ever been thought of, if he had been only good and gracious and these attributes had not consisted with others of a severer cast, the plan would not have been such as it is. Is there no recognition of any thing but grace in the development of the plan of redemption? Was it grace that cast the Saviour to the ground in such agony as exuded blood from all the pores of his body; was it grace which filled that cup he fain would have put away from him, if it had been possible, and why was it not possible, if grace reigneth in sole sovereignty? Was it not something of a darker, sterner cast, that caused the father to withdraw himself in that hour of utmost need and that gave occasion to that bitter lamentation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Mercy was the beginning of redemption, mercy will be the glorious end of it, but in the progress,

justice has to be satisfied, and mercy reigns triumphant through the satisfaction of justice, and wide is the sceptre of her rule, and she inviteth all to be her subjects, and weepeth over them that will not bow to her gentle reign. It was grace that sent forth the Son, but wrath filled full her cup, and there was in it, I know not what pain and sorrow ; death was at the bottom, and it was presented to him ; he paused ; he prayed ; he asked heaven if it was necessary ; it was ; he drank it, and wrath hath now no more a cup for them to drink who are in Jesus.

I have ended the discussion. It has not been my object to declaim, but to demonstrate. I have not spoken to that within you which feels, but to that which thinks ; nothing to the faculty that receives impressions, but all to the faculty that investigates truth, and what have we found ? God's own account of his character, and his revealed constitution under all its changes, and all the acts of his government, bearing united testimony to the goodness and severity of God, and the plan of salvation attesting the same. We have found him slow but sure to anger, always preferring forgiveness, yet not declining the alternative of punishment, bearing in one hand the sceptre of mercy, in the other the sword of justice, always extending first the sceptre, but afterwards using the sword ; we have found him such a being, as obedience has every thing to hope from, and disobedience as much to fear. Then let us believe it ; he that will not has made voluntary shipwreck of his understanding.

And hear, finally, what use I am going to make of it all. This God who has been described to you

to day, is the one with whom each of you has to do ; under his eye and to his presence each is moving ; and it is the same that will take strict account of your actions, and give lasting complexion to your eternity. He changes not ; what he was, he is, he will be. The same that he was when every place was heaven and every feeling joy ; when he beautified Paradise and blessed the parent pair ; when Noah found grace in his sight ; when Abraham arrested and intreated and moved him ; when of Ephraim he said, "how can I give thee up ?" and to Israel, "why will ye die ? I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner."

When true to his promise, for love of man he spared not his own Son, the same he is now, to day, as slow to anger, as easy to be moved, as prone to forgive, as bountiful to bless. Behold here the God with whom thou hast to do, oh, thou that penitently seekest him, and forsakest thy sins ; fear not to trust him, he has laid a foundation here for thy hope, so solid that nothing can shake it, and so broad that it may be built upon even unto heaven. Art thou willing ? He was ever willing. Dost thou believe, thou art saved, thy interests are interwoven with those of the Son of God. Hast thou sworn eternal enmity to sin, and fealty to God ? thy sin is covered and thy God reconciled. Hast thou set thy face towards heaven ? thou shalt reach it. Multiply thy hopes, enlarge thy desires, stretch thy conception and heaven shall outdo them all. Oh, what a place will that be which the architect of the universe will prepare for them he loves. Hope in him, he changes not. No, he never changes, sinner. The same he was when first he



frowned, and the rebel spirits fled to their proper hell, carrying with them that which made it; when, in altered tone, he called Adam out of his hiding place, and touched him with death; when, at his command, heaven and earth contributed their waters to cleanse a corrupted world; when he commanded the fire to come out of its harmless latency and consume the guilty cities; when he gave up Ephraim, and when he cut off Israel, the same he is now, oh! sinner, the same determined enemy of sin, so fearful in threatening, so faithful in fulfillment, so terrible in vengeance; and will be, oh! neglecter of this salvation, when thou liest down to die. Thou wilt have him to do with, oh! impenitent, disobedient man. What art thou that thou-canst escape? When angels, his first born, could not, and the old world could not, and Sodom could not, though for it Abraham, God's friend, addressed himself to the loving kindness of God; and Israel could not, and Judah could not, and even Jesus Christ could not. Oh! what height of self-love, and strength of self-delusion. Is there nothing for thee to fear from him? What hath possessed thee to think so? What has infatuated you, oh men, to choose for the resting place of your souls, a spot that has been seared so oft and scathed by the bolts that have burst upon it. I would allure you from it; but if I cannot, I would frighten you away from it. There is wrath. I have proved it to you. Tempt it not. Mercy has opened a refuge, fly to it, agree with your God, can you contend with him? "His way is in the whirlwind, and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet; he re-

buketh the sea and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers, Bashan languisheth, and Carmel and the flower of Lebanon languisheth, the mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea the world and all that dwell therein; his fury is poured out like fire. Who can stand before his indignation, and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?" Can you contend with him? Dare you enter the lists against him? Then, submit, be reconciled to-day—now.

## SERMON VI.

Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee ; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men !—**PSALM xxxi. 19.**

How much there is to excite in us the feeling of admiration ! How many and strong the appeals continually made to that principle which God has implanted in the soul ! There is much in art, man's workmanship, to admire, but more in nature, God's handy work. All his works are wonders. He is to be admired in all he does. In the physical creation there is much which is admirable, but there is more in the moral. These are specimens of the moral sublime, with which no natural sublimity can compete. What is the symmetry of form when compared with the comeliness of virtue. What is skilful contrivance, and wise adaption when brought into competition with virtuous action ? There is no beauty like that of holiness ; no grandeur comparable with the grandeur of goodness. But if there be in the moral works of God so much to admire, how much more there must needs be in the mighty workman, in God himself. What wisdom can there be in mere contrivance like that which belongs to the contriving mind ? what expressed goodness of God can bear compari-

son with his essential goodness? We must look at the perfections of God. We must contemplate the divine nature, if we would have our admiration elevated to its highest pitch. There is nothing either of a moral or physical nature out of God, which is in any wise so wonderful as God himself.

The divine attributes are distinguished into the natural and moral. Of the former *power*, is one. How wonderful, glorious, awful is the power of God! But not so much so as his *goodness*, which is one of his moral attributes. All his perfections are excellent, but how excellent is his loving kindness! Oh! "how great," the Psalmist exclaims, is thy power? no—thy goodness!

There is wonderful sublimity in the declaration, "Let there be light." There was a display of *power*. But what is even this to the sublimity of the statement, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God chooses the name which is to designate his nature not from among his natural, but from among his moral attributes. God is not power. God is love.

"Oh how great his goodness." The Psalmist bursts out here into an expression of admiration in view of the goodness of God. What more worthy of being admired by us! We see all that he saw of it, and we see more. New and numerous displays of divine goodness have been made since he died. He saw not the cross, the great radiant point of goodness, the chief work of love! If he dimly described it in the future, yet we have it in near and distinct retrospect. Nay more, before our eyes hath

Jesus Christ been evidently set forth, crucified, as it were, among us. Nor have we seen merely, we have *felt* his goodness. Not only our judgments pronounce upon it, but our hearts bear testimony to it.

Let us contemplate it, that we may admire it. God grant we may more than admire. God grant that while we admire, we may repent, and praise, and confide and love. May God graciously mingle penitence and gratitude, trust and hope, and love with our admiration.

But where shall we look? Where *not* look rather? Wherever we turn our eyes, we meet goodness in some of its diversified forms. The earth is green with it. The air is balmy with it. The deep blue vault of heaven proclaims it. Day unto day tells of it. If we look at the *past*, it is a history of goodness; if at the *present*, our eye sees the display of it; our ear hears the report of it; our hearts are gladdened with the experience of it. It mingles in every thing. How great it must be, when the loss of one of its ten thousand benefits can give such pain. The *future* we have reason to know, is still more full of it; we may look abroad or at home; we may contemplate others as its objects, or ourselves; we may look around ourselves or within ourselves. Its forms how innumerable, its varieties how diversified; how many good things there are, and no good thing withholds he from them that walk uprightly. Its adaptations how nice; for every want a supply, for every malady a balm, and even for every desire satisfaction! "Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Think of the number-

less objects of the divine goodness, even in this single sphere ; this little spot of space ; how many living things, and not one overlooked. " These all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season." The Lord is good to all and his tender mercies are over all his works. The sustenance of the fowl, the clothing of the lilly, the life of the most insignificant living thing he makes his care. How much more is man his care, man the immortal soul his charge, intelligent, Godlike ! Who need fear, who may hope to be overlooked by such a being ?

Think then to *how many* God is good. But what is the sum of these, to the aggregate amount of those that have lived since the foundation of the world, and all have been the objects of his goodness, the subjects of his care and regard. Think *how long* God has been good. His goodness is one of his essential, eternal attributes ; how long he has been exercising his goodness, even since there were creatures ; aye, and in the making of those creatures ; all he made he saw and pronounced good, very good. Man was good. God made him not what he is now. Say not in apologies for sin, that thou art as thou wast made. It is not so. If this earth was the beginning of the creation of God, then six thousand years has he been exercising goodness. Had a habit of beneficence been to be formed by God, how deep this long continued and unwearied exercise of goodness must have fixed it. How accustomed to the exercise of goodness has our Creator become. How natural it must be to him to do good ! We should think of the uninterruptedness as well as length of the divine goodness. God has

never rested from this work, nor is he tired. It is as if he had just begun to do good. Men soon become weary in benevolent doing. It takes but a few acts of kindness, a few exercises of liberality to tire them. The applications to them must not be frequently repeated. But God encourages us to ask of him daily. Indeed he waits not in most cases for our asking. His bounty anticipates our solicitations. He gives unasked. We may meditate on the *abundance* of the divine goodness; "abundant in goodness," is a part of his name as proclaimed by him. He *filleteth* his creatures with good. He giveth us all things *richly* to enjoy; "my cup runneth over," said one. We may dwell on its *condescension*, how low it stoops.

"What is man that thou art mindful of him, that thou shouldest magnify him, that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him, that thou shouldest visit him every morning and try him every moment?" There is something admirable also in the *facility* of the divine goodness. This idea is expressed in the simplest, yet most sublime manner in Psalm cxlv., "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Longinus would have taken notice of this, had he met with it. Just see here the cause, "thou openest thy hand," and then the effect, "and satisfiest the desire of every living thing;" of *every living* thing, the *desire* thou *satisfiest*, and to do it, hast only to *open thy hand*. But there is one exercise of goodness to which this remark does not apply. It was not easy. The bare opening of the divine hand could not effect it. Salvation could not be spoken into existence as light was. Redemption was

not by *power*, but by *price*, and the price was not silver or gold, but life, the most precious life. "God spared not his own Son;" and that was not easy.

We must not forget the *character* of the objects of God's goodness. Sinners, this commendeth the love of God. "God, who is rich in mercy for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when dead in sins." And we must remember their habitual *bearing* towards God, even while receiving and enjoying his bounty. It is ingratitude. In this respect the mere animal outdoes the man. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." It is hard to keep on doing good to such as rebel against him who has nourished and brought them up as children. How many never thank God in serious and thoughtful earnest; never express thankfulness except thoughtlessly, and, therefore, profanely. How few speak or sing his praises! The whole creation should be one choir of singers, and the chief ones of creation its precentors. Every voice should be instructed, and each voice the organ of a heart. In heaven they all sing praises. But on earth; in the church, how few? How few here? The people do not praise thee. I blush, I mourn that such goodness as God's is so feebly celebrated here; so faint a song sent up to the praise of divine grace and glory; if our praises must be represented by a choir, that it should be by so small and inconstant a choir. But, be it remembered, the legitimate use of a choir is not to *represent*, but to *lead* and *aid* the praise of a whole people. I would



this *hint*, or whatever it may be called, might be taken.

But the goodness of God has a length, breadth, depth, and height, each incomprehensible. No finite mind can take in its dimensions. Who can know it? It passeth knowledge. Hear what it says. It speaks in this sacred volume. See what it has done. All history is a record of it; what it is doing; what it is going to do. There is much to admire in what it has done and is doing. But there will be more to admire in its future displays. It was when the Psalmist looked forward, and by faith descried in the long distance before him the goodness of God, that he burst out into this exclamation of admiration, "Oh! how great is thy goodness which thou hast *laid up!*" The past is great, and the present greater still; but greater far is that which is to come. The greatest displays of goodness, if one only be expected, are in reserve. The inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, is *reserved* in heaven for you. Eye hath seen many and marvellous displays of divine goodness, and ear hath heard of many, and busy, creative imagination has conceived more; but eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him. Oh! what is earth to heaven? What is grace to glory? There are to be exhibitions and exercises of divine benevolence hereafter far beyond all that have been seen, heard, or imagined; exhibitions of goodness entirely novel, not now conceived to be possible. New forms of

love, new sensations of pleasure ; untold, unimagined happiness awaits the people of God ; when grace is to be crowned with glory ; when earth is exchanged for heaven ; when the heirs of God come to the years of majority ; when the period of discipline and training is completed ; when this imperfection shall put on perfection, and this mortal immortality ; when we shall no longer see through a glass darkly, and know in part, but see face to face, and know even as we are known ; when we shall have crossed the river ; when at length we arrive at home, and are established in the place which Christ has gone to prepare. What a place that must be ! prepared by Christ for his purchased people ; and when there will be an end of such mixed society as we mingle with on earth ; when all shall be of one mind and one heart, and love shall reign triumphant, universal, alone ; not a tear, not a terror ; no pain, no night, no death, but light, life, love. " Oh ! how great is thy goodness which thou *hast laid up !*"

But is it for all ? It is in offer to all ; within the grasp of all ; but all will not enter in at the strait gate, and lay hold of eternal life. Only a certain class will enjoy it. They are described here as those who *fear* God and *trust* in him. Their fear of God secures their *obedience* to him, and when they have done all, they count not upon it, but trust in his mercy and in his Son for pardon and salvation. " The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him ; in those that hope in his mercy." Such are the subjects of regeneration ; and being thus pure in heart,

they are blessed and shall see God. They repent of their sins ; they believe in Christ ; they love God and one another. They walk by faith. It is but one class of persons who are thus variously described in the Scriptures. If you answer to this description, this goodness is laid up for you, but not otherwise.

But I ought to say that these persons are not ashamed of their fear of God and their confidence in him. They trust in him "before the sons of men. They are visible, as well as real Christians ; while, with the heart, they believe unto righteousness, with the mouth they make confession unto salvation. They declare themselves on the Lord's side, as well as go over to it.

There are *acts* which must be performed ; a *character* had ; a *work of God*, of which we must be the subjects ; a *spirit*, which we must imbibe or the promises are not ours.

And now, in closing this discourse on divine goodness, I must submit some inferences.

How sinful is sin, *all* sin ! It being against one so great, so good, good to all, good to us.

What a heart of sin that must be which such goodness does not lead to repentance. How hard when such love will not break it ! How obstinate that such kindness cannot subdue it ! Are there not hearts here which are still proof against all goodness ?

How reasonable it is, that the laws of a being so benevolent should be strictly, universally, and cheerfully obeyed ! Can such a being have made laws

by obedience, to which the ultimate good of his creatures is not to be promoted? Yet how many of God's beneficiaries live daily in the transgression of his commands; live on his bounty, but not in his fear, nor to his glory!

What an appeal the Bible makes to our hopes! Oh! shall any of you fail of the inheritance reserved in heaven; be forever separated from the glory of the divine goodness? We must not forget the medium of God's goodness to us. Christ, the chief gift of his goodness, is the medium of all the rest. We have been speaking of the *object* of hope. The *foundation* of it is Jesus Christ.

How important we should be God's people. There is a favor which he bears only to them. Oh! taste and see that the Lord is good.

God's goodness is not intended merely for us to contemplate and admire, but also to imitate. We are commanded to be merciful, holy, perfect even as he is; to resemble him in beneficence.

And now what shall his goodness effect? Who knows not that there is moral power in goodness, efficiency in love? The love of Jesus is the greatest force in the universe. I say, what shall this goodness do? We know what its tendency and intent is; to lead sinners to repentance. Here are sinners that have never repented towards God; hearts that have never been broken; or, if broken, broken by the anguish of bereavement rather than by the sense of sin. Shall it break your hearts, lead you to repent? It may never. A thing does not always reach what it has a tendency to; an expedient may be thrown

in the way. A thing may be adapted and designed to an end, and not secure it. Shall this goodness lead you to repent? Ah! suffer it. Let it reach, move, melt, change your hearts. Superadd to thy goodness, oh! God, thy grace, and it shall do it. Oh! thou that spared not thy Son, give thy Spirit too.

## SERMON VII.\*

Bless the Lord, oh ! my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

PSALM ciii. 2.

THIS hour, which, from year to year we have been wont to spend together, has sometimes been consecrated to one subject of meditation, and sometimes to another, for there are many subjects which are appropriate to the day and the occasion. You will conjecture from the text to what theme I intend to consecrate this hour, so far as my act can consecrate it. I am not going to remind you now, as sometimes I have done while occupying this position at the meeting of the years, of the brevity of life, and the rapidity of time's flight, and death's awful certainty, and still more awful uncertainty, and the issues of death. Nor shall I put you in remembrance, except it be incidentally, of the vanity of man, the transitoriness of all human things, the emptiness of worldly grandeur, and the fading and fleeting nature of every thing temporal and terrestrial, though these are topics on which I might, not inappropriately descant. Nor is our theme to-day that judgment, whither we are all hastening, and which so many of our fellow-mortals

\* Preached on New-Year's day, January 1, 1828.

and some of our fellow-worshippers have reached since the last beginning of days; nor is it immortality, except as immortality should combine itself with every subject and diffuse itself through all our meditations. Nor in looking back on the year and on life will it be a primary object with me to search out and set before you your sins, and to excite you to repentance, though well I know, that, if you do faithfully the duty which I am going to inculcate, you cannot help remembering your sins, and you will repent of them. Though no two subjects stand in more direct contrast to each other, than the divine goodness, and human sinfulness and unworthiness, yet, as subjects of thought, none are more closely associated, for contrast is our principle of association; how can you think of the one without thinking of the other? Our sins constitute the shading of the picture, of which God's benefits are the light and coloring. One glance takes in the whole; and no sinner can be really grateful, without being penitent. Repentance is a sinner's gratitude, its first and deepest emotion; "knowest thou not that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

I have already indicated the subject to which I shall attempt to direct your thoughts; and the chord of the heart, that instrument of many strings, that I shall aim at; for to touch it, so as to cause a full and lasting vibration, is not mine; God alone can do that; for that, the divine finger must move across it. It is easy to awaken slight and transient emotions of gratitude. That may be done, and often is, by some extraordinary display of divine goodness, some un-

expected mercy, while the heart remains untouched ; just as sometimes an external concussion, by making the whole instrument to tremble, calls forth sound from every string, though none is touched ; but the long and loud vibration of praise is never heard from the heart, until the hand of heaven comes upon it. Oh ! that it may come on every heart here to-day ! and be not this hour only, but this whole day, and every future day of life sacred to gratitude, and then shall immortality be spent in praise.

The Psalmist addresses his soul ; “ Oh ! my soul.” He was wont to do it. On one occasion we find him expostulating with it, for unreasonable depression, “ why art thou cast down, oh ! my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me ; hope thou in God ;” and perhaps there are those here to whom this language seems more appropriate, than that of the text ; to whom this day brings painful remembrances and renews the recollection of bereavement ; some with whom the past year has been a year of sorrow, and who have brought a heavy heart with them to our sanctuary to-day ; and feel as if their feelings could not chime in with our meditations. But is there one here who has not benefits to remember, and abundant cause why he should bless the Lord ? What if you have been afflicted ; will you except affliction from your list of benefits, when “ whom the Lord loves he chastens ?” The Psalmist did not make this exception ; he says “ it is good for me that I have been afflicted ;” “ before I was afflicted I went astray ;” “ I know, oh ! Lord, that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.” Affliction seems to be one of the pro-



mised blessings of the covenant, which, while it cannot but occasion grief, calls also for gratitude. Is never any thing salutary that is painful? It may be that, that very affliction, in the remembrance of which you feel as if you could not praise, has been the greatest of the divine benefits to you; and that God's dealings with you make a louder and more urgent call on you for gratitude, than is made on any other; invoking you to praise him through, and with your tears, and from the altar of your broken heart to send up unto him the sweetest and most abundant incense of gratitude. Let every one, then, join in the charge which the Psalmist gives his soul, "bless the Lord, oh! my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

The language of the text seems to chide the soul with forgetfulness, while it charges it not to forget. It seems to imply that there is a proneness in us to be unmindful of the divine benefits, and to let the instances and expressions of God's goodness slip from our memories. And who does not know this to be the fact?

It is not in reference to this subject alone that we are forgetful. We are generally and characteristically, as sinners, forgetful, inconsiderate creatures. I couple these words together, for if we do not consider, we may as well forget. Indeed inconsideration is, practically, forgetfulness. Now, the great complaint of God is, "my people doth not consider." "Oh! that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end;" they consider not the work of the Lord, nor regard the operation of his hands. "God is not in all their thoughts."

“ Now, consider this, ye that forget God.” It is surely no wonder, if men forget God, that they forget his benefits; and that, if *he* is not in all their thoughts, that his goodness should not be. Perhaps there is no subject on which even Christians are more lamentably unmindful, than this, about which the Psalmist chides and charges his soul. The very uniformity and abundance of the divine goodness is abused to the promoting of this unmindfulness. Because there is so much to be remembered, and so much which, with the greatest effort of memory, must be left unremembered, we do not lay that burden on the memory which it can easily bear. We generalize on a subject, on which, of all others, we ought to be most particular. We acknowledge that he crowneth us with loving kindness and tender mercies, without considering the ways in which that loving kindness displays itself, and without remembering and reflecting on those mercies in detail; and consequently our gratitude is too much a general and indefinite emotion. We say “ he hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities,” without considering first what our sins have deserved, and then how we have been actually dealt with; and yet, unless we set in contrast what we have merited with what we have received, we cannot enter into the sentiment of the Psalmist as we ought; and our acknowledgment is, in a great measure, unmeaning. So we call upon our souls to forget not all his benefits, while we take no pains to remind our souls of any of them.

What if the divine benefits began to be conferred

before memory commenced its record? Yet do we not know, and can we not reflect that Omniscience has watched over us from the womb, and that Omnipotence rocked our cradle, supported our first unstable steps, and, through many dangers, led us along the path of infancy and childhood. And need we forget, though it be not properly a subject of memory, the circumstances of mercy, under which we came into being, the hands and hearts of tenderness that received us, and rejoiced in the care of us, and the manifold distinctions of the land in which Providence cast our lot, and above all that we were born beneath the star of Bethlehem, and opened our eyes on the radiance of the sun of righteousness. Oh! my soul, forget not these benefits of thy God to thee.

What if, from childhood up, there is much of the divine goodness that cannot be remembered. Yet may not this very fact be reflected on with gratitude, that, where one benefit is remembered, there are ten, yea, ten times ten, that cannot be remembered. But we must not charge all this defect to the weakness of memory; there are other and stronger reasons why the benefits which God has been conferring upon us, are, for the most part, forgotten. They made but little impression on our hearts, when they were received, otherwise they would not have been forgotten. The memory is tenacious of every thing that deeply affects the heart. It is a law of the soul; and, again, in violation of another law of the soul, which requires that we should frequently review and recall what we would retain, we have not been in the habit from time to time of reviewing, and bring-

ing afresh before us, the divine benefits; and, still again, we do not make those efforts to recollect that we ought. If you would sit down awhile to-day, and look back, and around, and within, and ply your memory, many are the mercies that you would be able to recollect, which hitherto you have been utterly unmindful of; and how can any of you more profitably employ a portion of this day?

I have not prescribed to myself the impracticable task of enumerating the divine benefits. They are too *numerous*. Even those that we all enjoy in common, are more than I could so much as cursorily mention; life, health, reason, kindred, friendship, liberty, peace, the Gospel, a Saviour; on which of these might I not dwell the whole time allotted for this service, and as for the last "forever his dear sacred name, might dwell upon my tongue." And they are so *diversified*; how many have we, which others have not, the accompaniments and effects of the glorious Gospel which has been put into our hands, while there are myriads of beings like us, which it has never reached and blessed. Let not these be forgotten in your reflections to-day. There are many and cogent reasons why they should not be forgotten; they exalt you, but they surely become, through your abuse of them, the occasion of your deeper and more destructive downfall. This is the heaviest of all condemnations, that light has come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. The direst curse is perversely distilled from the purest blessing. The condemnation of conscience and the

law does but break a man, but on whomsoever the weight of the condemnation of the Gospel falls, it shall grind him to powder. Do not set down this liability as a draw-back on the sum of benefits, because it is a necessary accompaniment of every benefit which is conferred on an accountable being; he may misuse the talent entrusted to him. But this is a digression for which, however, I do not think it necessary to apologize. I say the benefits are too *various* to be enumerated, as well as too many. I know not where I should begin the enumeration, nor how continue it, and I should be obliged to leave it only begun. The history of the divine goodness, in the case of each individual, here, is in some respects peculiar. Our schedules of benefits do not exactly answer to each other. There are some, yea, many that are on every list; but there are others, that are not registered by all. I speak to some, perhaps, whose lives have been redeemed from imminent destruction, and who can join with much more sensibility than others can, in the specification, "who healeth all our diseases." Prosperity is enrolled among the benefits of one, while it is wanting to another, though in that case, doubtless, God saw the absence of it to be a greater blessing. But, omitting inferior distinctions, or rather leaving them for you to discover, I must mention one, the greatest of all. The Gospel says, we have, in common, the offer of salvation and the invitation to Christ, and through him to heaven; but salvation itself we have not all realized; a Saviour offered we have all, but not a Saviour embraced; Christ tendered to us in the

Gospel, but not formed in the heart the hope of glory; reconciliation has been proposed to every one, but reconciliation has not been accomplished in every case. That assemblage of benefits which the Holy Spirit brings down to the soul, and causes to cluster around and upon it, a new heart, love, joy, peace, consolation from a heavenly source, the light of the divine countenance, the presence and communion of God, these in possession, and heaven and glory in certain prospect, these, oh! Christian, thou hast, while thine impenitent friend has none of them. Mark the difference, and commemorate it at the throne of grace to-day; the difference, it is great as the distinction between life and death, and wide as the impassable distance betwixt heaven and hell. He has only heard that God is gracious, but thou hast *tasted* that he is gracious; he is still vexing himself with the cisterns that can hold no water, but thou, happy soul, hast found thy way to the fountain of living waters. And when was it? When first was the new heart recorded among his benefits to you? Are there not here to-day many, who had not this blessing on their list a year ago, that have it there now? Souls, which, during that interval, have taken the heavenly direction, and had the love of Jesus kindled in their breasts, the song of salvation put into their lips, and ineffable hope of glory sunk deep in their hearts! Oh! forget not this benefit; forget not? canst thou ever forget the year that closed yesterday, a year that will be memorable to thee throughout eternity. The past year has been a memorable year to this church, a year of the

right hand of the Most High, a year of the visitation of God to us, in which he has most manifestly heard our prayers and revived his work, of which we have the most unanswerable evidence, in the moral change that has taken place in many, exhibiting its reality in the love of God and man, in the works of piety and charity. "Bless the Lord, oh ! my soul, and forget not this benefit ;" and "let the people praise him, yea, let all the people praise him ;" and, on this extended wing of gratitude, let prayer arise, that the year which has opened, may be yet more memorable for the abundance of its spiritual blessings, a year signalized above every other by the visits of God, the year of nativity divine to many, many souls.

I have said already twice that these benefits are too *many and various* to be enumerated ; even the *classes* of benefits are many ; they are temporal, and they are spiritual ; of time and of eternity ; relating to the body and to the soul ; blessings in hand, and blessings in hope, in remembrance, in enjoyment, and in promise. The details I have no choice but to leave to you. What enhances the difficulty of accomplishing this task, is the necessity of taking into view the circumstances under which these benefits are conferred, in order to estimate the gratitude that is due for them. It is to be considered who confers them ; God, the most high and holy God ; and on whom he confers them ; men, insignificant and most unworthy men ; his smile he bestows on them who most richly deserve his darkest frown ; and makes them the objects of his favor, who merit only his wrath. All his benefits are mercies ; every exercise

of goodness is an act of grace, goodness of the highest kind. He confers his benefits on those who make no acknowledgment of them; how many are the favors that come from his hand for which no credit is given him, but the glory is awarded to another. And yet he is not wearied, but continues to confer his good things, in face of continued unthankfulness. The hand that is lifted against him, he nerves; the tongue that profanes his name, he moves; and he keeps up the vital play in the heart that obstinately excludes him from its affections. Oh! how hard it is to bear ingratitude. There is nothing that so easily provokes a good man. Yet how long God has borne it, and from how many, and ingratitude the most aggravated too; how much from each of us, and oh! how long; and still his long-suffering is not exhausted, and he withholds not his benefits. Oh! my soul, forget not who gives, and on whom these benefits are conferred; on guilty and thankless men. Oh! miracle of grace! most stupendous of the wonders of goodness! he spared not his own Son, but delivered him unto death, and such a death as none other ever died, for us and for our salvation. Oh! my soul, whatever other benefits thou forgettest, forget not this. Remember it to-day, and every day. Lose sight of every thing, rather than of the cross of Christ. Look at it, gaze on it, and him who hung upon it, and think why he hung upon it, and for whom. Oh! reflect on the moral of the cross. I should be guilty of an unpardonable omission, if, in expatiating with you on the goodness of God, I should not stop you here, before the cross, to con-



template goodness in its divinest form, benevolence in its most expensive and stupendous display. "God *so* loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends, who, at the time of his laying it down, were his enemies, and who love now, only because they have been first loved. Oh! this is the goodness that leads to repentance; here it is that the eye affects the heart; here gratitude finds its highest theme, and, in view of this, let it lift its loftiest note, "Bless the Lord, oh! my soul, and, for this, let all that is within me, bless his holy name."

"Bless the Lord, oh! my soul." The soul is the seat of gratitude, and must be the organ of our praise. In vain does the tongue sing and the lips profess, if, in the ear of God, the soul is not vocal with his praise, and all that is within us, harmoniously engaged in the utterance of his great goodness; here is something that should unite all the powers and passions of the soul.

You perceive, hearers, that I have reminded you upon but one topic; I have aimed at a single object, to call forth gratitude in view of the divine goodness; but if this be reached, every thing is secured, if only gratitude, I mean not that spurious gratitude which floats occasionally on the surface of the heart, but that genuine gratitude that dwells ever at its centre, shall be brought into exercise, I will engage for all the rest. The gratitude of which I speak is a Christian grace, and the graces

of the Spirit ever go in company. Where gratitude is, there is love, going forth in every direction and leaving its benevolent traces every where, and there is repentance with her broken heart newly bound up, and faith with her hand on the head of the victim, and hope with her eagle eye gazing on glory, and humility, appareling the soul, and meekness with her pitying eye, and pleading voice, saying, "father, forgive them." Oh! if gratitude may only be excited, it will be enough. You will mourn over the past. Can you be thankful, without grieving for past unthankfulness? And all the resolutions which we would have you form in view of the future will be formed, and formed in the strength of the Most High. One part of the language of gratitude, as the Psalmist himself has taught us, is "what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" This desire to requite is inseparable from gratitude; if you are grateful, you will feel it, and you will ask, "what shall I render?" "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do." What render! Thy heart, thy whole heart, and every thing else must go with it, thy mind, thy strength, thy substance, thy influence, all will be devoted. What do! dost thou ask? His word tells you what he will have you do: "Follow holiness, love not the world, be not conformed to it, cease to do evil, abstain from all appearance of evil. Let your light so shine that others seeing your good works, may glorify your father in heaven. Seek those things which are above, be instant in prayer, watch and be sober."

If you are grateful, you will resolve to do these things, and will strive to keep your resolutions; and

this year you will be more active and engaged in religion, than you have been the last.

You feel something, you think you are grateful, but be not deceived, fellow sinner. Are you contrite? Is your gratitude accompanied with repentance?

You think your soul blesses God, does it supremely love him? Are you serving him? Do you mean to serve him from this hour forth? Do you hate his great enemy, sin? Are you daily striving against sin, and seeking to please God? Oh! this is the test.

Oh! sinner, you are not grateful, your soul does not bless God. It has never blessed him, you have never been grateful, and yet hast lived so long and been loaded with so many benefits, and now hast just completed another year of goodness, and art entering on still another under the most auspicious circumstances. God waits to be gracious, shall he wait in vain? Perhaps this will be the last year of his long suffering and your trial; it will be to many, why may it not be to you? and if it shall, and thou remainest unchanged, whither wilt thou go? If to heaven, why art thou not cultivating the spirit, and learning the song of heaven? Why not trying thy wing for this upward flight? Oh! how canst thou go there, as thou art? Thou canst not. Then why not change, why not begin to-day?

## SERMON VIII.

Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, rejoice.

PHILIPPIANS vi. 4.

THE Christian system is in many, and those its most important aspects, perfectly peculiar. Of these peculiarities the passage selected leads me to remark on this, that it not only declares it to be our privilege to be happy, but makes it absolutely our duty to be happy. We are not merely authorized and allowed ; we are commanded to be happy. The language of the text is not permissive, but imperative. The Apostle speaks in the tone of authority and style of command, "Rejoice." No other system ever did or durst do this ; and perhaps you may think Christianity not sufficiently considerate in doing it ; for how, it may be asked, can a man be happy by merely willing to be so ? Who hath such control over his heart that it shall rejoice on every occasion that he bids it ? and if our ability goes not this length, how should our obligation ? It would seem to argue an ignorance of the constitution of human nature, to make joy imperative ; happy ! says one, ah ! I would be, but I cannot. I would obey *that* command, but every fibre of my heart aches, and its whole capacity is occupied with sorrow—how can I ? This objection shall be an-

swered in the progress of our remarks, when we shall have stated the difficulty in all its length and breadth. For, you will observe that we are commanded not only to rejoice, but to rejoice *always*; and, in another place, we are required to rejoice *evermore*. So that it would seem to be our duty not only to be happy, but to be uniformly and under all circumstances happy; to rejoice under every aspect of Providence, in every position of circumstances, and in every exigency of occasion. This some will think a most extravagant demand, because an impossible performance, and, indeed, an undesirable attainment; impossible, since, as it is made our duty to sorrow on some occasions, as well as to rejoice, it supposes joy and sorrow capable of co-existing in the heart at the same time; and undesirable, because when circumstances call for sorrow, who would rejoice? We can rejoice sometimes, but to rejoice always is impossible, and would be cruel. How, when the body is racked with pain, or the mind distracted with care, or the heart bleeding at its every pore, full of deep and fresh-made wounds, how then can one rejoice? or when a friend is suffering, or having just ceased to suffer, has left us for what seems to us forever, how can we be happy then?

Having stated the difficulty in its full force, I now affirm, and shall attempt to show, that it is our duty to rejoice, and to rejoice always. And I remark,

1. That God, who requires rejoicing of his people, affords them ample and sufficient reason for rejoicing; and hence the requirement is reasonable, and the fulfillment practicable. It is admitted that we

cannot be happy, and, of course, cannot be obliged to be, without good cause for being so ; but we say that the Christian has good cause for being happy ; that in being commanded to rejoice, there is that offered him which is able to make him joyful, and in view of which it is entirely reasonable that he should rejoice ; he is not required to rejoice without reference to some cause of joy, without any object to rejoice in ; nor is he required to rejoice in an object inadequate to make him happy. He is not required to rejoice simply, to rejoice in nothing, nor to rejoice in himself ; there is nothing in that object to make him happy ; nor to rejoice in the world, in its profit, in its honors, in its pleasures, nor in all these together, nor in the intercourse of friendship, the fellowship of blood and the circle of home, though these afford a happiness not to be despised, though fearfully subject to interruption. No, not in these ; but *in the Lord*, in Jehovah. “*Rejoice in the Lord.*” This is the object in which the soul is to rejoice ; and I say that the object is adapted and adequate to the production of joy. It is practicable to rejoice in him, and we are reasonably required to rejoice in him. That such a being exists, a being infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness, forbearance and mercy, an absolutely perfect being, and not only exists, but exists every where and forever, occupying all duration and all space ; and that he not only exists, but reigns absolute, supreme, and universal sovereign, his providence reaching to all beings and all events, superintending and controlling them, his dominion comprehending all creatures and condescending to

each; and that such a being not only exists and reigns, but is the Christian's friend, his sworn, pledged, fast, bountiful and unchangeable friend, ay, his father too, the fondest father, and as wise as fond. If this is not enough to make the heart happy, I know not what is. If one cannot rejoice in the existence, perfection, dominion, and friendship of such a being, in what can he? His heart must be incapable of the emotion of joy. Behold here is one whose nature is love; his will, power; his thought, wisdom; his empire, the universe; his duration, eternity; his dwelling place, immensity, which he fills; and, Christian, he is your friend; he has said, "Blessing I will bless you; all things shall work together for good to you; I will never leave you nor forsake you;" and willing more abundantly to show to the heir of the promise the immutability of his counsel, has confirmed it with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, you, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you, might have strong consolation. Him you are required to rejoice in; is it impossible or unreasonable? can you not do it? ought you not to do it? You know that no event occurs but under his eye and by his permission, and that he is wise and good in all that he permits, as well as in all he effects, and you know that every thing which affects you, shall ultimately redound to your good. What, then, is wanting to make you happy? Can you not rejoice in the attributes, government and favor of such a being? I know, not every one can, for while every one can say, "He exists and he

reigns," not every one can add, "and he is my friend." The consideration that "the Lord reigneth," is a reason, the Psalmist tells us, why some should tremble. His existence and sovereignty without his friendship cannot create joy in the heart. They do, and they should rather generate distress and alarm. How can his enemies rejoice in him? And why should they? The command is not to them, "rejoice," but first "be reconciled." How dreadful it is, that such a being should have enemies, especially that he should have them in a world which he has so loved, and among men for whose reconciliation to him he has done so much, that there should be war between him and his creatures, particularly this favored family of creatures! Yet so it is, however stoutly some may deny it. And they who are his enemies, must not presume to count upon him as their friend, and it were premature in them to rejoice in him, even if they could. No pledge has he given them, nor is any promise theirs.

2. My second remark is that there exists equal reason why the Christian should rejoice in God at all times, as at any time. The cause of his happiness is uniform; the effect ought, therefore, to be uniform. If God ever ceased to exist, or to reign, or to be his friend, then he might cease to rejoice, but not otherwise. If it is ever proper that the being, government, and favor of God should give joy, it is proper that they should communicate it, as long as they endure, and they endure always. It is therefore as reasonable that we should be required to rejoice at all times, as at any time. Art thou pained



in body, art thou afflicted in soul, hast thou been bereaved of one greatly beloved by thee, and closely bound to thee? There are reasons why you should be sorrowful, but the grand cause of joy still remains, and is unaffected by these causes of sorrow. God still exists, still reigns, and is the same, and the same towards you, and why should you not say as in Habakkuk iii. 17, 18., "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither *shall* fruit *be* in the vines; the labor of the olive tree shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and *there shall be* no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." What though a cloud has come between, it is thin, and transient, and beyond it, nearer the throne 'tis sunshine, serene and bright. This aspect of Providence is indeed dark and mysterious, but there is another which is intelligible and clear. The set of circumstances by which you are immediately surrounded, may be very sorrowful, but there is another concentric circle of larger diameter, in which all is joyous. Does God frown, but behind the frown, more strongly marked than it, and visible through it, behold the smile ineffable. What if the present is sad, the future is fair; if thou hast not much good in possession, yet thou hast much in prospect; and thou hast hope, if thou hast nothing else to cheer and keep thee up; glorious is the object of that hope, firm its foundation, pure its spirit, and the possession is not distant. Behold how near is heaven, and the vision of the king in his beauty. One short step and thou art at home with Christ forever; one dark hour, and ever

after that, no night; one sharp pang, then pain no more; one more moan, and then it is all song; a conflict brief, though it may be fierce, and then the field and the day are yours; the field heaven, and the day eternity. Am I prophesying of you? And can you, should you not rejoice? I know as you move along the path of life, many ills await you and numerous causes of sorrow occur, and far am I from wishing that you should not be sorrowfully affected by them? They are intended so to affect you, and their usefulness depends on their so affecting you. It were both unnatural and undutiful not to grieve sometimes, ay, and deeply too. I would only wish you to be affected also by the causes of rejoicing which co-exist with these causes of sorrow. I would have you rejoice in God, if in nothing else you can. If disappointed in one respect, I would have you feel that in another and far more important respect, disappointment is impossible to you. Many hopes may wither and die, but there is one that no blight shall come over; many flattering prospects may be obscured, but there is one prospect, bright and boundless, bright as the light of heaven, boundless as the eternity of God, which no darkness shall ever settle upon. Rejoice in this, while on other accounts you can but grieve; for,

3. I remark that joy and sorrow in the same heart and at the same time are perfectly compatible. They cannot both predominate together, but co-exist they can, and do. There may exist contemporaneously reasons for both sorrow and joy, and indeed in the terrestrial history of every Christian they do both always

exist; and if the cause can co-exist externally, the effects can internally. Paul realized this union, "as sorrowful," he says, "yet always rejoicing." When we are commanded to rejoice *always*, it is not meant that we should rejoice *only*. Obedience to that command would be impracticable, but the meaning is that we should never be so sorrowfully affected by the causes of sorrow, as not to be joyfully affected by the causes of rejoicing, that the heart should not be given up to the exclusive occupancy of the former, that in all our sorrows joy should mingle, and mingle in such measure, as not only to dilute the sorrow, but to give its own character to the mixture, the joy predominating over the sorrow, so that the subject of them shall be, on the whole, a happy man while on many accounts he is and cannot but be miserable. "He is cast down, but not destroyed."

4. I remark again that in the case of the Christian the causes of joy always predominate over those of sorrow. Whatever reasons may exist why he should be unhappy, greater and stronger reasons exist why he should be happy. Not so with the sinner, but the contrary. It is right, therefore, that he should be more joyful, than sorrowful, or in other words, that he should on the whole rejoice. A Christian may lose a part of his possessions, and on that account be called upon to grieve, but the larger part, that which properly constitutes his portion, he cannot lose. He always retains much more than can be taken from him. Of friends near and dear he may be bereaved, but never of the one that above all others best deserves the name of friend, the friend that stick-

eth closer than a brother. The common resources of men may fail him, but there is one resource ampler than all of these, which he cannot exhaust, and none can take away from him. He may become an orphan, yet still he has a father kinder and abler than all human parents ; he may be houseless, nevertheless he has a home in heaven, and though cast off of man, he has still a refuge in God. Yes, after all his reverses and losses and disappointments, God remains to him. God, the proprietor of all worlds, the source of all joy, the author of all good, God is his in covenant and by promise ; and this single cause of joy surpasses infinitely all the united causes of sorrow. And there is one more remark I must not omit.

5. It is that the very sorrows of the Christian are to be rejoiced in. Among the causes of his joy are his very griefs. They work for him a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory ; and may not a man congratulate himself on that which has this operation ? They contribute to the increase of holiness in his heart, they imbitter sin, they wean him from the world, and is it not reasonable that one should rejoice in those things which prove the means of his sanctification ? True, one cannot rejoice in sorrow as such ; but if they that sow in tears, shall reap in joy, may not the husbandman, in the prospect of such a harvest, rejoice even while he goeth forth weeping. The Apostle Paul, had learned the heavenly art of converting his sorrows into subjects of rejoicing, for, having said, " We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God," he adds, " and not only so, but we glory also in tribulation ;" that is, we

rejoice in sorrow, and then assigns for it this most satisfactory reason, "knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed;" he rejoiced in it, in consideration of its effects. And David speaks of affliction as something promised, not threatened, and as, therefore not an evil, but a good, for he says, "I know that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."

If, then, to the Christian there be abundant cause for joy, and equal cause why he should rejoice at one time, as at another; if joy and sorrow are compatible, and the causes of joy always transcend those of sorrow, and the Christian's very sorrows are grounds of rejoicing, is it not practicable, and reasonable, and obligatory, that he should rejoice always?

I am aware that uniform rejoicing is not his attainment; but it is not on that account, any the less, his privilege and his duty. He does not always rejoice, because the causes of sorrow are near, while those of joy are more remote; the former are sensible; the latter are spiritual. He is quick of sight to see, but slow of heart to believe; he is keenly alive to impressions from this world, but dull to receive those which come from the world which is invisible and future. Moreover, though he is certain that God exists and reigns, he is not always so certain that God is his friend. He has not an abiding assurance of the divine favor. Yet this he should have, and then he will be able to rejoice always in the Lord.

I exhort you, Christians, to the exercise of this privilege, yea, to the performance of this duty. I

beseech you, God commands you to be happy. He has laid a foundation for your happiness, solid and broad. You may build upon it without fear; and as many as please may build upon it.

Hear now a few inferences.

1. If it is our duty to be happy, then it is a sin to be miserable. We are apt to think that our being sad and sorrowful is pleasing to God; that our voluntary wretchedness recommends us to him, but it is not so. And men have been prone to suppose, that self-inflicted sufferings are meritorious in his sight; but it is by no means the case. He is pleased when his will is done; and it is his will that we should rejoice. It is his pleasure that we should be happy. Infer not, however, that it is a sin to be serious; nor confound happiness with merriment.

2. How grossly they misrepresent the religion of the Bible, who speak of it as a gloomy thing. What! a gloomy thing! a religion which not only permits, but commands its subjects to rejoice? What! has that a tendency to make one miserable, which, affording him ample means of being happy, absolutely requires him to be so? A gloomy thing! that which diffuses through the soul a peace, divinely serene, that passeth understanding, and originates in the heart a hope full of immortality, and conciliates death, and dissipates the darkness of the grave, and reveals a smiling God? The religion of the Bible inimical to human happiness! A wilder raving was never uttered in Bedlam; a fouler falsehood never came up from Tophet; and yet many under this impression concerning it, eschew and deprecate it.

And some parents carefully preserve their children from what they seem to esteem its contagion, lest it should drive them to melancholy; would have them make no preparation for dying, lest that should render them unfit for living.

Ah, my hearers, it is not religion that makes men unhappy; or, if it is, it is not the religion of the Bible, made the religion of the heart. I can never believe that it is in the love of God, or the hope of heaven to make one unhappy. It is the want of religion that makes men unhappy; or it is a false view of religion; or it is indecision and doubt in religion.

3. We learn from this subject what it is that makes the human soul happy. It is not the world. One may awhile rejoice in that, but he cannot always; he will not always have it. He is passing over it, and it is passing away. No; it is not the world. And yet how many of you have nothing else to rejoice in. Ah! what will you do when called to part from it? It is the Lord. He is happy, who can call him his?

4. If God alone can make his creatures happy, what madness it is to live in ignorance of him, or in estrangement from him. Then "acquaint thyself with him;" "return unto him."

I cannot ask the sinner to rejoice, because he has no object to rejoice in; and the reasons why he should sorrow prevail over the others.

This subject reveals the misery of sinners. They can't rejoice in God; and there is nothing else one can permanently rejoice in.

I pity him who has no God to rejoice in. Though

**NEVINS' SERMONS.**

full of riches, laden with honors, brilliant in be  
and having all of this world that the heart can hold,  
I do not envy, I pity him. I think how soon he will  
be poor, and how melancholy a day death will be  
to him.



## SERMON IX.

We ought to obey God.—Acts v. 29.

THE proposition which I am about to announce as my text is one to whose truth I am confident of an unanimous assent, and you may be surprised, when you hear it, that a proposition so unhesitatingly admitted by all, and which moreover is supposed to be perfectly understood by every one, should have been selected by me, to be the subject of particular remark on this occasion. "We ought to obey God." Yes, yes, most certainly, is the universal response, from every judgment, and conscience, and heart; and it is immediate, as well as universal. There is no time required for considering the proposition. It is a truth seen by intuition. If there be a God, and he has any will respecting our conduct, and there is any way of coming at his will, we ought to obey him. It is reasonable, right, fit, obligatory; it is the first and most sacred of obligations. We owe him obedience on every account. He is our Maker and proprietor and benefactor, and a being infinitely perfect, incapable of willing any thing inconsistent with the strictest rectitude. We ought to obey him. Ought we! Then why have we disobeyed him, and not through ignorance, inadvertence, or infirmity, but knowingly,

deliberately, willingly? We always were aware of this obligation. And why are so many of us disobeying him now, disobeying him in so many respects, in such a multitude of instances, in the face of so much moral light, in opposition to our clearest and strongest convictions of duty, and against such a weight of motive, and with so little concern too? Why do we tread so heavily and trample so contumaciously on an obligation which we confess to be so sacred? Ought we to obey God? Do you admit it? Then out of thy own mouth will he judge thee, and on thine own admission condemn thee. You say that you ought to obey God, and you speak sincerely; you believe it; it is the decision of your reason; it is one of the plainest dictates of common sense, and yet you do not obey him; nor care to obey him; you are neither curious to know, nor careful to do his will. But perhaps you think that you are rendering obedience to God. Many, I am persuaded, think they are, when in fact they are not, and it is principally to expose and correct this practical error, that I have determined on this passage for my text. I propose to show you what that is, which God esteems and accepts as obedience to him; and you will perceive that in not a few particulars it is distinguished from that which frequently passes among men for obedience.

2. The mere doing of what he commands us to do does not constitute obedience to him, unless we also abstain from what he forbids us to do. Negative precepts, that is, those which prohibit, are as obligatory, and as essential to constitute obedience, as posi-

tive precepts, which enjoin something to be done. The remark is so obviously correct, that it may seem superfluous to have made it, as it is certainly unnecessary to dwell upon it. I remark,

2. That obedience to be acceptable must be *universal*. It must not only have respect to what is forbidden, as well as what is required, but it must have respect to all that is forbidden and all that is required. No principle is more manifestly scriptural, none more entirely reasonable. If we ought to obey God in any respect, we ought to obey him in every respect. The same reasons exist why we should be conformed to the whole will, as to any part of the will of God. Every part of his will is of equal authority, and equally wise and just. If therefore any one habitually and intelligently disobeys God in any respect, he forfeits the character of obedience; and hence it is written, "cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." And does not this remark convict many? Do you not habitually neglect some known duty, or at least something which might be known, and would be perceived to be a duty, but that you shut your eyes against the light? Are you not habitually living, and allowing yourself in the practice of some known sin?

3. The acting and refraining to act in all respects in conformity to the requirements and prohibitions of God, does not necessarily constitute obedience to God. It does not, unless it be not only done, but done out of regard to God. This is a very important principle to be regarded by you. To obey God, is not simply

to act according to his will, but to act according to his will, because it is his will. An accidental conformity of the will of man to the will of God is not obedience. It must be intentional. There is *rectitude* in the conformity of the will of man to the will of God, whether it be intentional or unintentional, but obedience exists not unless the conformity be intentional. There is a difference between doing right and obeying God. I speak of the external part of right doing. To sin is much more than to do wrong. An atheist may do some things which the law of God requires, but you would not therefore say that he obeys God, for he does not even acknowledge that there is a God. A man may do some things which the law of God requires, without knowing that the law of God requires them. This man acts right, so far at least as his external conduct is concerned, but he does not obey God, nor intend to obey him. One cannot obey God without knowing that he obeys him, without having in his mind a regard to God. There is another case still. A man may do some things which the law of God requires, knowing that the law of God requires them, and yet not do them because the law of God requires them, but from some other and inferior consideration, as because some inferior authority commands them, a legislature, or a parent, or a master, or because his interest, his honor, or his credit requires they should be done, or the welfare of the community. Thus, for example, all the respect which some persons pay to the Christian Sabbath is on account of the acknowledged utility of that institution, not from any regard

to the author of the decalogue. And some are scrupulously honest in their dealings, because dishonesty is disgraceful, or from a better motive, an inherent principle of integrity, in consequence of which they act uprightly in cases in which detection and exposure are impossible. I do not say that it is wrong to be influenced by such considerations, especially if they stand in subordination to the authority of the Supreme Lawgiver, but I do say that unless the primary and principal consideration with us be a regard to God, not any thing we do should be accounted as obedience to him. And this is no novel and strange principle. The very same elements go into the constitution of filial obedience. A dutiful son is one who intentionally conforms to the will of his parent, who does what his parent instructs him to do, not because it falls in with his own inclination, or because he is to gain any thing by it, but out of regard to the will and command of his parent.

It is apparent then that there may be a great deal of virtue and morality and right acting among men, at the same time that there is no obedience to God in it all, because, though there may be an acknowledgement of God, and an acquaintance with his laws, yet regard to him and to his law is not the reason of the conduct in question. Now a man may not rely for acceptance with God on any right course of acting, even though regard for God should be the motive of it. How much less may it be relied on, when this is not the motive, and when it does not constitute obedience to God. And yet is not this the dependence of multitudes?

4. I proceed now to make another distinction, which, I am certain, is both just and important, though it should seem to some of you to be rather nice. A doing according to God's will, out of a regard to God, does not alone contribute obedience to him. Whether it be obedience or not, depends on the *nature* of the regard that is had to him. The regard may be *servile*. A man, knowing the will of God, may act in conformity to it from the mere dread of the effects of his displeasure, should he not, and he may be conscious that but for this fear, he would act differently. Now that is not such obedience as God esteems and accepts; it is not such as angels render; it is not such as saints render. But, again, the regard may be *mercenary*. The expectation of reward may be the paramount motive. Now it is right to have respect to the recompense of reward, and to that of punishment too. God's promises and threatenings are both intended to influence us; but these must not be the only, nor yet the main considerations. The regard that is had to God in all acceptable obedience, I know not how better to describe than by saying it is the union of *respect and love*. It is the very same kind of regard which a dutiful child has to a parent. It is not *servile*, though the child certainly dreads his parents' displeasure, nor *mercenary*, though he hopes for the tokens of his parents' approbation; but it is ingenuous, and affectionate, and disinterested; he would obey, whatever loss he should sustain thereby, and whatever evil incur. His regard is both *fond* and *reverential*; he loves, and he feels a sort of moral incapacity to

disobey one he loves ; he venerates, as well as loves ; and he feels that there would be something most unworthy and unnatural, in contravening his commands and trifling with his will.

5. Obedience, to be acceptable, must be *internal*, as well as external. Obedience does not consist in any thing external. External actions are really but the expression of obedience. It has its seat in the soul ; it is a predicate of the soul ; it originates with the heart ; it can originate no where else. In what is the law of God summarily comprehended but in a two-fold exercise of the heart? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." These are the two great and kindred commandments ; and hence God, in making inquiry for obedience, looks to the heart, the seat of obedience, and, if he does not find it there, he does not and cannot find it any where. Consequently, if any of you do not love God with all the heart, and your neighbor as yourself, it is as manifest as any thing can be that you do not obey God ; and all your pious, honest, and charitable acts must, in his account, pass for nothing. Whatever they are, they are not the expressions of love, the obedience of the heart.

6. *Constancy* is another quality of acceptable obedience. It must be habitual and uniform, not occasional and interrupted. There exist the same imperative reasons why God should be obeyed at all times, as at any time ; and that regard for him, which is essential to true obedience, has equal reference to all his laws, and exists as a permanent and fixed

principle, operative at all times. The love of God, the principle and essence of obedience, is not a fitful and feverish excitement, but a regular, uniform, and healthful pulsation.

7. It is necessary to the acceptableness of obedience, that it should be *unconditional*. We ought to obey God, whatever the difficulty of the command, the circumstances under which obedience is required, and whatever may be the consequences of obeying. The obligation is absolute and immutable. There is no power of dispensation. No matter what the inconvenience, the loss, the suffering, the disgrace, God must be obeyed. It is one characteristic of him that shall abide in the tabernacle of the Lord, that he sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. And yet how many exceptions are taken on the mere score of inconvenience. "It is my principle to sanctify the Sabbath ; but it is not convenient to do so to-day," and the man thinks himself released. He is on a journey ; he wants to reach home ; or, he has good company ; or, his business is urgent ; and it is on this principle, and not that they would mutilate the decalogue, that many object to any alteration in the laws which regulate the transportation and opening of the mail, the inconvenience of the thing. And must the laws of the great and dreadful God, whose majesty is such that all nations are before him as nothing, bend to human convenience ? Say that it is not a law, or that it has ceased to be obligatory ; but, admitting its right to the place it occupies in that irrevocable code, think not to annul its obligation by the plea of inconvenience. What ! is



it our duty to obey God only when it is convenient and agreeable, or when it does not seem to interfere with any of our secular interests? What a principle! and yet, though I know not that any one avows it, how many act upon it!

8. Obedience to God behooves to be *supreme* and *primary*, and not subordinate and secondary. It is due not merely when no other authority interferes with it, but though all other authority should oppose it. This obligation takes the precedence of every other. They must bend to it. It will bend to none. Whoever is disobeyed, God must be obeyed. Whoever be offended, he must not be. We ought to obey God rather than man; no matter what relations may subsist between us and others. The servant owes obedience to his master, and the child to his parent, but they and all, by a superior and more sacred obligation, owe obedience to God. He is the father of our spirits; he is our supreme master.

It is a fond opinion, with many, that under a popular government the representative is, in all cases, bound by the will of his constituents; and no exception is made even for the case which involves a violation of the law of God. That this obligation does exist, in many cases, is certain; that it exists in every case, but one, may be true. I decide not, (for I meddle with politics only so far as they cover the path of morals; then they come on my ground;) but there is one case in which the obligation does not exist. A man may not do what, in his conscience, he believes to be morally wrong in obedience to any will, however loud and strong be the expression of it. It

is no valid plea that he represents and acts for others. Personal responsibility cannot be so merged in that which is official. How true religion exalts and dignifies human nature ! It is the only principle of true indubitable courage.

9. God must be obeyed *immediately* ; without hesitation or delay ; as soon as the order is received and it is ascertained to be from him ; there is nothing then to wait for. Delay is disobedience, even though it should be accompanied with the determination to obey hereafter. Many, who admit the obligation to obey God, have done nothing as yet but meditate and purpose obedience. They mean to repent, and they mean to serve God. Why do they not then ? Is God's law fulfilled by good resolutions and dutiful purposes ?

10. Obedience to God must be *unquestioning*. We have no right to ask the reason of his commands, or their utility. It is enough that he commands. I was reading the other day an account of the answers given by some little Sunday school girls, who were questioned in reference to the petition, "Thy will be done." What is to be done ? "God's will," they replied. Where ? "On earth." How ? "As it is in heaven." And how do angels in heaven do it ? "They do it immediately," said one ; "actively," said another ; "unitedly," replied a third ; and then there was a pause, when one little girl arose and said, "why, sir, they do it without asking any questions." What an interesting development of mind. Oh ! when shall the will of God be thus done on earth. Oh ! when shall the charge of unreasonableness and

inutility, or at least of the want of manifest reasonableness and utility, cease to be brought against the legislature of heaven. Vain, presumptuous man must know why he should do this and that, and what is the use of doing it, before he will put hand to do it, though God commands him to do it.

11. Obedience involves *submission*. He that is obedient to God's preceptive will, will be also submissive to his providential will. The reasons of obedience and submission are the same. It is the Lord, therefore let him do, as well as command to be done what seemeth him good. "Thy will be done," means "be thy purposes accomplished, as well as be thy commands obeyed."

12. *Sinlessness* is not necessary to obedience to God. It is necessary to the perfection of obedience, but not to its reality; but though actual and entire freedom from sin be not indispensable to the existence of the character we have been describing, yet the desire and prayer, and aim and effort, and struggle to be free from it, is.

I have told you what it is to obey God, and now what I have said I wish to be used for the two-fold purpose of conviction and examination.

My hearers you have not obeyed God. I bring this heavy charge against you. You have trampled upon the rights of Jehovah; you have disregarded an admitted and most sacred obligation; you have not done what you confess you ought to have done; the law, holy, just and good, of the great and glorious God, your maker, master, parent and benefactor you have broken; nor once merely, but times liter-

ally innumerable, and under circumstances the most aggravating, in opposition to motives the most constraining, under light the most brilliant, though admonished and threatened, though entreated and expostulated with, and dealt with in judgment and mercy both; nor have you disobeyed his law merely, but refused obedience to the Gospel of his grace. You see, you cannot help seeing, that you are sinners, and to how fearful an extent you have gone in sin; and in the light of this same subject you may see the great evil of sin. It is, indeed, no trifle; no light and ludicrous matter. I know mankind regard and treat it as such, but in this they manifest equal stupidity, as impiety. It is to trample on the most sacred obligations, to disregard the most holy claims, it is to offend and oppose the greatest and best of beings. Is that a trifle? It is rebellion against the most rightful of sovereigns, unnatural conduct towards the most affectionate and attentive of parents, and an ungrateful treating of the kindest of benefactors. Is that a trifle? Is it not a transcendent evil? Ought it not deeply to affect him who has done it? It must, unless he be without heart. Let it then affect you, that you have done it; that you have disobeyed the great God, your God, to whom you are so entirely beholden and so largely indebted. Let it fill you with concern, shame and sorrow.

But I would have the subject used as a test of Christian character. The Christian has been reduced to the obedience of God. Now many of you profess to be Christians; and are you what you profess to be? Do you obey God, all his commands,

those which require abstinence and self-denial, as well as the others ; and this out of regard to God ; nor from a merely servile and mercenary regard ; but from an affectionate and reverential regard of him, because you venerate and love him ; obey him in your spirit and with your heart, loving him sincerely and supremely ; do you obey him *constantly* and *unconditionally*, as your supreme lawgiver ; and is your obedience *immediate* and *unquestioning*, and accompanied with submission ?

If you have not obeyed God hitherto, are you disposed to obey him now ? Let us make trial of your disposition. " God now commandeth all men every where to repent ;" if you would obey him, do this ; repent ; there is no duty prior to this : and how reasonable repentance is ! It is to be sorry for having disobeyed God, and to do so no more.

Again : " this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ ; do this, if you would obey him ; and how reasonable this is ; how necessary. Neither pardon, nor holiness, nor life, nor any blessing can be without it. Beware of doing one thing when God commands another.

This is the whole matter in controversy between God and sinners. It relates to his law ; he claims obedience, and they will not concede it. You are parties in this controversy ; it has been going on hitherto, waxing warmer, and the breach ever widening. Is it not time it was terminated ? Who hath contended against God and prospered ? Let the potsherd contend with the potsherd of the earth, but woe to him who striveth with his Maker. Hast thou an

arm like his, or canst thou thunder like him? Can thine heart endure or thy hand be strong when he shall lay hold on vengeance? Who can stand before his indignation?

The controversy can only be terminated in one way. He will not yield; you must; he cannot give up his laws; you must renounce your disobedience. Your repentance and submission will heal the breach and settle the controversy. Nothing else can.

Can you feel safe, while consciously living in disobedience to God?

Do you feel calm, in contemplating the prospect of certainly and speedily meeting him? and of accounting to him?

It is wonderful all do not see their need of such a provision as that of the Gospel, and immediately avail themselves of it.

## SERMON X.

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.—PSALM li. 4.

**THERE** is no one who does not know, as instructed by his own experience, that there are two kinds of regret or repentance. We find them distinguished in the Bible as the sorrow of the world and the sorrow of God; and in that book are recorded notable examples of each. They differ in their nature as widely almost as they do in their tendencies and results, which are as dissimilar as death and life. "The sorrow of the world worketh death;" while that of God is unto salvation and eternal life.

It is not my purpose now to call your attention to the several particulars which distinguish them. I mean to remark only on one peculiarity which distinguishes the repentance which is genuine from that which is spurious. The distinction to which I refer, has respect to the view which is taken of sin in the exercise of true repentance. All repentance implies a view and some sense of sin. Every one who repents, is convinced and confesses that he has sinned. But true evangelical repentance regards and feels sin as *against God*; and its confession is not merely "I have sinned," but "I have sinned against the Lord;" and the emphasis is laid on the

words which express the *object* of the sin, *against the Lord*. *Saul* confessed he had sinned, and so did *Judas*. "I have sinned," said he, (and his confession declares wherein he had sinned; the betrayer of Jesus exculpates him,) "in that I have betrayed innocent blood." And both *Saul and Judas* were sorry, *sincerely, exceedingly* sorry; but they were not sorry *towards God*. The *consequences* of their sin affected them, but not its *object*. They did not *view and feel* their sin as against God. They would have been just as sorry if there had been no God. Their consciences were convicted, but their hearts sympathized not. It is true of multitudes of mankind, that their conviction never goes beyond, "I have sinned; I have done wrong;" and their repentance is simple sorrow, or sorrow only towards man. But with those three notable examples of true repentance, which we so frequently refer to, how different it was. When Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man," he answered, "I have sinned against the Lord," though the object and construction of the parable seemed to be to convince him of his sin as against *Uriah*. He repeats the same here in still more expressive language, "Against thee have I sinned." So the prodigal, "I have sinned *against heaven*." His mind adverts first to that; and the publican felt similarly, "God be merciful to me a sinner." If he had not been affected by his sin as *against God*, he would not have gone to God to ask mercy. *Judas* confessed to nobody, or to man. It is not only evident that these men were affected by the consideration *against God*, but that they



were far more affected by that than by any other consideration ; yea, affected almost exclusively by that view of sin. This is plain from the confession of the Psalmist, "Against thee *only* have I sinned."

But ought they to have been so greatly, and almost exclusively affected by this consideration ? Is the view they took of sin correct ? Is sin, and all sin against God, and so much more against God than it is against any other being ? And is this the chief aggravation of sin ? Let us inquire into this matter.

It is acknowledged by all, that some sins are against God, as, for example, profaneness, blasphemy, sabbath-breaking, and all impiety and irreverence. God is seen to be the immediate object of those sins. They are palpably directed against him. But men are not so ready to extend this confession to sins of every kind. And yet are they not all transgressions of his law ? acts of opposition to his will ? instances of rebellion against his government ? Do they not all set at nought his authority ? Is it not against God that you sin when you break the sixth or eighth of his ten commands, as well as when you break the first, third, or fourth ? They are all his commands, though they do not all relate to him. He is the author, if not the subject of them ; all are expressions of his will. If any sins are not against God, they must be such as are manifestly against men ; such as those which directly attack the property, reputation, chastity, or life of others. But that even those sins are primarily against God, is plain from this, that David's confession has reference to sins of that kind. How

cruelly against his fellow creatures they were, individuals, the church and the nation ; but he says, in confessing them, "Against thee, (and adds,) thee *only* have I sinned." I do not suppose he meant to deny that he had sinned against others ; but his sin was, in his estimation, so much more against God than it was against others, that he speaks of it, by a very common figure, as *only* against him. A sin may have many objects. It may be against one's self, suicidal, and against one's family, and against the church, and the world too. But its chief object is God. It wrongs, insults, outrages no being so much as it does the greatest and best.

I would distinctly assert, then, that not only is all sin against God, but every sin is more against God than it is against any other being. However it may despise human authority, it involves a greater contempt of his. However injuriously it may affect other interests, it does still more injury to the great interests of God's universal kingdom. Who can tell what an influence for evil every transgression of divine law may not exert, and what calamitous consequences would not follow, but for the overruling providence of God.

Men rarely fall into a greater error than when they speak of a person as sinning only against himself ; as nobody's enemy but his own. Alas ! even the drunkard and the suicide sin still more grievously against God than against themselves ; and, however adverse to themselves they may be, they are still greater enemies to God. Why, "the carnal mind is enmity against God." It is not en-

mity to any other being, though it may be inimical to many. It is capable of being reconciled to others. The greatest enemies in politics are easily reconciled. It is only to make their interests identical, and the work of reconciliation is done. No change divine of heart is necessary. But men are such enemies to God that the very seat of the enmity has to be upturned and radically altered, before reconciliation takes place. A man does not become a friend of God by being convinced that it is his interest to be on terms of friendship with God. He holds out long after that. I would observe here, before I proceed farther, how much sin must be against God to justify such language as this, in which there is an entire overlooking of its opposition to other beings, and a recognition of it as alone against God. Think how much injury to men is often done by a particular sin; how much it is against them, as, for example, the sin of David, of Jeroboam, of Manasseh. And yet the same sin is so much more against God than against men, that the Holy Spirit directs that, in the confession of it, it shall be spoken of as only against God. Think of the evil towards men involved in murder, seduction, intemperance. How heinous, as against men, those offences are! But what must they be as against God, how much more evil and heinous, when the evil and heinousness of them, great as it is against men, is as nothing in comparison with their enormity as against God.

I proceed now to my main remark, which is, *that sin's greatest aggravation is its being against God.* If it were not so, it is clear that so much stress would

not be laid on this circumstance in the confession of it. When David says, "against thee, thee only have I sinned," he does not mean merely to proclaim the *fact* that sin is exclusively against God, but to signify that that constitutes the chief evil of it, and that it was that view of sin which most painfully affected him; "*against thee,*" that was what so greatly troubled him. He was sorry for the injury he had done to others; (and what grief, what agony often attends the recollection of the injury done to others by our sins,) but deep as that grief was, it was nothing to the sorrow he felt for having sinned against God; "they shall look on me whom they have pierced and mourn as one mourneth for a first born." But how does this so greatly aggravate sin, its being against God? What if it is against God? Who is God? and what is he to us, that our sinning against him should so affect us? I will tell you.

I suppose that when David said, "against thee," he thought of the *greatness* and *majesty* of God, and it affected him that he had sinned against a being of such awful grandeur, of such terrible glory, a being of understanding infinite, and power almighty; against him he had presumed, he had dared to sin. He thought too of his *holiness*; not against a polluted fellow creature merely had he sinned, but against him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look at iniquity, in whose sight even the heavens are not clean; God, glorious in holiness, of whom the seraphim say continually to each other, "holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts." Against *thee*. He reflected moreover, I suppose, on

the *equity and justice* of God ; on the rectitude of his government, the excellence of his law, and the reasonableness of his requirements. They were not grievous commandments he had broken. It was not a hard yoke he had disdained. The law he had transgressed was holy, just, and good. Obedience to it was no less conducive to his good than to God's glory. But a consideration which still more deeply affected him was the *goodness* of God ; against *thee*, so good to all, to me so benevolent, so beneficent. He thought of the condescension of God, his bounty, his forbearance, his compassion, of goodness in all its various forms, its universality, its liberality, its unweariedness. Against him, the great, holy, just, wise and good Jehovah he had sinned. He reflected on all his perfections ; and then on his *relations*, as creator, preserver, benefactor ; *his* creator, preserver, and benefactor ; against thee, the former of my body, the father of my spirit, my bountiful provider, my watchful guardian, my powerful protector, in whom I live and move and have my being ; against thee, on whom I am so continually and completely dependant. He thought of his *obligations*, of all that he owed to God. He had sinned against the being who had the strongest claims on him originally, and who had been by his munificent and perpetual benefactions bringing him continually more in debt. He thought of all that God had done for his soul. He had pardoned all his sins, had saved him from going down to the pit, having himself found a ransom for him, and even the sin he was repenting of, God had forgiven !

There was at least one other thought present to

the mind of the Psalmist. It was of God's omnipresence, for he alludes to it in this very connection. All he had done against God, he had done *before* him, in his immediate presence; "and done this evil *in thy sight*;" against thee and before thee I have sinned.

After this brief and very imperfect survey, who does not see that the grand aggravation of sin is its being against God.

But did this attach enormity to the sin of David merely? Have not others sinned against the same being? Yes, all who have sinned, have sinned against God, and all the sins of each have been against God. There is no sin which is not against God. It is not sin, if it is not against God. *Thou* art the man, as well as he whom Nathan addressed in this language, and *thou*, and *thou*, and the language in which he replied equally well becomes you, "I have sinned against the Lord."

But have you ever taken this view, and been affected by this consideration? Have you ever in your confession gone beyond, "I have sinned." Has your heart ever impelled you to add with emphasis *against thee*. This is the grand defect of many convictions and repentances. Have you ever entered into the deep meaning of those two words *against thee*? If you have not, you are still a stranger to genuine, evangelical repentance.

1. This subject shows us why conviction of sin is often so slight. It is because the sin is not regarded as against God. That most important circumstance of sin is overlooked. The *object* of sin is not con-

templated and considered. The person perceives and confesses only that he has sinned, and no wonder that does not greatly affect him. That is not the affecting consideration. The affecting consideration is its being against God. Many persons acknowledge to us that they are sinners, but they cannot, they say, perceive that they are so great sinners, as we would have them believe. Their whole difficulty arises from their not contemplating sin as *against God*. It is my sinning against God and *such* a God, that makes me so great a sinner. If I forget the object of my sin, I shall of course be blind to its enormity. Look at your sin in the light of this subject, as *against God*; and think of it too, as *before* him, against him and before him; and can you any longer doubt that you are a great sinner? You have heard sometimes an indignant master, or parent address a servant or child in language like this, "dare you disobey my orders in my presence, insult me to my face," and you felt that that circumstance aggravated the disobedience. But do you not know that all God's orders are disobeyed in his presence. We never sin but in his sight. All iniquity insults him to his face.

2. We see from this subject why true repentance equally regards all sin. It does so because all sin is against God. The reason why the true penitent repents of any sin is its being against God, and this reason holds with respect to all sin whatsoever. It is all against God. If there were any sins not against God, he might spare those; but there is not, cannot be any such sin. Spurious repentance is partial. It sorrows on account of one sin, but for another feels no grief, and

the reason is that it recognizes no common character as belonging to all sins, and constituting their turpitude. Judas never repented but of one sin. Saul was several times sorry. Neither of them repented of all their sins, because they repented of no one of them on right principles, and for the proper reason.

3. We see why the reformation that follows true repentance is thorough. The true penitent sorrowing for sin as against God, and perceiving all sin to be against God, for the reason that he renounces *any*, renounces *every* sin. It grieves him so that he has done so much against God, that he cannot consent to do any thing more against him, and his daily prayer is, "let not any iniquity have dominion over me; search and see if there be any evil way in me."

4. We see why sin is no trifle, viz: because it is against God. Its object gives it importance. An offence small in itself, becomes great if directed against majesty. And for the same reason that sin generally is no trifle, no sin is a trifle, because there is no sin which is not against God. This, therefore, redeems every sin from the insignificance which some would attach to certain sins.

That language applied to sin, "it is nothing, it is a trifle, a venial offence, a mere peccadillo," would never be used, if men contemplated sin as against God.

The subject is a *practical* one, will you then make a practical use of it? It concerns you, it concerns every sinner; will you then allow it to interest you? Will you investigate the subject, and see if the view



I have presented of sin is correct? And if it is against God, and you find it so, will you let your mind dwell on that circumstance of sin? Will you weigh those two words *against thee*? Will you ponder on the import of them?

If sin is against God, and you have sinned against him, is it not time to confess it, and to confess it as against God, and to God? Is it not high time to say, each of you, "against thee, and thee only have I sinned?" Would it be premature if you were to adopt this confession to-day? Will you do it? Will you say in the ear that is never dull, "against thee have I sinned," being sorry that you have done so, and resolving to do so no more? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," he is faithful, for he has said he will; and just, for now he can be just and justify him who believes in Jesus; and he will do more; he will cleanse us from all unrighteousness, for "the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son cleanses us from all sin."

5. We see why, even where there is some conviction of sin, it is no deeper, often but a slight seriousness. It is because sin is not regarded as *against God*.

6. We see why it is that you can sin with so little compunction, ay, without feeling of any kind, why you can so recklessly neglect this and that duty. It is because you don't consider that you are doing it to God.

7. How dreadful the approach to the judgment seat will be to those who neglect the mercy seat. How much more formidable human tribunals would

be, if the judge were the being personally offended ; if he were the object of the crime on which he sits in judgment. This terror belongs to the tribunal before which you are to appear.

8. We see why men are so proud, and carry themselves so haughtily. They forget God, especially do they forget how vile and guilty they have made themselves by sinning against him.

## SERMON XI.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.—  
2 CORINTHIANS vii. 10.

THE Apostle Paul wrote two epistles to the church which he had instrumentally established at Corinth. The first was in answer to a letter received from that church, as he expressly says; and if that letter from Corinth were now in existence, it would, undoubtedly, throw some light on such parts of the answer to it, as are now more or less obscure. In his first epistle, the Apostle sharply reprov'd the Corinthians for tolerating in their communion a notorious offender, a certain incestuous person. He rebukes them for being puffed up and not rather mourning, that he that had done the deed might be taken away from among them, for he asks, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" He commands them not to keep company with such a person, being called a brother; no, not to eat; nay more, he enjoins it upon them to put away from among themselves the wicked person; to deliver him unto Satan; that is, to excommunicate him from that visible body over which the Lord Jesus Christ presides, and to regard him as belonging to that other community,

which is subject to the prince of the power of the air ; and this "for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the Lord Jesus." Before writing this second epistle, Paul had heard through Titus, who had come from Corinth, that his instructions had been complied with, and that, as a church, they had sorrowed deeply on account of the evil done by one of their members ; and he takes notice of it in this chapter. He speaks of the comfort he had received in hearing of their mourning, and tells them that though he grieved for the necessity of writing that letter to them, yet he does not repent having written it, nor that it had made them sorry, because they had been made sorry but for a season, and had sorrowed to repentance ; that is, as the word literally signifies, to a change of mind, and, consequently, of conduct. They had been made sorry after a godly manner, and, therefore, had received no damage by him in any thing ; and then he introduces this general proposition, "For godly sorrow, (or sorrow according to God, that is, such as he requires, and as is derived from divine considerations,) worketh repentance (or a change of mind,) to salvation not to be repented of, (regretted,) but the sorrow of the world worketh death." This is our subject—sorrow.

It is melancholy to reflect, my hearers, that of all, even of those who are now most elate, and prosperous, and gay, we may, with absolute certainty predict sorrow. Yes, whosoever thou art, oh ! man, and whatsoever thy present circumstances, sorrow awaits thee. The tear, the sigh, the sob, the bitter regret shall be thine. That cup, which now spar-

kles as thou puttest it to thy lips to drink its delicious draught, shall pass away and be exchanged for another, in which the wormwood and the gall will constitute the chief ingredients. It is certain, inevitable, unless thou hast already drunk thy bitter portion, sown all thy tears, and a merciful Providence should remove you suddenly to that country where no tear is secreted, and whence all the causes of sorrow are excluded. Except on this single condition, it is inevitable; and it is *suitable* that you should have experience of sorrow; for its causes surround and pervade you. They are in you and about you. Events will occur, which cannot but mournfully affect you. You are bound by the tender ties of affection to many, and you will painfully feel it, as one after another they are severed; and you will owe to many the sorrow of sympathy; but above all you have, each of you, done that for which you should sorrow; if sorrow were not necessary, yet it is most appropriate; if repentance were not a duty, yet it ought to be esteemed a privilege. Sorrow is the sinner's road to rejoicing. Through tribulation and *much* tribulation, we enter into the kingdom of God. Tears are the seeds of joy, and blessed are they that mourn. But sorrow is absolutely *obligatory* as well as suitable. "Be afflicted and mourn and weep," is an apostolical exhortation. Sorrow is of the very essence of repentance; and what are we more peremptorily or more frequently commanded to do than to repent? And, in fine, sorrow is, in every sense, *necessary*; our very salvation is suspended on it. It is impracticable without it, "for godly sorrow

worketh repentance to salvation ;” and salvation is never wrought without it. Nor is it necessary by arbitrary appointment merely ; but in the very nature of things. The return and submission of the rebel involves sorrow as a part of it. Oh ! ingrate child of the best of fathers, couldst thou, even if thou mightest, return to that home which thou hast abandoned, and fall into that embrace of love which thou didst spurn, and enjoy, unupbraided, thy father’s favor and thy father’s bounty, without the feeling of sorrow ? Could you ? would you ? We should not too fervently deprecate sorrow ; and there is a species of it that we should court and cherish. We hear sometimes of the luxury there is in tears, and of the joy of grief ; of penitential tears, of that grief, which is according to God, it is true.

But will any sorrow suffice ? Does it matter not what evil causes the sorrow ? Do all tears produce joy ? No ; salvation is not suspended on sorrow without regard to its cause. No tear germinates and fructifies unto joy, but the penitential tear. That sorrow which pain, loss, disappointment, bereavement, and various other like causes produce, is not necessarily salutary. It is often destructive : “ the sorrow of the world,” that is, that which is produced by mere worldly considerations, “ worketh death.” It emaciates the body and drinks up the spirit. Often it makes men more rebellious against God ; and not unfrequently arms them against their own lives. The sorrow that is salutary has *sin* for its cause. That is the evil which gives rise to it ; and here let me introduce a reflection. How little of all

the mourning that exists among men, is on account of sin, although sin is the cause of all the evils on account of which they mourn, and ought, therefore, to excite a permanent sorrow, and when, moreover, sin is the only thing for which it is profitable to indulge sorrow. We speak of the benefits of affliction generally; but they are confined to that affliction which is on account of sin; and other affliction is beneficial, only as it may conduce to this. And let me ask you here, for I would interweave rather than append an application, has sin ever caused you sorrow? Other evils have afflicted you; but has this greatest, this elemental evil, that thou hast sinned against God, that thou hast broken his law, rebelled against his authority, insulted his throne, and cast his favors back upon him? Hast thou gone to the root of the matter, where the evil originated, and sorrowed there?

But will every species of sorrow for sin suffice? Is it enough that sin be the cause of the sorrow? No. *Judas* sorrowed sincerely and deeply, and sin was the cause of his sorrow, "I have sinned," said he, "in that I have betrayed innocent blood;" but his sorrow wrought only death. To mere sorrow on account of sin the Scriptures make no promise; on it they set no value. Nor should they; we do not. It is involuntary; no one supposes that mere regret for having done a wrong thing, without regard to the particular considerations which inspire the regret, has any virtue in it. *Judas* was no better for that kind of repentance which he exercised. It was but a bitter foretaste of that remorseful repentance, which

is a part of his punishment, a pang of hell on earth. In the original language of the New Testament, as you doubtless remember to have often heard, there is a word appropriated to this exercise, a word expressive of simple sorrow for sin ; and it is quite a different word from that which is used, when repentance is enjoined as a duty, or spoken in connection with salvation, although, through the poverty of our language, both are translated repentance. The former word signifies literally, *a care or concern after a thing*, regret. The latter, *a change of mind*. They are both used in this chapter ; the first in verse 8, "I do not repent, though I did repent ;" and in the text, "not to be repented of," that is, not to be regretted. The other is used in verse 9, and also in the text, "godly sorrow worketh *repentance*," not regret merely, but a change of mind and consequently of conduct. The first word is employed to denote the repentance of *Judas*, the other that of *Peter*. The latter kind of repentance is voluntary, and the subject of command and promise, but the former is involuntary. It is a part of the entail of sin. It is or will be universal. It often precedes and attends true and saving repentance ; and in the case of all those who die without true repentance, it *will* be a part of their endless portion. It is the product of prisons and punishments ; and in view of this kind of repentance, that establishment yonder may be well called a penitentiary, though I fear, it nurses but little of the other species of repentance. The distinction is clear, and it is important, and it is so familiar, that perhaps I have needlessly dwelt upon it ; we recog-



nize it in the judgments we form of others, though we cannot often apply it. But is it not often overlooked when we sit in judgment on ourselves? Do we distinguish, as we ought, between the sorrow that is according to God, and the sorrow of the world; between the regret and the change of mind? And do not many satisfy themselves with this, that they have felt the mere regret? When one of you is asked if you have repented, do you not understand the interrogator as enquiring simply whether you have felt sorry for having done wrong? And if you can say, "oh! yes, I have repented, I do repent, I never did wrong, but I was afterwards sorry for it," do you not feel as if you had satisfactorily answered the inquiry? But you have not. All that you affirm of yourself may be true, and yet you may be as utter a stranger to available repentance, as he is, who was never invited to the exercise of it. I know you have felt sorry. I do not wish you to tell me that you have. It is nature to feel sorry. It requires no grace to feel sorry. You cannot help feeling sorry, there is no virtue, for there is no voluntariness in it. The question is not whether you have felt sorry, but what has made you feel sorry, whether you have been made sorry after a godly manner, and what your feeling sorry has made you, what has produced your sorrow, and what your sorrow has produced. The point is not settled, when it is ascertained that you have experienced sorrow on account of sin. Both the cause and the effect of that sorrow are to be investigated, and it is upon the result of this investigation that the decision turns against, or

in favor of you. Your sorrow may be that of the world. It must be of a godly sort, or it is not to salvation. Rely not then on the bare fact of your sorrow.

But to describe with some particularity that peculiar sorrow, which is called godly or according to God, because it is such as he requires, and because it has a special regard to him. To sorrow after a godly manner, or to repent truly is,

1. To feel sorrow for sin as offending God, rather than as injuring ourselves or others. The true penitent views sin in its every aspect, but chiefly as it looketh towards God. He grieves because of the mischief it does himself and may do others, but he grieves chiefly because of the injury it offers to God. It displeases, it dishonors, its tendency is to dethrone God. His boundless goodness it maltreats, his supreme authority it insults, and his infinite power it defies. It is conduct unworthy of a creature, a subject, a ward, a beneficiary, a child. "I have sinned," was the confession of Judas; he says not "against God." But hear the confession of the penitent prodigal. "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight;" hear another's, "against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight;" and still another's, "mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Mark the difference. In the first case, see the sorrow of the world; in the other instances, behold the sorrow according to God; hence,

2. It is to feel sorrow for sin as an evil in itself, and not merely, nor yet principally in its conse-

quences. The effects of sin are evil, but sin itself is more evil, and it would be evil, though it produced no effects. There is harm from it, but there is still more harm in it. The grand evil of sin consists in its moral character, not in its physical consequences. That the will of an infinitely perfect being should be contravened or murmured at by one of his intelligent creation, that his high and rightful authority should be disregarded, and a law dictated by his wisdom and transcribed from his attributes broken and broken again, that such a sovereign should be rebelled against, such a benefactor ungratefully treated, and such a father dishonored, disobeyed and even hated, that then is the evil of sin. These are the views of the true penitent, and these views call forth mourning from him. His sorrow is according to God. And, hence, he recognizes no class of sins as trivial, as unworthy of sorrow, or as deserving only a very low degree of sorrow. How can he, when every sin, equally with every other, is a contravention of the same supreme will, a breach of the same good and holy law, an act of rebellion against the same heavenly sovereign. For the least heinous of all sins, he sorrows, and sorrows deeply, and can never think that he has sorrowed enough. But it deserves to be made a distinct observation,

3. That to repent truly is to feel sorrow for all sin. If true repentance regards sin as an evil in itself, then, as every sin is an evil in itself, it must have respect to all sin. Does the genuine penitent view sin as having God for its object? and does he sorrow for it on that account? and is not God the object of

every sin equally? A man may regret one sin and not another; but he cannot repent of one, without repenting of all. Repentance is universal with regard to sin, because the considerations which excite it apply equally to all sin, and because, moreover, it involves a change of mind. Some persons talk of having repented of some sins and not of others. Their repentance is of the same species with his, who went and hanged himself. They have truly repented of none, or they would have repented of all. Their's is the sorrow of the world. That is partial; but not so godly sorrow. It is universal. The true penitent grieves to have offended God in any respect.

4. Godly sorrow originates in *love*, and is connected with *faith*. A man may regret having offended a being whom he hates, because he may fear his vengeance; but he grieves only for having offended a being whom he loves. Fear may shake the heart, but it is love alone that melts it. The revelation of the majesty and justice of God may make it tremble, but it is only a discovery of his loveliness that softens and subdues it. The slave crouches and cowers, and "Don't strike," he says, "I am sorry; I will do so no more." It is fear. He would escape if he could; and he will offend again, if he can cover his sin. The child seeks the very bosom he has pierced, and there weeps and hides his head, "Strike," he says, "I deserve it; I have sinned; but spurn me not; I would perish here." It is love. I have said that godly sorrow is connected with faith, faith in Christ. Yes, "Repent and believe the Gospel," was the united command of the Saviour; and Paul testi-

fied, "repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," with the same breath. Repentance is exercised in view of the cross of Christ, and to behold that is to believe; "they shall look on him whom they have pierced and mourn." There they see at a glance the display of God's love and justice, the grace of Christ, the evil of sin, and heaven's unwillingness that men should perish, and the heart gives way at the sight.

*Finally*, to repent truly is to be so sorry for a thing, as not to do it again; or, at least so sorry, as sincerely to intend, and by all means to endeavor not to do it again. There is a real reformation, where there is godly sorrow, and a reformation in every respect, though not such a perfect reformation in any respect, as to secure the penitent against all future falling into sin. With this qualification, I repeat it, that to repent is to be so sorry for an act, as not to do it again. Does not the sorrow of many of you fall short of this? You are sorry; but are you so sorry as to amend your doings? Do you not go on in the same old way, sinning, and sorrowing, and sinning, sin being on both sides of your sorrow? You regret that you do not live a better life, and you think you will, but you form and fulfill no fixed purpose to lead a better life. Why is this? Because there is no change of mind. Your repentance is but an after-care, regret, the sorrow of the world. Godly sorrow worketh a change of mind; and where there is a change of mind, there will be a change of conduct.

And now permit me to ask, not if you have felt sorrow for sin, for, if you have, the question is not

decided in your favor, though if you have not, it is at once decided against you ; but whether you have sorrowed after a godly manner, sorrowed for having offended the great God, on account of the intrinsic evil of sin, for all sin, even for those which are classed in the catalogue of the world as trivial, sorrowed from love and with faith, and unto reformation and holiness ? Then you have sorrowed to salvation ; and whether you have, inquire, examine. It is indispensable that you should see the state of the case. Sorrow is before you ; and sorrow for sin ; you have no choice to exercise in regard to this. There is no alternative. There will be sorrow for sin, either godly or worldly ; penitential or remorseful ; here or hereafter ; temporary or eternal ; in hope or in despair ; salutary or destructive. This alternative there is ; between these two kinds of sorrow you have to choose ; and can you hesitate ? can it take you long to decide which is the less evil ? And will you not make choice of the less ?

And if you mean ever to sorrow unto repentance, will you not now, when this may be your only opportunity, and the stock of sorrow you are laying up, is daily accumulating ? Will you make more work for repentance ?

The repentance recommended, is not to be repented of. There is a repentance which itself needs to be repented of, for there is sin in it. It is regret ; the sorrow of the world ; but this is not true of godly sorrow. None ever regretted having experienced that ; nor would you.

And is it not *reasonable* that you should feel the

sorrow and exercise the repentance I have described? I appeal to heaven if it is not; I appeal to earth if it is not; and I dare make my appeal to hell itself to say if it be not reasonable. Well, then, the Gospel is a reasonable system; the terms of salvation are reasonable. What more can you want? Then if you should never feel this sorrow, if you should die in unrepented sin, what will, what must be, what ought to be your portion hereafter? Will not your perdition be reasonable? Will you not be your own accuser, your own executioner too? What will be your reflections, as you pace the prison of despair? Will they not be such as these? "I am here, because I would be here. I might have been elsewhere, in yonder heaven, where many I knew and loved are. I brought myself here; fool, wretch that I was; and must I be here forever, oh! forever?" Yes, forever, ever, a thousand voices of despair re-echo.

## SERMON XII.

For all this they sinned still.—PSALM lxxviii. 32.

I do not know that there is any part of the Bible, which more easily finds its way to my heart, which more readily and deeply affects it, than those Psalms, for there are several of them, which, like this, exhibit in contrast God's conduct towards men, especially towards that family of men which he selected to be his peculiar people, and their conduct towards him; the methods and measures of God to bring them back to repentance and to reduce them to obedience; and their infatuated, obstinate, and but too often successful resistance of them; his alternate judgments and mercies, his successive smiles and frowns, all having the same benevolent object in view, to melt them into contrition, and to bind them by fear and love and gratitude in unalterable allegiance to his throne, and the strange and almost uniform inefficacy of these divine expedients to the end proposed by them. What a spectacle is here presented! How glorious to God is this exhibition, and how dishonorable to man, how it illustrates by the same light divine goodness, and human wickedness! So God dealt with his ancient people. So he deals with each one of you, treating every individual now very much



as he treated once that nation, striving with you by his spirit for your own salvation ; *striving*, how shameful that striving should be necessary, that there should be any opposition or obstinate holding out on your part, to require striving !

The text succeeds a poetical account of God's dealings with Israel, particularly with that notable generation which saw his wonders in Egypt, and whom he brought out of that house of bondage with a high hand and an out-stretched arm. It beautifully and pathetically relates what God did for them, what marvellous things to deliver them from their enemies, and to provide for their subsistence in their journeyings through a wilderness of drought and sterility ; how he divided the sea and caused them to pass through, and made the waters to stand as a heap ; how in the day time he led them with a cloud and all the night with a light of fire ; and clave the rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink as out of the great depths ; and how when they asked, God can furnish a table in the wilderness, he commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the corn of heaven, and rained flesh also upon them as dust and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea. It relates also how they distrusted and murmured against God, how they tempted and rebelled against him, and how God being provoked to anger, sent his consuming judgments upon them, and yet at the same time, how exceedingly ready he was, being full of compassion, to turn away his anger, so soon as they relented and sought him, though

even then their heart was not right with him. You will find these contrasted statements very beautifully interwoven in this Psalm, if you will read it as I hope you will, and not only this but all the Psalms constructed on the same principle, the one hundred and sixth particularly.

At the close of that part of the narration referred to, come in the words of the text, "for all this, they sinned still;" in brief and simple language describing the inefficacy of all that God had done for them, both in the way of judgment and mercy. They were unreclaimed, they went on unsubdued. And is not the same true of many individuals of this generation, and even of this assembly? At this very period of the history of some of you, after all God's dealings with you hitherto, his alternate mercies and judgments, after all the prosperity you have enjoyed, and the adversity you have suffered, after all the divine treatment you have experienced, the whole of which has been intended to arrest you in the career of sin and to change the determination of your ways, to bring you to repentance, submission, and obedience, at the end of all, may it not, with too much truth and appropriateness, be said of you, "for all this, they sin still."

"For all this, they sinned still." The first part of this declaration implies that what God had been doing for the Israelites, was *intended* and *adapted* to arrest their sinning or to bring them to repentance; for it is said, "for all this," that is, notwithstanding all this, in despite of all this; this that was meant to bring them to repentance, and that was suited to have

this effect ; for all this, they did not repent, they sinned still ; the measures were unsuccessful, the means inefficacious, they sinned still.

I would not have you suppose that the thing complained of, when it is said, "they sinned still," was their not having become perfectly holy. Even Moses, Phineas, Joshua, Caleb, and those who took the side of the Lord in all the rebellions, which marked the progress of the Israelites, were not perfectly holy. They differed most materially, however, from Korah, Dathan, Abiram and the great multitude who sided with them ; and who afterwards for their rebellion on another occasion were debarred from entering into the promised land. Nor is it intended to deny that they did sometimes relent a little, for it is affirmed a little farther on, "when he slew them, then they sought him, and they returned and inquired early after God ;" but the meaning is, that they still remained characteristically and habitually unbelieving and rebellious ; they continued to harbor the same distrustful and unfriendly dispositions towards God ; they did not repent and return to him with the whole heart ; their heart was not right with him ; when he afflicted them, they did indeed cry to him, but as soon as his hand was taken off, they forgot him again. They were not steadfast in his covenant. The others were not perfect in their obedience, but these rendered no acceptable obedience. In the best of them there was evil mingled with the good, but in these there was no good thing toward the Lord God of Israel. If the others were sinners, yet they were penitent sinners, but these were impenitent. The

distinction is very important; the difference is altogether essential. When we say of some of you that you sin still, we do not mean that there are any who do not sin at all, nor that you do never relent, and feel compunctious visitings, and purpose and perhaps accomplish some sort of reformation; but we mean that you do not repent, that you are not subjects of that "saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth in the grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience." We do not pretend to determine what kind of sins you commit. We do not accuse you of the more flagitious transgressions; but we say and mean that you are still characteristically, habitually, and willingly sinners against God. And when we call upon you to stop sinning, we mean that you should cease to be this; that you should repent according to that comprehensive definition of repentance which we have given.

"For all this, they sinned still." Now this, which describes the result of God's dealings with the generation which came out of Egypt, was written for the admonition of others; primarily of those who were contemporary with the Psalmist, but ultimately for the admonition of all, even of us on whom the ends of the world are come. In one place the Apostle tells us, "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning," Rom. xv. 4; and in another, 1 Cor. x. 11: he says, in connection with the very history which this Psalmist recapitulates, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples;

and they were written for our admonition." This use is frequently made of them in the New Testament, and it is remarkable that no portion of the Old Testament is oftener referred to for instruction and warning, than that part of the Mosaic history of which the generation which come out of Egypt is the subject. You will remember the extended allusion to it made in the third and fourth chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the purpose for which it is there introduced. It is referred to on the principle that human nature is in all places and at all times essentially the same, and that God's manner of dealing with men is every where and always in substance the same. Men now are liable to do as that generation did, and if they do as they did, they will be treated as they were treated. If either we are not subject to the same depravity, or exposed to the same penalty, in case we make a similar exhibition of it, there is no propriety in this reference, there is really nothing in that history, which should admonish us. The fact of its being referred to by inspired writers demonstrates that we are no better than they, and that God administers his government on the same principles now, that he did then. Therefore let them who sin still take warning from the fate of those of whom once it was said, "they sinned still." Do not you calculate on impunity in a case in which impunity was never realized by any; "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

There is a remark of some importance that I would introduce here. It is that we who live in these last days of time have on some accounts advantages for

salvation, which our more remote predecessors had not ; advantages arising out of that accumulation of force and increase of weight which certain motives are ever receiving as time makes progress. We have a longer experience to instruct us. We have more numerous examples to admonish us. There is in the history of divine providence as it goes on, a constant repetition of warning ; and the voice which proclaims that the wicked shall not go unpunished, is getting louder and more distinct every day. The generation which came out of Egypt had not all the same examples to warn them, that we have. If they could doubt what would be the fate of rebellion against God, yet how can we ? Who but a madman can now expect impunity in sin ; when God has made so many declarations that he will punish, and when in confirmation of his word, he has so many times actually punished ? Our situation then is more favorable to repentance. We feel a heavier pressure of motive upon us. So also we sin under more aggravating circumstances, for with this increased weight of motive, there comes also a heavier load of responsibility.

But to come to the more direct discussion of the text, let us consider,

1. What God does to keep men from sinning ; to arrest transgressors in their guilty course, and to reclaim them from it.

His doing any thing signifies that he would have them cease from sin, and illustrates the sincerity of the divinely expressed wish : " Oh ! that they would fear me and keep my commandments always,"

and of the exhortations, "turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." God does a *great deal* to arrest the sinner and bring him to repentance; "for *all* this," it is said; implying that much had been done. The truth is, all that God does up to a certain point in the history of every individual, is done with this view. All his dispensations and dealings propose the sinner's repentance and salvation, until that period when his Spirit, which he says shall not strive always with man, ceases to strive with him; that unknown period when he says of the incorrigible trasgressor, as he said of Ephraim, "he is joined to his idols, let him alone." All up to that fearful hour in the sinner's history is with a view to reclaim him from sin, but after that nothing is done with that view. He is given over. The things belonging to his peace are forever hid from his eyes. The harvest is past, the summer is ended, he is not saved, and he is not to be saved. He who sins up to that hour, shall sin on forever; he shall be abandoned to have unmolested his own way; he is left like Pharaoh to harden his heart more and more. And God's thus leaving him, and ceasing from those measures whose intent and tendency are to reclaim, is all that is meant by his hardening the sinner. But antecedently to this much is done for the sinner. He would be astonished, if he were at once to see it all. He would be filled with wonder at God's goodness and forbearance, and at his own ingratitude and rebellion. But he turns his eyes away from it; he does not consider the work of the Lord, nor regard the operation of his hands. He does not

study to know the meaning of every mercy, and of every affliction. He is prospered, but he forgets God, he is afflicted, and his aim is, as soon as possible to forget the affliction. He does not know that God is dealing with him for the sake of his soul. He does not consider that the spirit of the Lord is striving with him about the matter of his salvation. When he wakes up in eternity he will see it, and he will wonder that he could ever have been blind to it. "For *all* this, they sinned still."

The fact that God does so much to arrest the sinner, in his progress, proves that it is all-important to his happiness, essential to his salvation that he should be stopped. His deliverance can be accomplished in no other way. Iniquity must be his ruin, unless he ceases from it. It is on no other condition that he can have any hope from the mercy of God. If he will sin still, his perdition is inevitable.

But that we may answer the question, "What does God do to arrest the sinner?" What are those persuasive measures he resorts to, to make the sinner willing and obedient? What motives does he present? I have time to mention only some of them; nor can I do much more than merely mention them.

1. He proclaims his own infinite abhorrence of sin. And will you persist in the love and practice of that which he abhors; is it not reason enough why you should hate and eschew it, that he hates it in its most plausible form, and in its mildest degree?

2. In the exercise of his sovereign authority, he positively and pointedly forbids it; and dare you do what God forbids, knowing, too, that he forbids it?



Fear you not him who can not only kill the body, but destroy both body and soul in hell ?

3. He has annexed to the commission of sin a penalty, deep as hell, enduring as eternity, inexhaustible as infinitude. He has declared his inflexible determination to inflict that penalty without abatement. He can do it, for all power is his. He will do it, for there is no change in him, "hath he said, and shall he not do it?" There is no possibility of eluding his eye or escaping out of his hand, for his eye and hand are every where. Wilt thou tempt that penalty? Wilt thou defy him to do his utmost?

This penalty he has annexed to all and every sin. He has made every offence committed against him capital. In his penal code, there is no punishment short of death. "Death is the wages of sin; the soul that sinneth it shall die."

4. He has not only threatened, but begun to execute his threatenings. The weight of his indignation long suspended, has fallen on many and buried them in the bottomless pit. Man's life here below is made up of vanity and labor because of sin. The aspect of Providence is dark with the frowns which hang upon it; and the first death has passed or is passing upon all. He has punished. His acts confirm his declarations. Oh! who that reflects on what God has said about sin and done against it, can go on in it? Who dare continue in a course which he has so determinately set himself against, on which he so darkly frowns, and from which he so terrifically warns?

This is a part of what he has done. And surely

this were enough to frighten the most courageous into obedience, if one could be frightened into that, whose principle and fulfillment is love, which casteth out fear.

But he has adopted a different set of measures ; measures inviting, attracting, winning, melting ; measures of mercy. He would draw by cords of love ; he would overcome by methods of kindness. He declares his reluctance to punish. He proclaims his willingness to forgive ; and that he might consistently pardon he lets us see at what expense he has been ; how that to spare us, he spared not his own Son, but laid on him the iniquities of us all, that, by his stripes, we might be healed. He has consented that one, infinitely dear to him, should stand in our place, and bear the curse for us, that we might be redeemed from the curse. The cross of Christ, at the same time, in the same exhibition, demonstrates that God will punish sin, and that he would spare the sinner. There comes forth from it the most powerful of all possible motives ; mercy and judgment meet there. All that fear can do, and all that love can do are here united in one appeal, irresistible, I would say, but that, alas ! it is resisted. Can you gaze upon the cross of Calvary, and go on in sin ? If you can, there remaineth nothing more ; you must go on.

These are measures which God employs with sinners generally. But what has he done for you in particular ? Think ; you know your own private history best. Have you never felt him near you ? Have you not sometimes thought that God was deal-

mity to any other being, though it may be inimical to many. It is capable of being reconciled to others. The greatest enemies in politics are easily reconciled. It is only to make their interests identical, and the work of reconciliation is done. No change divine of heart is necessary. But men are such enemies to God that the very seat of the enmity has to be upturned and radically altered, before reconciliation takes place. A man does not become a friend of God by being convinced that it is his interest to be on terms of friendship with God. He holds out long after that. I would observe here, before I proceed farther, how much sin must be against God to justify such language as this, in which there is an entire overlooking of its opposition to other beings, and a recognition of it as alone against God. Think how much injury to men is often done by a particular sin; how much it is against them, as, for example, the sin of David, of Jeroboam, of Manasseh. And yet the same sin is so much more against God than against men, that the Holy Spirit directs that, in the confession of it, it shall be spoken of as only against God. Think of the evil towards men involved in murder, seduction, intemperance. How heinous, as against men, those offences are! But what must they be as against God, how much more evil and heinous, when the evil and heinousness of them, great as it is against men, is as nothing in comparison with their enormity as against God.

I proceed now to my main remark, which is, *that sin's greatest aggravation is its being against God.* If it were not so, it is clear that so much stress would

not be laid on this circumstance in the confession of it. When David says, "against thee, thee only have I sinned," he does not mean merely to proclaim the *fact* that sin is exclusively against God, but to signify that that constitutes the chief evil of it, and that it was that view of sin which most painfully affected him; "*against thee*," that was what so greatly troubled him. He was sorry for the injury he had done to others; (and what grief, what agony often attends the recollection of the injury done to others by our sins,) but deep as that grief was, it was nothing to the sorrow he felt for having sinned against God; "they shall look on me whom they have pierced and mourn as one mourneth for a first born." But how does this so greatly aggravate sin, its being against God? What if it is against God? Who is God? and what is he to us, that our sinning against him should so affect us? I will tell you.

I suppose that when David said, "against thee," he thought of the *greatness* and *majesty* of God, and it affected him that he had sinned against a being of such awful grandeur, of such terrible glory, a being of understanding infinite, and power almighty; against him he had presumed, he had dared to sin. He thought too of his *holiness*; not against a polluted fellow creature merely had he sinned, but against him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look at iniquity, in whose sight even the heavens are not clean; God, glorious in holiness, of whom the seraphim say continually to each other, "holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts." *Against thee*. He reflected moreover, I suppose, on

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the *equity and justice* of God ; on the rectitude of his government, the excellence of his law, and the reasonableness of his requirements. They were not grievous commandments he had broken. It was not a hard yoke he had disdained. The law he had transgressed was holy, just, and good. Obedience to it was no less conducive to his good than to God's glory. But a consideration which still more deeply affected him was the *goodness* of God ; against *thee*, so good to all, to me so benevolent, so beneficent. He thought of the condescension of God, his bounty, his forbearance, his compassion, of goodness in all its various forms, its universality, its liberality, its unweariedness. Against him, the great, holy, just, wise and good Jehovah he had sinned. He reflected on all his perfections ; and then on his *relations*, as creator, preserver, benefactor ; *his* creator, preserver, and benefactor ; against thee, the former of my body, the father of my spirit, my bountiful provider, my watchful guardian, my powerful protector, in whom I live and move and have my being ; against thee, on whom I am so continually and completely dependant. He thought of his *obligations*, of all that he owed to God. He had sinned against the being who had the strongest claims on him originally, and who had been by his munificent and perpetual benefactions bringing him continually more in debt. He thought of all that God had done for his soul. He had pardoned all his sins, had saved him from going down to the pit, having himself found a ransom for him, and even the sin he was repenting of, God had forgiven !

There was at least one other thought present to

the mind of the Psalmist. It was of God's omnipresence, for he alludes to it in this very connection. All he had done against God, he had done *before* him, in his immediate presence; "and done this evil *in thy sight*;" against thee and before thee I have sinned.

After this brief and very imperfect survey, who does not see that the grand aggravation of sin is its being against God.

But did this attach enormity to the sin of David merely? Have not others sinned against the same being? Yes, all who have sinned, have sinned against God, and all the sins of each have been against God. There is no sin which is not against God. It is not sin, if it is not against God. *Thou* art the man, as well as he whom Nathan addressed in this language, and *thou*, and *thou*, and the language in which he replied equally well becomes you, "I have sinned against the Lord."

But have you ever taken this view, and been affected by this consideration? Have you ever in your confession gone beyond, "I have sinned." Has your heart ever impelled you to add with emphasis *against thee*. This is the grand defect of many convictions and repentances. Have you ever entered into the deep meaning of those two words *against thee*? If you have not, you are still a stranger to genuine, evangelical repentance.

1. This subject shows us why conviction of sin is often so slight. It is because the sin is not regarded as against God. That most important circumstance of sin is overlooked. The *object* of sin is not con-



templated and considered. The person perceives and confesses only that he has sinned, and no wonder that does not greatly affect him. That is not the affecting consideration. The affecting consideration is its being against God. Many persons acknowledge to us that they are sinners, but they cannot, they say, perceive that they are so great sinners, as we would have them believe. Their whole difficulty arises from their not contemplating sin as *against God*. It is my sinning against God and *such* a God, that makes me so great a sinner. If I forget the object of my sin, I shall of course be blind to its enormity. Look at your sin in the light of this subject, as *against God*; and think of it too, as *before* him, against him and before him; and can you any longer doubt that you are a great sinner? You have heard sometimes an indignant master, or parent address a servant or child in language like this, "dare you disobey my orders in my presence, insult me to my face," and you felt that that circumstance aggravated the disobedience. But do you not know that all God's orders are disobeyed in his presence. We never sin but in his sight. All iniquity insults him to his face.

2. We see from this subject why true repentance equally regards all sin. It does so because all sin is against God. The reason why the true penitent repents of any sin is its being against God, and this reason holds with respect to all sin whatsoever. It is all against God. If there were any sins not against God, he might spare those; but there is not, cannot be any such sin. Spurious repentance is partial. It sorrows on account of one sin, but for another feels no grief, and

the reason is that it recognizes no common character as belonging to all sins, and constituting their turpitude. Judas never repented but of one sin. Saul was several times sorry. Neither of them repented of all their sins, because they repented of no one of them on right principles, and for the proper reason.

3. We see why the reformation that follows true repentance is thorough. The true penitent sorrowing for sin as against God, and perceiving all sin to be against God, for the reason that he renounces *any*, renounces *every* sin. It grieves him so that he has done so much against God, that he cannot consent to do any thing more against him, and his daily prayer is, "let not any iniquity have dominion over me; search and see if there be any evil way in me."

4. We see why sin is no trifle, viz: because it is against God. Its object gives it importance. An offence small in itself, becomes great if directed against majesty. And for the same reason that sin generally is no trifle, no sin is a trifle, because there is no sin which is not against God. This, therefore, redeems every sin from the insignificance which some would attach to certain sins.

That language applied to sin, "it is nothing, it is a trifle, a venial offence, a mere peccadillo," would never be used, if men contemplated sin as against God.

The subject is a *practical* one, will you then make a practical use of it? It concerns you, it concerns every sinner; will you then allow it to interest you? Will you investigate the subject, and see if the view

I have presented of sin is correct? And if it is against God, and you find it so, will you let your mind dwell on that circumstance of sin? Will you weigh those two words *against thee*? Will you ponder on the import of them?

If sin is against God, and you have sinned against him, is it not time to confess it, and to confess it as against God, and to God? Is it not high time to say, each of you, "against thee, and thee only have I sinned?" Would it be premature if you were to adopt this confession to-day? Will you do it? Will you say in the ear that is never dull, "against thee have I sinned," being sorry that you have done so, and resolving to do so no more? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," he is faithful, for he has said he will; and just, for now he can be just and justify him who believes in Jesus; and he will do more; he will cleanse us from all unrighteousness, for "the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son cleanses us from all sin."

5. We see why, even where there is some conviction of sin, it is no deeper, often but a slight seriousness. It is because sin is not regarded as *against God*.

6. We see why it is that you can sin with so little compunction, ay, without feeling of any kind, why you can so recklessly neglect this and that duty. It is because you don't consider that you are doing it to God.

7. How dreadful the approach to the judgment seat will be to those who neglect the mercy seat. How much more formidable human tribunals would

be, if the judge were the being personally offended ; if he were the object of the crime on which he sits in judgment. This terror belongs to the tribunal before which you are to appear.

8. We see why men are so proud, and carry themselves so haughtily. They forget God, especially do they forget how vile and guilty they have made themselves by sinning against him.

## SERMON XI.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.—  
2 CORINTHIANS vii. 10.

THE Apostle Paul wrote two epistles to the church which he had instrumentally established at Corinth. The first was in answer to a letter received from that church, as he expressly says; and if that letter from Corinth were now in existence, it would, undoubtedly, throw some light on such parts of the answer to it, as are now more or less obscure. In his first epistle, the Apostle sharply reproveth the Corinthians for tolerating in their communion a notorious offender, a certain incestuous person. He rebukes them for being puffed up and not rather mourning, that he that had done the deed might be taken away from among them, for he asks, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" He commands them not to keep company with such a person, being called a brother; no, not to eat; nay more, he enjoins it upon them to put away from among themselves the wicked person; to deliver him unto Satan; that is, to excommunicate him from that visible body over which the Lord Jesus Christ presides, and to regard him as belonging to that other community,

which is subject to the prince of the power of the air ; and this " for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the Lord Jesus." Before writing this second epistle, Paul had heard through Titus, who had come from Corinth, that his instructions had been complied with, and that, as a church, they had sorrowed deeply on account of the evil done by one of their members ; and he takes notice of it in this chapter. He speaks of the comfort he had received in hearing of their mourning, and tells them that though he grieved for the necessity of writing that letter to them, yet he does not repent having written it, nor that it had made them sorry, because they had been made sorry but for a season, and had sorrowed to repentance ; that is, as the word literally signifies, to a change of mind, and, consequently, of conduct. They had been made sorry after a godly manner, and, therefore, had received no damage by him in any thing ; and then he introduces this general proposition, " For godly sorrow, (or sorrow according to God, that is, such as he requires, and as is derived from divine considerations,) worketh repentance (or a change of mind,) to salvation not to be repented of, (regretted,) but the sorrow of the world worketh death." This is our subject—sorrow.

It is melancholy to reflect, my hearers, that of all, even of those who are now most elate, and prosperous, and gay, we may, with absolute certainty predict sorrow. Yes, whosoever thou art, oh ! man, and whatsoever thy present circumstances, sorrow awaits thee. The tear, the sigh, the sob, the bitter regret shall be thine. That cup, which now spar-

kles as thou puttest it to thy lips to drink its delicious draught, shall pass away and be exchanged for another, in which the wormwood and the gall will constitute the chief ingredients. It is certain, inevitable, unless thou hast already drunk thy bitter portion, sown all thy tears, and a merciful Providence should remove you suddenly to that country where no tear is secreted, and whence all the causes of sorrow are excluded. Except on this single condition, it is inevitable; and it is *suitable* that you should have experience of sorrow; for its causes surround and pervade you. They are in you and about you. Events will occur, which cannot but mournfully affect you. You are bound by the tender ties of affection to many, and you will painfully feel it, as one after another they are severed; and you will owe to many the sorrow of sympathy; but above all you have, each of you, done that for which you should sorrow; if sorrow were not necessary, yet it is most appropriate; if repentance were not a duty, yet it ought to be esteemed a privilege. Sorrow is the sinner's road to rejoicing. Through tribulation and *much* tribulation, we enter into the kingdom of God. Tears are the seeds of joy, and blessed are they that mourn. But sorrow is absolutely *obligatory* as well as suitable. "Be afflicted and mourn and weep," is an apostolical exhortation. Sorrow is of the very essence of repentance; and what are we more peremptorily or more frequently commanded to do than to repent? And, in fine, sorrow is, in every sense, *necessary*; our very salvation is suspended on it. It is impracticable without it, "for godly sorrow

worketh repentance to salvation ;” and salvation is never wrought without it. Nor is it necessary by arbitrary appointment merely ; but in the very nature of things. The return and submission of the rebel involves sorrow as a part of it. Oh ! ingrate child of the best of fathers, couldest thou, even if thou mightest, return to that home which thou hast abandoned, and fall into that embrace of love which thou didst spurn, and enjoy, unupbraided, thy father’s favor and thy father’s bounty, without the feeling of sorrow ? Could you ? would you ? We should not too fervently deprecate sorrow ; and there is a species of it that we should court and cherish. We hear sometimes of the luxury there is in tears, and of the joy of grief ; of penitential tears, of that grief, which is according to God, it is true.

But will any sorrow suffice ? Does it matter not what evil causes the sorrow ? Do all tears produce joy ? No ; salvation is not suspended on sorrow without regard to its cause. No tear germinates and fructifies unto joy, but the penitential tear. That sorrow which pain, loss, disappointment, bereavement, and various other like causes produce, is not necessarily salutary. It is often destructive : “ the sorrow of the world,” that is, that which is produced by mere worldly considerations, “ worketh death.” It emaciates the body and drinks up the spirit. Often it makes men more rebellious against God ; and not unfrequently arms them against their own lives. The sorrow that is salutary has *sin* for its cause. That is the evil which gives rise to it ; and here let me introduce a reflection. How little of all



the mourning that exists among men, is on account of sin, although sin is the cause of all the evils on account of which they mourn, and ought, therefore, to excite a permanent sorrow, and when, moreover, sin is the only thing for which it is profitable to indulge sorrow. We speak of the benefits of affliction generally; but they are confined to that affliction which is on account of sin; and other affliction is beneficial, only as it may conduce to this. And let me ask you here, for I would interweave rather than append an application, has sin ever caused you sorrow? Other evils have afflicted you; but has this greatest, this elemental evil, that thou hast sinned against God, that thou hast broken his law, rebelled against his authority, insulted his throne, and cast his favors back upon him? Hast thou gone to the root of the matter, where the evil originated, and sorrowed there?

But will every species of sorrow for sin suffice? Is it enough that sin be the cause of the sorrow? No. *Judas* sorrowed sincerely and deeply, and sin was the cause of his sorrow, "I have sinned," said he, "in that I have betrayed innocent blood;" but his sorrow wrought only death. To mere sorrow on account of sin the Scriptures make no promise; on it they set no value. Nor should they; we do not. It is involuntary; no one supposes that mere regret for having done a wrong thing, without regard to the particular considerations which inspire the regret, has any virtue in it. *Judas* was no better for that kind of repentance which he exercised. It was but a bitter foretaste of that remorseful repentance, which

is a part of his punishment, a pang of hell on earth. In the original language of the New Testament, as you doubtless remember to have often heard, there is a word appropriated to this exercise, a word expressive of simple sorrow for sin ; and it is quite a different word from that which is used, when repentance is enjoined as a duty, or spoken in connection with salvation, although, through the poverty of our language, both are translated repentance. The former word signifies literally, *a care or concern after a thing*, regret. The latter, *a change of mind*. They are both used in this chapter ; the first in verse 8, "I do not repent, though I did repent ;" and in the text, "not to be repented of," that is, not to be regretted. The other is used in verse 9, and also in the text, "godly sorrow worketh *repentance*," not regret merely, but a change of mind and consequently of conduct. The first word is employed to denote the repentance of *Judas*, the other that of *Peter*. The latter kind of repentance is voluntary, and the subject of command and promise, but the former is involuntary. It is a part of the entail of sin. It is or will be universal. It often precedes and attends true and saving repentance ; and in the case of all those who die without true repentance, it *will* be a part of their endless portion. It is the product of prisons and punishments ; and in view of this kind of repentance, that establishment yonder may be well called a penitentiary, though I fear, it nurses but little of the other species of repentance. The distinction is clear, and it is important, and it is so familiar, that perhaps I have needlessly dwelt upon it ; we recog-

nize it in the judgments we form of others, though we cannot often apply it. But is it not often overlooked when we sit in judgment on ourselves? Do we distinguish, as we ought, between the sorrow that is according to God, and the sorrow of the world; between the regret and the change of mind? And do not many satisfy themselves with this, that they have felt the mere regret? When one of you is asked if you have repented, do you not understand the interrogator as enquiring simply whether you have felt sorry for having done wrong? And if you can say, "oh! yes, I have repented, I do repent, I never did wrong, but I was afterwards sorry for it," do you not feel as if you had satisfactorily answered the inquiry? But you have not. All that you affirm of yourself may be true, and yet you may be as utter a stranger to available repentance, as he is, who was never invited to the exercise of it. I know you have felt sorry. I do not wish you to tell me that you have. It is nature to feel sorry. It requires no grace to feel sorry. You cannot help feeling sorry, there is no virtue, for there is no voluntariness in it. The question is not whether you have felt sorry, but what has made you feel sorry, whether you have been made sorry after a godly manner, and what your feeling sorry has made you, what has produced your sorrow, and what your sorrow has produced. The point is not settled, when it is ascertained that you have experienced sorrow on account of sin. Both the cause and the effect of that sorrow are to be investigated, and it is upon the result of this investigation that the decision turns against, or

in favor of you. Your sorrow may be that of the world. It must be of a godly sort, or it is not to salvation. Rely not then on the bare fact of your sorrow.

But to describe with some particularity that peculiar sorrow, which is called godly or according to God, because it is such as he requires, and because it has a special regard to him. To sorrow after a godly manner, or to repent truly is,

1. To feel sorrow for sin as offending God, rather than as injuring ourselves or others. The true penitent views sin in its every aspect, but chiefly as it looketh towards God. He grieves because of the mischief it does himself and may do others, but he grieves chiefly because of the injury it offers to God. It displeases, it dishonors, its tendency is to dethrone God. His boundless goodness it maltreats, his supreme authority it insults, and his infinite power it defies. It is conduct unworthy of a creature, a subject, a ward, a beneficiary, a child. "I have sinned," was the confession of Judas; he says not "against God." But hear the confession of the penitent prodigal. "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight;" hear another's, "against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight;" and still another's, "mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Mark the difference. In the first case, see the sorrow of the world; in the other instances, behold the sorrow according to God; hence,

2. It is to feel sorrow for sin as an evil in itself, and not merely, nor yet principally in its conse-

quences. The effects of sin are evil, but sin itself is more evil, and it would be evil, though it produced no effects. There is harm from it, but there is still more harm in it. The grand evil of sin consists in its moral character, not in its physical consequences. That the will of an infinitely perfect being should be contravened or murmured at by one of his intelligent creation, that his high and rightful authority should be disregarded, and a law dictated by his wisdom and transcribed from his attributes broken and broken again, that such a sovereign should be rebelled against, such a benefactor ungratefully treated, and such a father dishonored, disobeyed and even hated, that then is the evil of sin. These are the views of the true penitent, and these views call forth mourning from him. His sorrow is according to God. And, hence, he recognizes no class of sins as trivial, as unworthy of sorrow, or as deserving only a very low degree of sorrow. How can he, when every sin, equally with every other, is a contravention of the same supreme will, a breach of the same good and holy law, an act of rebellion against the same heavenly sovereign. For the least heinous of all sins, he sorrows, and sorrows deeply, and can never think that he has sorrowed enough. But it deserves to be made a distinct observation,

3. That to repent truly is to feel sorrow for all sin. If true repentance regards sin as an evil in itself, then, as every sin is an evil in itself, it must have respect to all sin. Does the genuine penitent view sin as having God for its object? and does he sorrow for it on that account? and is not God the object of

every sin equally? A man may regret one sin and not another; but he cannot repent of one, without repenting of all. Repentance is universal with regard to sin, because the considerations which excite it apply equally to all sin, and because, moreover, it involves a change of mind. Some persons talk of having repented of some sins and not of others. Their repentance is of the same species with his, who went and hanged himself. They have truly repented of none, or they would have repented of all. Their's is the sorrow of the world. That is partial; but not so godly sorrow. It is universal. The true penitent grieves to have offended God in any respect.

4. Godly sorrow originates in *love*, and is connected with *faith*. A man may regret having offended a being whom he hates, because he may fear his vengeance; but he grieves only for having offended a being whom he loves. Fear may shake the heart, but it is love alone that melts it. The revelation of the majesty and justice of God may make it tremble, but it is only a discovery of his loveliness that softens and subdues it. The slave crouches and cowers, and "Don't strike," he says, "I am sorry; I will do so no more." It is fear. He would escape if he could; and he will offend again, if he can cover his sin. The child seeks the very bosom he has pierced, and there weeps and hides his head, "Strike," he says, "I deserve it; I have sinned; but spurn me not; I would perish here." It is love. I have said that godly sorrow is connected with faith, faith in Christ. Yes, "Repent and believe the Gospel," was the united command of the Saviour; and Paul testi-

fied, "repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," with the same breath. Repentance is exercised in view of the cross of Christ, and to behold that is to believe; "they shall look on him whom they have pierced and mourn." There they see at a glance the display of God's love and justice, the grace of Christ, the evil of sin, and heaven's unwillingness that men should perish, and the heart gives way at the sight.

*Finally*, to repent truly is to be so sorry for a thing, as not to do it again; or, at least so sorry, as sincerely to intend, and by all means to endeavor not to do it again. There is a real reformation, where there is godly sorrow, and a reformation in every respect, though not such a perfect reformation in any respect, as to secure the penitent against all future falling into sin. With this qualification, I repeat it, that to repent is to be so sorry for an act, as not to do it again. Does not the sorrow of many of you fall short of this? You are sorry; but are you so sorry as to amend your doings? Do you not go on in the same old way, sinning, and sorrowing, and sinning, sin being on both sides of your sorrow? You regret that you do not live a better life, and you think you will, but you form and fulfill no fixed purpose to lead a better life. Why is this? Because there is no change of mind. Your repentance is but an after-care, regret, the sorrow of the world. Godly sorrow worketh a change of mind; and where there is a change of mind, there will be a change of conduct.

And now permit me to ask, not if you have felt sorrow for sin, for, if you have, the question is not

decided in your favor, though if you have not, it is at once decided against you ; but whether you have sorrowed after a godly manner, sorrowed for having offended the great God, on account of the intrinsic evil of sin, for all sin, even for those which are classed in the catalogue of the world as trivial, sorrowed from love and with faith, and unto reformation and holiness ? Then you have sorrowed to salvation ; and whether you have, inquire, examine. It is indispensable that you should see the state of the case. Sorrow is before you ; and sorrow for sin ; you have no choice to exercise in regard to this. There is no alternative. There will be sorrow for sin, either godly or worldly ; penitential or remorseful ; here or hereafter ; temporary or eternal ; in hope or in despair ; salutary or destructive. This alternative there is ; between these two kinds of sorrow you have to choose ; and can you hesitate ? can it take you long to decide which is the less evil ? And will you not make choice of the less ?

And if you mean ever to sorrow unto repentance, will you not now, when this may be your only opportunity, and the stock of sorrow you are laying up, is daily accumulating ? Will you make more work for repentance ?

The repentance recommended, is not to be repented of. There is a repentance which itself needs to be repented of, for there is sin in it. It is regret ; the sorrow of the world ; but this is not true of godly sorrow. None ever regretted having experienced that ; nor would you.

And is it not *reasonable* that you should feel the



sorrow and exercise the repentance I have described? I appeal to heaven if it is not; I appeal to earth if it is not; and I dare make my appeal to hell itself to say if it be not reasonable. Well, then, the Gospel is a reasonable system; the terms of salvation are reasonable. What more can you want? Then if you should never feel this sorrow, if you should die in unrepented sin, what will, what must be, what ought to be your portion hereafter? Will not your perdition be reasonable? Will you not be your own accuser, your own executioner too? What will be your reflections, as you pace the prison of despair? Will they not be such as these? "I am here, because I would be here. I might have been elsewhere, in yonder heaven, where many I knew and loved are. I brought myself here; fool, wretch that I was; and must I be here forever, oh! forever?" Yes, forever, ever, a thousand voices of despair re-echo.

## SERMON XII.

For all this they sinned still.—PSALM lxxviii. 32.

I do not know that there is any part of the Bible, which more easily finds its way to my heart, which more readily and deeply affects it, than those Psalms, for there are several of them, which, like this, exhibit in contrast God's conduct towards men, especially towards that family of men which he selected to be his peculiar people, and their conduct towards him; the methods and measures of God to bring them back to repentance and to reduce them to obedience; and their infatuated, obstinate, and but too often successful resistance of them; his alternate judgments and mercies, his successive smiles and frowns, all having the same benevolent object in view, to melt them into contrition, and to bind them by fear and love and gratitude in unalterable allegiance to his throne, and the strange and almost uniform inefficacy of these divine expedients to the end proposed by them. What a spectacle is here presented! How glorious to God is this exhibition, and how dishonorable to man, how it illustrates by the same light divine goodness, and human wickedness! So God dealt with his ancient people. So he deals with each one of you, treating every individual now very much

as he treated once that nation, striving with you by his spirit for your own salvation ; *striving*, how shameful that striving should be necessary, that there should be any opposition or obstinate holding out on your part, to require striving !

The text succeeds a poetical account of God's dealings with Israel, particularly with that notable generation which saw his wonders in Egypt, and whom he brought out of that house of bondage with a high hand and an out-stretched arm. It beautifully and pathetically relates what God did for them, what marvellous things to deliver them from their enemies, and to provide for their subsistence in their journeyings through a wilderness of drought and sterility ; how he divided the sea and caused them to pass through, and made the waters to stand as a heap ; how in the day time he led them with a cloud and all the night with a light of fire ; and clave the rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink as out of the great depths ; and how when they asked, God can furnish a table in the wilderness, he commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the corn of heaven, and rained flesh also upon them as dust and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea. It relates also how they distrusted and murmured against God, how they tempted and rebelled against him, and how God being provoked to anger, sent his consuming judgments upon them, and yet at the same time, how exceedingly ready he was, being full of compassion, to turn away his anger, so soon as they relented and sought him, though

even then their heart was not right with him. You will find these contrasted statements very beautifully interwoven in this Psalm, if you will read it as I hope you will, and not only this but all the Psalms constructed on the same principle, the one hundred and sixth particularly.

At the close of that part of the narration referred to, come in the words of the text, "for all this, they sinned still;" in brief and simple language describing the inefficacy of all that God had done for them, both in the way of judgment and mercy. They were unreclaimed, they went on unsubdued. And is not the same true of many individuals of this generation, and even of this assembly? At this very period of the history of some of you, after all God's dealings with you hitherto, his alternate mercies and judgments, after all the prosperity you have enjoyed, and the adversity you have suffered, after all the divine treatment you have experienced, the whole of which has been intended to arrest you in the career of sin and to change the determination of your ways, to bring you to repentance, submission, and obedience, at the end of all, may it not, with too much truth and appropriateness, be said of you, "for all this, they sin still."

"For all this, they sinned still." The first part of this declaration implies that what God had been doing for the Israelites, was *intended* and *adapted* to arrest their sinning or to bring them to repentance; for it is said, "for all this," that is, notwithstanding all this, in despite of all this; this that was meant to bring them to repentance, and that was suited to have

this effect ; for all this, they did not repent, they sinned still ; the measures were unsuccessful, the means inefficacious, they sinned still.

I would not have you suppose that the thing complained of, when it is said, "they sinned still," was their not having become perfectly holy. Even Moses, Phineas, Joshua, Caleb, and those who took the side of the Lord in all the rebellions, which marked the progress of the Israelites, were not perfectly holy. They differed most materially, however, from Korah, Dathan, Abiram and the great multitude who sided with them ; and who afterwards for their rebellion on another occasion were debarred from entering into the promised land. Nor is it intended to deny that they did sometimes relent a little, for it is affirmed a little farther on, "when he slew them, then they sought him, and they returned and inquired early after God ;" but the meaning is, that they still remained characteristically and habitually unbelieving and rebellious ; they continued to harbor the same distrustful and unfriendly dispositions towards God ; they did not repent and return to him with the whole heart ; their heart was not right with him ; when he afflicted them, they did indeed cry to him, but as soon as his hand was taken off, they forgot him again. They were not steadfast in his covenant. The others were not perfect in their obedience, but these rendered no acceptable obedience. In the best of them there was evil mingled with the good, but in these there was no good thing toward the Lord God of Israel. If the others were sinners, yet they were penitent sinners, but these were impenitent. The

distinction is very important; the difference is altogether essential. When we say of some of you that you sin still, we do not mean that there are any who do not sin at all, nor that you do never relent, and feel compunctious visitings, and purpose and perhaps accomplish some sort of reformation; but we mean that you do not repent, that you are not subjects of that "saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth in the grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience." We do not pretend to determine what kind of sins you commit. We do not accuse you of the more flagitious transgressions; but we say and mean that you are still characteristically, habitually, and willingly sinners against God. And when we call upon you to stop sinning, we mean that you should cease to be this; that you should repent according to that comprehensive definition of repentance which we have given.

"For all this, they sinned still." Now this, which describes the result of God's dealings with the generation which came out of Egypt, was written for the admonition of others; primarily of those who were contemporary with the Psalmist, but ultimately for the admonition of all, even of us on whom the ends of the world are come. In one place the Apostle tells us, "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning," Rom. xv. 4; and in another, 1 Cor. x. 11: he says, in connection with the very history which this Psalmist recapitulates, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples,

and they were written for our admonition." This use is frequently made of them in the New Testament, and it is remarkable that no portion of the Old Testament is oftener referred to for instruction and warning, than that part of the Mosaic history of which the generation which come out of Egypt is the subject. You will remember the extended allusion to it made in the third and fourth chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the purpose for which it is there introduced. It is referred to on the principle that human nature is in all places and at all times essentially the same, and that God's manner of dealing with men is every where and always in substance the same. Men now are liable to do as that generation did, and if they do as they did, they will be treated as they were treated. If either we are not subject to the same depravity, or exposed to the same penalty, in case we make a similar exhibition of it, there is no propriety in this reference, there is really nothing in that history, which should admonish us. The fact of its being referred to by inspired writers demonstrates that we are no better than they, and that God administers his government on the same principles now, that he did then. Therefore let them who sin still take warning from the fate of those of whom once it was said, "they sinned still." Do not you calculate on impunity in a case in which impunity was never realized by any; "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

There is a remark of some importance that I would introduce here. It is that we who live in these last days of time have on some accounts advantages for

salvation, which our more remote predecessors had not ; advantages arising out of that accumulation of force and increase of weight which certain motives are ever receiving as time makes progress. We have a longer experience to instruct us. We have more numerous examples to admonish us. There is in the history of divine providence as it goes on, a constant repetition of warning ; and the voice which proclaims that the wicked shall not go unpunished, is getting louder and more distinct every day. The generation which came out of Egypt had not all the same examples to warn them, that we have. If they could doubt what would be the fate of rebellion against God, yet how can we ? Who but a madman can now expect impunity in sin ; when God has made so many declarations that he will punish, and when in confirmation of his word, he has so many times actually punished ? Our situation then is more favorable to repentance. We feel a heavier pressure of motive upon us. So also we sin under more aggravating circumstances, for with this increased weight of motive, there comes also a heavier load of responsibility.

But to come to the more direct discussion of the text, let us consider,

1. What God does to keep men from sinning ; to arrest transgressors in their guilty course, and to reclaim them from it.

His doing any thing signifies that he would have them cease from sin, and illustrates the sincerity of the divinely expressed wish : " Oh ! that they would fear me and keep my commandments always,"



and of the exhortations, "turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." God does a *great deal* to arrest the sinner and bring him to repentance; "for *all* this," it is said; implying that much had been done. The truth is, all that God does up to a certain point in the history of every individual, is done with this view. All his dispensations and dealings propose the sinner's repentance and salvation, until that period when his Spirit, which he says shall not strive always with man, ceases to strive with him; that unknown period when he says of the incorrigible trasgressor, as he said of Ephraim, "he is joined to his idols, let him alone." All up to that fearful hour in the sinner's history is with a view to reclaim him from sin, but after that nothing is done with that view. He is given over. The things belonging to his peace are forever hid from his eyes. The harvest is past, the summer is ended, he is not saved, and he is not to be saved. He who sins up to that hour, shall sin on forever; he shall be abandoned to have unmolested his own way; he is left like Pharaoh to harden his heart more and more. And God's thus leaving him, and ceasing from those measures whose intent and tendency are to reclaim, is all that is meant by his hardening the sinner. But antecedently to this much is done for the sinner. He would be astonished, if he were at once to see it all. He would be filled with wonder at God's goodness and forbearance, and at his own ingratitude and rebellion. But he turns his eyes away from it; he does not consider the work of the Lord, nor regard the operation of his hands. He does not

study to know the meaning of every mercy, and of every affliction. He is prospered, but he forgets God, he is afflicted, and his aim is, as soon as possible to forget the affliction. He does not know that God is dealing with him for the sake of his soul. He does not consider that the spirit of the Lord is striving with him about the matter of his salvation. When he wakes up in eternity he will see it, and he will wonder that he could ever have been blind to it. "For *all* this, they sinned still."

The fact that God does so much to arrest the sinner, in his progress, proves that it is all-important to his happiness, essential to his salvation that he should be stopped. His deliverance can be accomplished in no other way. Iniquity must be his ruin, unless he ceases from it. It is on no other condition that he can have any hope from the mercy of God. If he will sin still, his perdition is inevitable.

But that we may answer the question, "What does God do to arrest the sinner?" What are those persuasive measures he resorts to, to make the sinner willing and obedient? What motives does he present? I have time to mention only some of them; nor can I do much more than merely mention them.

1. He proclaims his own infinite abhorrence of sin. And will you persist in the love and practice of that which he abhors; is it not reason enough why you should hate and eschew it, that he hates it in its most plausible form, and in its mildest degree?

2. In the exercise of his sovereign authority, he positively and pointedly forbids it; and dare you do what God forbids, knowing, too, that he forbids it?

Fear you not him who can not only kill the body, but destroy both body and soul in hell?

3. He has annexed to the commission of sin a penalty, deep as hell, enduring as eternity, inexhaustible as infinitude. He has declared his inflexible determination to inflict that penalty without abatement. He can do it, for all power is his. He will do it, for there is no change in him, "hath he said, and shall he not do it?" There is no possibility of eluding his eye or escaping out of his hand, for his eye and hand are every where. Wilt thou tempt that penalty? Wilt thou defy him to do his utmost?

This penalty he has annexed to all and every sin. He has made every offence committed against him capital. In his penal code, there is no punishment short of death. "Death is the wages of sin; the soul that sinneth it shall die."

4. He has not only threatened, but begun to execute his threatenings. The weight of his indignation long suspended, has fallen on many and buried them in the bottomless pit. Man's life here below is made up of vanity and labor because of sin. The aspect of Providence is dark with the frowns which hang upon it; and the first death has passed or is passing upon all. He has punished. His acts confirm his declarations. Oh! who that reflects on what God has said about sin and done against it, can go on in it? Who dare continue in a course which he has so determinately set himself against, on which he so darkly frowns, and from which he so terrifically warns?

This is a part of what he has done. And surely

this were enough to frighten the most courageous into obedience, if one could be frightened into that, whose principle and fulfillment is love, which casteth out fear.

But he has adopted a different set of measures ; measures inviting, attracting, winning, melting ; measures of mercy. He would draw by cords of love ; he would overcome by methods of kindness. He declares his reluctance to punish. He proclaims his willingness to forgive ; and that he might consistently pardon he lets us see at what expense he has been ; how that to spare us, he spared not his own Son, but laid on him the iniquities of us all, that, by his stripes, we might be healed. He has consented that one, infinitely dear to him, should stand in our place, and bear the curse for us, that we might be redeemed from the curse. The cross of Christ, at the same time, in the same exhibition, demonstrates that God will punish sin, and that he would spare the sinner. There comes forth from it the most powerful of all possible motives ; mercy and judgment meet there. All that fear can do, and all that love can do are here united in one appeal, irresistible, I would say, but that, alas ! it is resisted. Can you gaze upon the cross of Calvary, and go on in sin ? If you can, there remaineth nothing more ; you must go on.

These are measures which God employs with sinners generally. But what has he done for you in particular ? Think ; you know your own private history best. Have you never felt him near you ? Have you not sometimes thought that God was deal-

ing with you? Have you never enjoyed blessings, and suffered bereavements which you could trace back to him? Has he never gratified your inclinations? Has he never disappointed your hopes? Have you not sometimes been made to feel your dependance on him? Have you never felt yourself to be in his hand, and then has not his favor seemed desirable and his frown dreadful? Has he never brought you near the grave and then withdrawn you? Are you a stranger to the thrill of gratitude, or to the pang of bereavement? Has his Spirit never striven with you? Has not the truth sometimes affected you? Have you not, at times, felt the constraint of conviction, and been almost persuaded to be different from what you are? Has no inward monitor ever whispered to your soul? Has nothing ever intimated God and eternity to you? Has the world never lost its illusion to your eye? Has man never seemed, at his best estate, altogether vanity, and all that life can afford palled upon your sated appetite? Have you never thought that you ought to repent? Has it never appeared to you that you had a deep stake in religion? Have you never been persuaded that there is one thing above all others needful, and that that is what you do not possess? Have you never thought seriously and mournfully of the end of time, and the exchange of worlds, of the grave and the spirit, and the judgment and that eternity, that long eternity, your own, a blessing or a curse?

God has been striving with you; and all to arrest you in the career of sin, and to call you back. And

what is the result? Are you sinning still? "For all this, they sinned still."

I have not time to remark at any length on the thought suggested by the latter part of the text; the *inefficacy* of all these divine expedients. "They sinned still."

In regard to the *cause* of this inefficacy, however, I would say that it does not imply any defect of power in God. And in relation to the *extent* of the inefficacy, I would observe these two things; *first*, that the great multitude of mankind appear to go on in sin and plunge into perdition. They cease, it may be, from some sins, but they persist in others. They do not repent. And, *secondly*, I would remark that those who do cease from sin, owe it not to these measures, except as they are the mere instruments of God.

I resume now, in conclusion, a question I have already asked, "What is the result of God's dealings with you?" Has he striven to any purpose? Has he arrested and reclaimed you? And, if not, why should any thing more be done for you? What more can be done, that has not been done already? Why should not God give you up as incorrigible? Why should you be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more.

## SERMON XIII.

My son, give me thy heart.—PROVERBS xxiii. 26.

“WHENCE came I?” is the first question which, in some shape or other, man puts to himself, when he begins to exercise his rational faculties. While he is yet asking it, there is something within him which unites with every thing around and above him, to declare that there is a God, who, himself uncreated, created all beings, and all things, and a God, as all his works and ways do testify, uncontrollable in power, unsearchable in wisdom, immense in goodness; yea, universally and infinitely perfect; a God, whose offspring we all are, as even a heathen poet could say, and who giveth to all life and breath and all things. “Doth he require any thing of me?” is a question that naturally follows the other. I know he, in whom I live, and move, and have my being, deserves all that I have and more than I can render; but does he desire it? does he demand it? He has a claim upon me; but does he insist upon his claims? does he use his right? or, has he waived it? has he turned me loose upon the world, and given me the freedom of a universe, and a license to do as I please, restrained by no law, and amenable to no account? Is it a matter of indiffer-

ence to him what I do with these organic powers, and these intellectual faculties, and these deeply-seated affections, the noblest part of me? Or does he expect and exact some return from them? I know he needeth nothing that I can give him. Yet it may be fit and morally right that he should exact and I should render what he may have no physical necessity for. If he cannot be the less happy on account of any thing which I withhold, yet I may be both less happy and less worthy. Shall I measure my obligations by his wants? But whether he requireth any thing or not, is there any thing that I may render him? Have I any thing that he will take from me, and that is worthy of him to receive? Tell me this, for I want to render something to my God for all his benefits to me. He blessed me into being; he hath called me out of unconscionness, and made me to feel the joys of conscious existence. I live *by* him; I live *in* him. His sun lights my path; his earth yields me sustenance; from his air I inhale health; and music, and fragrance, and beauty come floating upon it to my delighted senses. What will this beneficent God have me to do for him? Is there any thing I can do? Oh! tell me, for I am in haste to do it; let me pay but the first installment of gratitude, and I shall be happier than ever. What does he require? what will he receive? what labor that my hands can perform? what exercise that my faculties can be put to? what pilgrimage that my feet can accomplish? what posture that my body can assume? The lifted eye, the listening ear, the bended knee, the whole frame prostrated,



his name set to the music of my voice? Is it any thing pertaining to the world? Shall I dig for its gems? shall I dive for its pearls? shall I amass for him its gold and silver? or is it some sacrifice of some living object dear to me as my own life? Shall I bereave myself? shall I macerate my body or afflict my soul? Is it any *rite*? What is it? It is none of these, for I am confident from his benignity, that what he requires will make me wiser and better and happier, and these have no such tendency. What is it then? What is that which the parent asks of the child? The gift most highly esteemed, which one creature renders to a fellow-creature, that which the monarch had rather have, than the sceptre he bears and the throne he sits upon? What is the most precious thing you have to give? Is it not the heart, its love, the homage of the affections? Well, this is what God requires: *my son, give me thy heart*. It is wisdom that speaks in the text and context; but she personates God. She speaks in his name and asks the heart for him. If we give the heart to wisdom, it is the same as giving it to God, for the affectionate fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The voice of wisdom is the echo to that which thundered from Sinai, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart," of which Jesus, in commenting upon it, said, "this is the first and great commandment." *God demands the heart*. What! the whole heart? Yes, my hearers, the whole heart; by which, however, is not meant that we must love him only, but him first, him supremely. We may love other objects, but we must

love them less than we love him. In every competition affection for him must prevail. Every love must yield to the love of him.

*But why the heart*, and not something else? Because the heart is the gift of highest price; and God should have the most precious thing we have; because the homage of the heart is the only thing which God cannot force from his unwilling creature; which he cannot have without the voluntary concurrence of the creature. Every thing else can be compelled, but *love* cannot, it is not love when it is forced. Therefore God *asks* the heart to be given him. Besides, the contemplation of the divine character is suited to produce in man such a love, as that in which the heart yields itself up and gives itself away. There is nothing you can do, or exercise or feel, which is appropriate to the divine nature, excepting love; for God is love, and the beholding of love should excite love. He that looketh on him who is love must not merely speculate, or venerate, or admire, he must love. God requireth the heart, because the giving of the heart to him, is the only way of making the heart good. It is not by contemplating him, not by admiring him, not by speculating upon his attributes, not by performing external acts of obedience, nor by suffering for him, but only by loving him, that we can assimilate our character to his, be holy as he is holy, and perfect as he is perfect. Every act of affectionate homage which the heart renders to him, does purify *it*, while it pleases him. The love of God, or the giving of the heart to him, does alone lay a foundation

for communion with him, and consequent happiness in him. It is not by knowledge that we approximate unto God, nor can we draw near and converse with him by mere rites and ordinances. Love is the preparation of the soul for intercourse with him, and the medium of the soul's intercourse with him. We are happy in God so far as we love him and no farther. Love is the conduct that conveys comfort and happiness from him the fountain down to the reservoir of the human heart. For these reasons he would have the heart given to him.

*But why does he ask ONLY the heart?* Is this all that he would have? Do not his commands embrace many other things? Why then does he not couple these with the heart? *Because* the gift of the heart includes or draws after it every other gift. The heart is the leader and commander of the soul, and all its host obediently follow whithersoever the heart directs. The head and hands and feet and senses are all servants to this sole and potent master, the heart. Therefore he who gives the heart, gives by consequence all that he is and has. We may give the mind without giving the heart, and we may employ all our senses and bodily powers in the service of religion, while the heart is afar off and differently employed. *They* cannot carry the heart with them. But only let the heart be engaged in anything, and then the faculties of the mind, the powers of the body, the influence of rank and character, and whatsoever of the world can be commanded, are all gathered together to co-operate and obey. The mind takes its direction from the heart; the life

has its issues out of the heart ; and the world makes its sacrifices at the altar it designates, and pours its tribute into the treasury it opens. Therefore God asks only the heart, he knows that there is no need of asking any thing else. And he asks this first and this only, furthermore, because no gift can be offered in a manner that shall make it acceptable to him, unless the heart precede and accompany it. The heart does not only include every gift, but it sanctifieth every gift. Whatsoever offerings we may make unto God, they are all unacceptable and unholy except the heart pervades them and goes with them. Ye sung just now, but did ye praise God? Was the heart attuned? did it make melody unto God? Oh! do you think that God is praised and pleased with fine sounds? And ye put yourselves just now into the attitude of prayer, and if ye did as in decency ye ought, you shut the senses as much as possible against the world; and ye thought of God, but did ye pray? That is another question. Prayer is the incense that goes up from the altar of the touched and tender heart. Ye sit sometimes at the sacramental table, but doth the heart then interchange affections with Christ? Oh! my hearers, it is the heart that makes the Lord's table a communion, that makes music praise, supplication prayer, regret repentance, and gives vitality to the otherwise dead mass of morality, making living virtue of it; for morality, according to the current meaning of that word, is not real virtue, and virtue is living morality. Therefore, my hearers, God asks the heart first and only, for these two reasons; that no gift is

good without it, and it bringeth with it or draweth after it whatever is good.

*My son give me thy heart.* I would remark on the affectionateness of this compellation, *my son*, and you will understand it as including *daughter* also. Now thou dost not deserve to be called by this name, son, daughter. Even in your innocence, you were a subject, a servant, a possession, as well as a son, and that God should, contemplating thee as still innocent, waive the titles that indicate authority and select the one that intimates similitude and affection, were an act of grace. How much more is it of pure and unlooked for favor that he calls you a son now? You are a rebel and an enemy, not a son now. Sonship implies affection, but you have forfeited it, and rights and privileges, but you have voluntarily parted with them. It supposes obedience, but you do not render it. Why should you still be called a son, since you have done every thing to make it just in God to disown and disinherit you? Yet God calls you a son; "my son," he says, though you respond not, "my Father." He hath yet a good will towards you. He is so ready to have that affectionate relation restored at any time, that he anticipates the language appropriate to it. And do I hear God call me his son? After so much unthankfulness and rebellion so high-handed; notwithstanding my wanderings from him, and my hard thoughts of him, and all my unfilial treatment of him; is it son I hear? Could I have expected this? And is he then willing after all to forgive and to forget, to take me again into his family

and make me his heir? And shall I hold out against such kindness? Shall not my heart go forth with all its affections to meet him, who cometh forth from heaven with parental feelings to meet and solicit me? There is something in kindness like this so undeserved and so unlooked for, that will make an impression on the human heart, if any thing can. Oh! how must Simon Peter have felt its melting and subduing power, when Mary delivered to him the message with which she was charged by her risen Lord, "go tell my disciples, and tell Peter;" tell Peter! he specified thee, Peter, lest thou should think he regarded thee no longer as a disciple. He loves and owns thee still, Peter, and bade me quiet your fears and dispel your doubts." I think my hearers, it was not the remembrance of the misery he had brought on himself by that first fall that prevented every future defecton, so much as the remembrance of Christ's tender treatment of him in and after his recovery. Now if that message had such an effect on Peter, what should not this address do with us? Is there not more in this, "my son," from such a quarter under such circumstances, to melt and break the heart? Yes, and it does break the heart that is not hard and infrangible as adamant itself. *My son give me thy heart.* It is a father making a request of a son. Now the request which any one of you who is a father, makes of his child, ought to be complied with, for the reason that it is made; unless the granting it be impossible or unreasonable. Much more doth this hold in the case of God, for he *will not ask what is impossible*, he *cannot ask what is unreason-*

able ; and he hath claims upon us stronger than any human parent can have. He is our first father ; the author of our being, and he has ever been more careful of us, more provident for us, more bountiful to us, more forbearing, and more compassionate than any human father can be. A son honoreth and obeyeth his father, but God is your father. Hast thou a filial heart, and wilt thou restrain it from this divine parent and not give to him what he requests, when he might demand it ? A human father does not always in his commands and requests propose the child's good, but sometimes his own pleasure ; but God in every thing that he asks or commands consults your good, your highest good. It is certain that compliance with this request of his will be for your advantage, and there is, therefore, no room for hesitation. A father, even the most wise and affectionate one, in proposing his child's advantage may err. He may command him to do, what to do would be seriously injurious to his best interests. But the Infinite Father cannot so err. He hath both the knowledge of what is good for you, and the benevolence to command that and only that. Will you withhold your heart from such a father ?

Especially when you consider the nature of the competition that is on foot for it. The heart must be given to some object external to it. It is not independent. It makes its dependance on something without, and finds its delights in things exterior to it ; hence many things pay court to it and solicit its affections, but they may all be reduced to these two ; the world, and God. To the one or other of which every

human heart is given. Few indeed concentrate their hearts on one worldly object. Now and then, to be sure, we meet with one who seems to have given his whole heart to the pursuit and preservation of wealth, or to a particular species of pleasure, or to projects of ambition; but, generally speaking, the heart is divided into a great many separate portions and these are distributed among the various objects which solicit human affections. These all cry, "give," and God cries, "give." Will you apportion your heart among the creatures or bestow it all undivided upon the Creator? What claim has the world upon you? A father's claim? You are yourself its Lord, and to give your heart unto it, were to become a voluntary slave to a degraded master. Can the world appeal to your gratitude? You owe it none. It is but God's instrument with which he provides for your wants and delights your senses. What can it promise you? Glory? Can it promise more than its Maker can? Happiness? Who gave it the power of conferring happiness? And cannot he make you happy without it? You prefer the world to God because of its attractions, forgetting that he who gave it all its attractions, must necessarily possess infinitely more attractions in himself. Think you he has so exhausted himself in creation, that he has no resources left in himself for the heart that gives itself unto him? Is there nothing in the fountain whence these streams flow; nothing at the centre whence these emanations proceed? Is there no beauty in the living archetypes, from which all thou seest are but copies? What if God should restrain



those currents that now run to thy soul, and withhold those emanations of joy, and mar, as with one dash he could, all this beauty, and make this world, in which thou now delightest thyself, as salt that has lost its savor, what would you do then? The world whatever it may promise you, cannot promise you the permanence of any thing. It exists at his will, and if thou givest thy heart to it, he can take it away from thee when he pleases, or which is the same, thee from it. Why dost thou choose for thy treasure and portion that which is perishable? Art thou perishable? Should the immortal heart, court mortal objects and satisfy itself with mortal love? To give your heart to the world, is to unite life and death in wedlock. The day of separation will come, when thou and thy world must part, and all those things which have now such attractions that they prevail over thee to deny thy heart to God, thou wilt have to take thy leave of severally, thy fascinating amusements that now do sweetly poison thee, and are so irresistible that even their immorality cannot detach thee from them; thy wealth too for which it may be thou hast virtually sold thy God and Saviour, and thy friends too that enticed thee to pleasurable sin, and encouraged thee to what is not good. All these you must leave. Oh! it will be a dreadful moment, the beginning of despair, the entering in of hell; when thou feelest thyself going from all thou lovest, to what thou neither lovest, nor knowest. How happy they who are saved this separating pang, to whom death has not this sting. Happy that soul that has been divorced from the world, and is now

united to God by the indissoluble bond of love. The Christian goeth to his heart's home when he dies ; the other goes from it ; and that is the difference ; oh ! the difference, between going *to* one's home, and *from* one's home ! So different is death to the Christian and the man of the world.

But cannot I love God and the world both ? give my heart to each ? No. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." But may I not, when I find the world receding, call off my heart and transfer it readily to God ? God will not then address thee as his son, and ask thee for thy heart ; and thou wilt have no disposition to love him then. It will be all fear. He has limited a time within which he will call, and thou mayest answer. It is life. God does not ask the dead to give him their hearts. Now is the accepted time ; and now does not mean forever. To-day, if you will hear his voice ; but to-day does not signify eternity. There is a set time, which, if you pass, you shall never more hear the voice of a Father affectionately addressing you, and asking to have your heart that he may make it happy. Give, then, your hearts to God while you may.

There is another thought that I would suggest for your consideration. You think it, doubtless, an easy thing for God to make this request. But do you know what expense he was at before he could make it ? It was inconsistent with the perfection of his character and with the glory of his government, that he should take back to himself the recreant hu-

man heart, till some satisfaction was made for the offence offered to the one and the dishonor done the other. What then? Did he wait for us to offer the satisfaction and pay the ransom? Ah! he would have waited in vain. Himself found the ransom; himself provided the satisfaction. "He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." God spared not his own Son. Mark here the strength of his paternal feelings. His own, only begotten, dear, beloved Son. How much that Son was loved; yet *that* Son was not spared, that *these* sons and daughters might be spared. He was not withheld. He was not screened from suffering and from death. No substitute was found to take the place of him who was our substitute. God spared not his own Son. I love those words; and I have thought sometimes, in reflecting on them, that there might have been an allusion, in this language, to the interrupted sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah, when the voice of God arrested the instrument of death, and directed the father to unbind and spare his son, and that the two facts were intended to be set in contrast to each other, God's sparing *Abraham's*, but not sparing *his own* son. Did God make this sacrifice that he might win your hearts and wed it to himself, and bless it; and will you, after all this withhold it from him? Do not, for the sake of the Father, and for the sake of the Son, and for your own sake, I beseech you, do not keep it back.

Have you already given it? Have you responded to this, "My father, I do give thee my heart. The world shall no longer have that heart, to detach

which from the world thy Son died?" And dost thou then love God with all thy heart? I wish it were the case with all of you. But be not too hasty in supposing it, for much depends upon it. By your fruits you are to be known. Do you feel and act towards God as you do towards any earthly object, when it has your heart? Do you take great delight in God, in access to him, in communion with him, in contemplating his works, perusing his word, engaging in his worship, making your confessions to him, offering your thanksgivings, and preferring your requests? Do you supremely dread offending him, and do you desire above all things to please him? Keep you his commandments? all of them? for he, than whom none ever had a deeper experimental knowledge of divine love, St. John, says, "This is the love of God that we keep his commandments."

My hearers, if any of you have not these proofs, do not contend, but rather confess that you have never yet given the heart to God; and give it now. Expose your soul to the influence of the motives I have used with you. Let them act upon you. Do not resist their momentum. While the heart is not given to God, it is undutiful, it is ungrateful; it is fearfully hazardous to live so one day, one hour. Think particularly of the ingratitude of living *in* God and not loving him, of receiving every thing you have from him, and not giving him the only one thing he asks of you. He gives you all things without your asking; but you will not give him one thing, though he asks it. He has even given you so many things, and given in so great abundance,

that you are content to be without him. Think of these things and mourn, and give now to God that which he asks of you—the heart; and because you are a sinner, it must be a broken and contrite heart; for the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart he will not despise. Give it, and, first, he will heal it with the blood of his Son, and then bless it evermore in the enjoyment of himself.

My son, give me thy heart. Methinks there is a special, though not an exclusive, reference to the young person in this address. It seems to contemplate the young man just engaging in the active scenes of life, and the young woman just involving herself in the cares peculiar to herself, and it says to each with a tenderness that should draw tears, "Give me—thy God, thy heart? These, that are around you, have loved the world so long, and so long denied me, that their hearts are now well nigh grown to the world; but thy affections cleave not so closely as yet. It is easier to withdraw thy heart. Come, give it me, and I will guide you, I will prosper you." Oh! happy youths! did they but know their good. God has a special regard for the young, and Jesus Christ a peculiar sympathy with the tender age. But, oh! my young friends, you are fast growing out of the regard of the one, and losing the sympathy of the other.

Oh! tremble for the consequences of what I have been saying, for I have been speaking of God's kindness and love; and I know it is a topic that always hardens, if it does not melt; a theme that, if it does not draw the soul nearer, drives it farther off. I

tremble because I fear that some one of you may again refuse the request, which, in the name and behalf of God, I have made of you to-day. I tremble lest that refusal should provoke God to withdraw his request for ever.

Now, in conclusion, who of us will unite in giving, for the first time, or anew, if we have given before, our hearts to God, saying, unfeignedly and from the deepest soul, "Here, Lord, we give our hearts to thee; 'tis all that we can do." Will you? Who is holding back his heart? God sees, and marks, and frowns. It is written in heaven; but relent, and it shall be erased.

## SERMON XIV.

For their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.—DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 31.

THERE is nothing easier to prove than that men are beside themselves. I desire no lighter task than to substantiate against them the charge of moral infatuation ; to demonstrate that “madness is in the hearts of the sons of men while they live.” Take, in proof of it, *this* : that men do things which, at the time of doing them, they not only know they will be sorry for, but actually intend to be sorry for ; thus deliberately and designedly making work for repentance ; doing what they mean to undo ; or *this* : that men put off to a confessedly uncertain future, that which not only is, but is by them admitted to be, of all things, the most obligatory, the most important, the most needful ; so running the risk of never doing what most needs to be done ; insuring every thing but that which is most precious and most exposed ; and taking measures to be prepared against every exigency but that which is the last and greatest. Another proof of the same species of madness will be afforded in the progress of my remarks, in which it will be seen that, though sinners perceive and acknowledge the immense superiority of the condition

of Christians, they make no effort, and have no desire that it should be their own ; refusing that which not only is in fact, but is seen by them to be, the better part and more desirable portion. 'The mere *fact* that men choose the *worse* part, is not necessarily a proof of moral infatuation ; but that they do it with their eyes open and their judgment convinced that it is the *worse* part. But do they act so irrationally ? My object is to show that they do.—“ Their rock is not as our rock, our enemies themselves being judges.”

1. I would observe that there is a difference between the people of God and others, which the latter discover ; a difference of character and condition of which they are aware, and which they are sometimes forced to acknowledge. I do not say that this distinction is visible in all professors of religion. How should it be ? It is not *real* in all. There are those who differ from others only in professing to be different from them. Nor do I say that this distinction is as manifest in all real Christians as it is in some ; nor in these equally manifest at all times ; but my remark is that there exists, and sinners see that there exists a class of persons in the world, who, in their spirit, and principles, and consistent acting in accordance with their principles, in their desires, aversions and aims, and in all that goes to constitute character, are different from them and from the generality of mankind ; as also in their hopes, consolations, supports, and sources of enjoyment. Notwithstanding the false professions of some, and the imperfections of all, this difference is seen to exist ;



and the discernment of it troubles irreligious persons more than any thing else does. I wish they saw more of it. Do you trouble sinners? Don't you, on the other hand, comfort and encourage them? help the ungodly? "Oh," said a worldly man to me not long ago, "it does us good, when we see one of your professors with us." I know one who, in the days of his unregeneracy, was made uneasy and dissatisfied with himself by this, when nothing else had power to do it. An intelligent and accomplished young man, on his death-bed, told a clergyman who visited him, that he had been an infidel and a profligate, and that, in the whole course of his infidelity, there was but one thing that disturbed him, and he could answer every argument for Christianity but one, and that was the pious example and prayers of a believing mother. That he never knew how to get over, but the remembrance of it would come to him in his mirth and disquiet him; and it was finally the means of his being brought to the belief of Christianity, and to a timely and happy repentance.

The perception of this difference exerts this power, because sinners discern that in so far as Christians are different from them, they are superior to them, have the decided advantage over them. This is what I propose to illustrate.

Observe, my object is not to show that Christians, by which I mean renewed men, regenerate persons are, *in fact*, better, safer, and happier than others; or that they are so in their own opinion, and in the judgment of their friends, but that they are so, "their enemies themselves being judges." And,

1. In point of *character*, sinners see and admit the superiority of the real Christian. Take examples from Biblical history. Compare John the Baptist, with Herod, or Mary, the sister of Lazarus with *Herodias* or her daughter Salome, the dancing girl. Look first at Paul, and then at Festus or even Agrippa. You see what the difference is, and where the superiority lies. Or look at some living Christian and then at yourself, and make a comparison. Look at his spirit and then at your own; his spirit of meekness and your's of resentment; his humility and your pride; his disinterestedness and your selfishness. See, he acts from love to God and a benevolent regard to men; you from a regard to yourself. You do what is agreeable, convenient, or immediately advantageous; he what is right, what the revealed will of God requires, what appears to be duty, what Christ enjoins, what adherence to principle and consistency demand, and that however disagreeable, inconvenient, or disadvantageous it may be. He is influenced by a supreme respect for the authority of God, and prefers the approbation of the Creator to that of all creatures. You have no such fear of God before your eyes; you trample upon his authority and laws, when they stand in your way; and you love the praise of men more than the praise of God, and, for the sake of pleasing men, will offend God. His aim is to *do* good, your's to *get* good. To enrich, gratify, or aggrandize yourself is your object. His, is to glorify God and bless mankind. He lives to the Lord. The love of Christ constrains him; but it is not so with you. Now, whose spirit is the more

excellent? whose principles of action the more worthy? which character the superior? I know which is. But I want you to say which is. Do you not feel your own inferiority? Yes, and sinners do often secretly despise themselves for it. Here they see one denying and laboring to subdue his appetites, while they to all theirs are giving the rein; and the time that they spend in vanity, they see others occupying in visits of charity and offices of kindness to the poor and neglected; and they know that they are wrong, and that the others are right. Their own consciences condemn them; and hence their unwillingness to let the case come before conscience, their reluctance to look at themselves, to ponder their hearts and to weigh their actions. They have something more than a suspicion what the result would be. I wish that each one of you would look back, though it were but for a single day, and review the history of the last twenty-four hours, and see what you think of it, either absolutely or in comparison with the manner in which that space has been filled up by many a Christian, and ought to have been by you.

Look at the *devotional* part of the Christian's character. He consecrates a portion of each day to secret communion with God, to prayer, confession of sin and contrition for it, to the grateful recollections of God's goodness to him, to the serious reading of the word of God, to meditation and self examination, and to intercession for you and others; no one out of the little circle of the family knows it, and perhaps even they do not. He makes no parade of his devo-

tions. God alone sees what passes in his closet. Now *you* have no such habits of devotion. You have nothing to say to God in the way of prayer, confession, or thanksgiving. You live without God in the world. Here is a difference between you and the Christian. On which side is the superiority? Which is right? Is not your judgment at variance with your practice? Do you not decide that the conduct of the Christian is the more filial, the more affectionate, grateful, reasonable and worthy?

Look now at the Christian in his family; and recollect then what you are in yours. Hear the expression of thanksgiving and the invocation of blessing, accompanying the reception of the bounties of divine Providence. And see night and morning the household assembled to hear the word of God, and to unite in the offering of prayer and praise. Now is this right or wrong? Is not this manner of conducting the affairs of a family preferable to yours. Does not your own judgment decide against the course you pursue?

But I pass on from the character to the condition of the Christian. If he is better than his neighbor, so it is better with him. I might show the *real* superiority of the Christian's condition; but that is not the object of the discourse. The object is to make out its superiority, our enemies themselves being judges, its superiority in your esteem and by your admission. And, hence, the necessity of a constantly recurring appeal to you; several things pertain to a man's condition.

1. In regard to *safety*, is not the condition of the Christian superior? Do you not think that he

is *safer* than you are? You may not think yourself in any very great danger, but is he in any danger whatsoever, he whose refuge the eternal God is, underneath whom are the everlasting arms, he who loves God, and is one of the called according to his purpose, concerning whom it is said that all things work together for his good. Have not you something to apprehend, but has he any cause for fear, to whom God says, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee, be not dismayed for I am thy God." Has he ever said that to you? When he shall, then you will be safe, never till then. 'To every child of his, he has said it; and now he enjoys the favor and protection of an all-seeing and almighty God; no evil can befall him, but by permission of one who tenderly loves him, and who can and will out of every evil so permitted educe a far greater good. He who has God for him is safer from natural evil, than any other; and safer from sin surely is he, to whom it is promised, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, my grace is sufficient for you. God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Could not your condition in point of safety be improved? but how could the Christian's.

2. In regard to *peace*, I would ask if the Christian has not the advantage of you? If the testimony of God is to be relied on he has all the advantage, implied in the difference between great peace and no peace, for, "great peace have they who love thy law," it is said in one place; and in another, "there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked;" he being

justified by faith has peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ ; and the peace of God that passes understanding keeps his heart and mind through Christ Jesus. This peace is the bequest of Christ to him, and he calls it *his* peace. Have you any such peace, a peace, which the tribulations of this world cannot disturb, for Christ says, " These things have I said to you that in me ye might have peace, in the world ye shall have tribulations, but be of good cheer." Do you know any thing of such tranquility ? Is not this far before the philosophic calm ? Candid hearer, do you think that the real Christian has as many fears, anxieties and disquietudes as you have ? that his bosom is as easily ruffled and liable to such violent agitations as yours ? do the circumstances of danger, does worldly disappointment, does the prospect of death trouble him as it does you ? If something should whisper in your ear, " This night thy soul is required of thee," do you think you could hear it with as much composure, as he whose mind is staid on God ? How is it that in seasons of danger, in the hour of apprehended shipwreck, in the sudden invasion of sickness, or in the time of impending pestilence, men fall upon their knees, betake themselves to the Bible and ask an interest in the prayers of Christians ? Do they not thereby testify that the rock of their reliance is not as our rock ?

3. In point of *consolation* in affliction, and *support* under the trials of life, has not the Christian an acknowledged advantage over every other ? Underneath him are the everlasting arms. What equal support have you ? God is his very present help in

trouble. Who is yours? Your relative? your minister? He is a poor prop; a broken reed is every man. Have you any, any refuge to run into for shelter when the storms of sorrow beat furiously upon you? Any voice like that of the Son of man, to say to you in your desponding moments, "be of good cheer;" any hand, like God, to pass over your streaming eyes, and wipe all tears from them? When all earthly expectations are disappointed, as easily and at once they may be, what hopes have you, that survive this wreck? The Christian has one left, worth all the rest, a hope full of immortality, an anchor to his soul, and one that will never make him ashamed; when human friends die or desert you, what friend have you, more constant than a brother; and what portion left, when this world's fails you? And now we come to the supposition of death, soon to be to each of us more than mere supposition. Do you think that you are as well prepared to die, as he who has committed his soul to the care and keeping of Christ? Do you think that he is as likely to be troubled with dying regrets as you? Do you think that he will lament in that hour, the seasons spent in prayer and devotion, his days of humiliation and nights spent in sorrow for sin, his strivings, vigils, self-denials and sacrifices for Christ, and the efforts by which he aimed at spirituality of mind? Do you not rather think that you will lament that you did not resemble him in these respects? If your last sickness were upon you, would you not wish to be in the place of the Christian? Balaam, one of your men of the world, expressed his preference in these memorable

words, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Did you never conceive a similar wish? And what does this prove, but your judgment that your rock is not as his rock? You dare not trust it in a trying moment. You are suspicious that it will not sustain you. You fear that it is but sand. But do you think the same of the Christian's rock, Christ Jesus? Do you suspect the stability of that foundation? Did any one ever grieve that a friend or relative of his died in the faith of Jesus Christ? Is there a parent, so unbelieving and irreligious himself, that, if now he had a child dying, he would not be comforted to hear from him the expression of repentance for sin and reliance on Christ and devotedness to him, though under other circumstances a similar declaration from his child would grieve and even exasperate him? The thing has often been put to the test. An infidel of some distinction in a northern state, whose wife was a woman of piety, was called in to see a favorite daughter expire. He had instructed her in one way, the mother in another. And now she asked him in the belief of whose sentiments, his, or her mother's, he would prefer to have her die. He immediately replied, "Your mother's." Here was the judgment of an enemy that Christianity is more safe and suitable for a dying hour, than infidelity.

Shall we go on one step farther? That brings us to the bar of God. In what character, think you it will be most desirable for you to appear there? Do you think that your prospects for the judgment are



as good as the Christian's? Do you really think you will be able to plead your cause there as successfully as Christ can? Will his advocacy be a thing to be despised then? A day is coming, for which all other days were made, the last and greatest of days, the day of God, in which the heavens being on fire shall melt. Wherefore seeing that ye look for such things what manner of persons ought ye to be? Here the appeal is made to you, and your opinion is asked. What manner of persons ought ye to be? Such as you are; or such as real Christians are?

But enough. You admit that the condition of the Christian is superior to yours; that he is safer, more peaceful, more comforted, happier. You say, no life is so happy as his, no death so desirable, no one's prospect for eternity so bright as his; and the course you pursue you admit is vain and unprofitable, and yet you will go on in it. Will you? If it were the course of duty; you should be reconciled to it. But it is a course equally at war with your duty, as with your interest. And will you persevere in it? Yes, *you* will; but oh! *God*, shall they? Shall they? Let them not.

Shall I tell you who the Christian's rock is? It is Christ. "Other foundation can no man lay." It is spacious, it is solid, it is now accessible. Every other rock is sand.

Suppose then you come over to our rock? We cannot leave our rock and go to you.

But am I on it? Let me try. Let me compare my character with that required in the Bible. Come over

to it *now* ; *venture* on it, venture wholly, let no other trust intrude. Then praise the rock, being fixed upon it, rock of God's unchanging love.

Oh ! that ye would. Oh ! that you cared for yourselves as you ought. Oh ! that Christians cared for you, as they should. They did a little while ago, seem to care for you, and God spoke peace to them. But some have turned again to folly ; so soon ; and some perhaps have gone off into a new folly.

## SERMON XV.

What doth the Lord require of thee ?—MICAH vi. 8.

**THE** subject brought to view in this interrogation deserves, if any subject does or can deserve it, your serious, fixed, and deep attention, whoever may treat it, and however it may be treated. The claims of God on man, whether he have any ; if any, whether he asserts them ; and what they are, and what is the character of them ; how they have been regarded by him on whom they are made, and how they ought to be treated by him, this is the subject.

1. Has God any claims upon you ? has he a right to require any thing of you, if it should seem good to him so to do ? This is the first question to be settled ; and it may be done, without argument, by appeal. The question is, whether God has a right to dictate to you what shall be the state of your heart, and the character of your conduct, your feelings and your doings ; a right to regulate, limit, and control you by rules and laws ; to demand this homage and that service of you ; to speak to you in the imperative mood, saying, do this, and abstain from that. Has he this right, or would he usurp a prerogative that does not appertain to him, should he do as I have said ? I am not concerned about the answer

you will give to this question. I am confident that your unanimous response is, "He has this right." Well then,

2. The next question is, does he exercise this right, does he assert any claims on man, or has he, as some would say, generously waived them all? Has he actually required any thing? He has a right to hold the reins in his hands; but does he hold them, or has he given them up to us? If you are a believer in revelation, and, in this Bible, as being the word of God, you have answered the question, for you can scarcely read a page in this book, without meeting with an instance of the exercise of this right. You find God every where speaking *imperatively* to his creatures; giving them not merely counsels, but authoritative commands. "Thou shalt, and thou shalt not;" this is his language to us. You admit then that God has claims on man, and that he asserts them. If there is any one here who has doubts in regard to revealed religion, and who, therefore, while he admits God's right, questions whether he has exercised it, I would ask of him, whether, the existence of the right being admitted, the probabilities are not altogether in favor of its exercise; and whether the presumption is not irresistibly strong, when it is considered that our very happiness depends on the right direction of our affections, and on a due regulation of our conduct? Is it not to be presumed that God has thrown the weight of his authority into that scale, on the preponderance of which our well-being is suspended, and that he has made obligatory by his express command that

course, which the highest interests of the soul require to be pursued? In short, may it not be inferred from the benevolence of God, that he does exercise his right of command and control over us? And that he has done this, have we not distinct intimations from within us, in the operations of conscience? If I interpret correctly the testimony of that faculty, its witness is not merely that a certain course is right, but that it is also pleasing to a superior being, and of the opposite conduct, not merely that it is wrong, but that it is at variance with the will of that Supreme Intelligence, which we call God.

3. We come now to the third inquiry in order. What are the claims which God asserts? In what manner does he exercise his right of government over us? What doth the Lord require of thee? I answer, what he says he does. It is a subject on which he has spoken. He has not left his creatures to the necessity of excogitating and inferring what his will concerning them is. He has explicitly declared it. Soon as there was a man upon earth to receive and obey his orders, they were proclaimed to him. And God has never left the world without a revelation. It is not his fault that a revelation is not universal now, but the fault of those who have it, who soon could make it universal if they pleased. The argument in favor of the necessity of a revelation, is to my mind irresistibly cogent; and from the necessity to the reality of a revelation we pass easily. And I find most abundant testimony, both external and internal, that the revealed will of God is expressed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Read the Bible then. That answers our third question. It answers in long and particular detail of things to be done and to be avoided. It answers it by laying down general principles of conduct, which admit of an easy application to the several cases which occur in the progress of life. It answers it sometimes in one comprehensive command. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." This the Lord requires of thee; thy supreme love, thy choicest affections, thy whole heart, and whatever else such a love disposes to and draws after it. The law is spiritual; the commandment exceeding broad. We have to do with one, who not only weigheth the actions, but the spirits of men. He has given rules for the regulation not only of our external conduct, and all of it, but of our speech, of our thoughts, our motives, our principles of action, and of all the various modifications of feeling. We are under law to God, and, consequently, accountable to him, every moment, and in regard to every thing that is thought, felt, said, as well as done by us. Now God requires obedience to the whole of this law at all times. He allows of no imperfection, or interruption in our obedience. These are his claims. In the exercise of his right, he makes this requisition. And now,

4. In regard to the *character* of these claims of God.

1. They are *reasonable*. Their reasonableness may be inferred from their reality. God is incapable of making an unreasonable demand. Their rea-

sonableness is asserted; "his commandments are not *grievous*; my 'yoke is *easy*.' What doth the Lord require of thee, **BUT** to do justly;" "I consent to the law that it is good, says one; and I delight in the law of God, after the inward man." If any one say that God's claims are unreasonable, we throw on him the burden of the proof that they are. Let him point the particular claim that is unreasonable and show that it is so.

2. These claims are *particular*; they are expressed in the singular number, "thou shalt." They are made on you as an individual, and not in any social capacity. God does not collect all his sons together and then say to them, "go *ye* and work to-day in my vineyard;" but he comes to the first and says, "go thou," and then to the second and says likewise; he addresses his commands singly to each one.

3. His claims are *paramount*. In every comparison they deserve to have the pre-eminence; in every competition the preference. Here I may venture to appeal to you. Is not that your first duty, which you owe to God? Has any being a claim on your affections and services prior and superior to that of God? Whom should you love rather than him? whom more than him? Ought not his will to be done, rather than that of any other being, rather than your own, or your friend's or your parent's? These questions can be answered in only one manner.

4. These claims are *impartial*. God asserts them with respect to every intelligent being, and with respect to each the same. He excepts no one, overlooks no one, excuses no one, and of each, of all,

demands the same supreme love, the same perfect and perpetual obedience to the same law.

5. They are *unalterable*, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. We may change, but not they ; our duty is the same, whatever our character. God cannot lower his demands, to adapt them to our inclinations or disabilities. This then is the character of God's claims on us ; and the next question is,

6. How have we treated them? Have we done as he has required? There may possibly be one in this assembly so blinded and deluded as to suppose and say that he has practically regarded these claims and done all the Lord has required of him. I trust, however, that there is not even one such person. I can speak for one, and do I not really make every one's confession when I say, "I have not regarded the claims of God. I have not done what he has required. I have not been regulated by his laws. I have not rendered that homage and service which, in the exercise of the highest right, he has demanded of me. I have not loved him with all my heart. I have not placed my affections on him. I am a sinner, whoever is not." Well then, what is to be done? These claims are unalterable, and they have been disregarded ; and besides there is a penalty threatened to be inflicted on him who disregards them. "The soul that sinneth it shall die. Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." It is easier in this case to say what is to be *suffered*, than what is to be done. You have not obeyed the precept. You must submit, therefore, to the other part of the alternative.



You must suffer the penalty. This is the alternative whichevery government presents, to obey or to suffer, obedience or punishment. This is all fair enough. And must I? I will go and cast myself at his feet, I will repent and make my confession to him, and throw my soul upon his mercy." But what know you of the mercy of God? Where learned you any thing about it? Whence have you the assurance that its claims will be preferred to those of justice? Why should they? The claims of justice are manifestly prior to those of mercy. "We must be just before we are generous," acknowledged principle asserts. "But I repent," you say. What if you do, does that satisfy the claim? Does that make good the law? Does repentance pay debts? Is repentance equivalent to a perfect obedience? We are in a dilemma. How shall we get out of it? The Gospel comes in and extricates us; blessed, glorious Gospel! The only begotten Son of God was for us made under the law, and has met and satisfied the claims of God on us; he obeyed the precept perfectly and bore the penalty fully, and the everlasting righteousness thus brought in by him, is capable of being reckoned to sinners in whose place he stood, and is actually placed to the account of every one that believeth. So that now he who said, "thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart," and "cursed is every one that continueth not," without either repealing that law, or mitigating that penalty, can and does say, "he that believeth shall be saved." And now while he still imperatively says, and will ever continue to say, "thou shalt love," yet the particular claims he asserts

now are repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. God now commands all men everywhere to repent, and this also is his commandment that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ. These are the claims which this day in the name and behalf of God I make on you. He claims by me now that each of you repent of all your sins and turn from them unto him, and believe on Jesus Christ his Son. And the question on compliance or non-compliance is to be taken; and every one of you will be under the necessity of voting either for or against compliance with these claims. No one of you will be excused; no one can put himself out of the house, and if you will allow me to continue the allusion, the ayes alone will be called for. All the rest will be reckoned among the noes; and if any man votes in favor of a postponement of the question, he votes against compliance, for the postponement in such cases is always indefinite.

And now the question. Let me state it. You have disregarded and practically contemned the original claims of God on your soul. You have not loved him; you have disobeyed and rebelled against him, often and long, wilfully and without provocation you have done it. Now, are you sorry for it? Do you repent and grieve before God that you have done it? Are you so sorry for it, that you intend to do so no more? Are you willing to forsake all sin, and to return to your allegiance to God? Are you ready to arise and go to your father, saying, "I have sinned against heaven?" And are you willing to accept of Jesus Christ as your substitute and surety,

to be cleansed by his blood, to be clothed with his righteousness, to be subject to his yoke, to sit at his feet? "If any man will come after me," Christ says, "let him deny himself and take his cross and follow me." Are you ready to give your consent to that, and to be evermore his devoted disciple; and, with your body and spirit, which are his, to glorify God? I do not ask you if you foresee your ability to do all implied in this, and foresee that you will actually fulfill all that this resolution imports, but I ask you in regard to your present willingness. God will provide for the rest."

And now, having stated the question, let me briefly say why you should vote affirmatively.

1. Because you *ought* to do it; it is *right*; it is *obligatory*; and what is more, you know that it is; you have no doubt about its being your *duty*; and do you require a reason additional to this? Are you one of them that hesitate, after they have found out what they ought to do? But,

2. I will ask you, is it *safe* for you, a creature in the power of God, entirely and ever dependant on him, to refuse compliance with his explicit and authoritative claims on you? Is it *safe*? Can you have his approbation, if you do so? Can you have your own? Can you be at peace either with God or with yourself? Can you expect good from him? Have you not every reason to apprehend evil from his hand? Do you not twice deserve it? Is it *politic* to refuse compliance with his commands? Is it *prudent*? Will it turn to your advantage? Will your happiness be promoted by it? Is it *hon-*

*orable* to you to disregard such claims on you? Is it *honest*? Consistent with being the noblest work of God, to pay every being but him to whom we owe most, and whose claim is first and strongest? Finally, is it *grateful*. Is it the way in which you ought to treat a being that has been so good to you? Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Do you thus requite the Lord, oh! foolish people and unwise? Is not he thy Father that hath bought thee? Hath he not made thee and established thee?"

These are some of the reasons in favor of compliance. And now in favor of *immediate* compliance, and against all further postponement, suffer a few things.

1. These claims are of old standing; and they have long, long been disregarded; and they have been repeatedly urged; and you have often promised to consider them. Indeed you have already examined into them; and the validity of them has been admitted, and will not be denied by any one now. In similar cases, men are always ready for the question. Why are not you? The truth is, you are *not willing* to comply with these claims; perhaps never mean to. Well, if you choose to suffer rather than obey, you can. None of the reasons, usually urged in favor of postponement, can be urged in this case.

2. The interests of others require that these claims should be admitted and complied with without delay. The interests of your children and of all over whom you have influence require it.

3. It is doing injustice to him whose claims they are, to delay compliance with them. They cannot be so fully complied with by any future determination

in their favor. They require that the whole life be spent in serving and glorifying God, and the present is a part of the whole. And you can never make amends to God for the injury you do him and his government by a longer continuance in disobedience, though you should hereafter become a penitent. You are incurring a loss of time now which you can never redeem; and observe that it is his time that you are squandering; they are his talents that you are suffering to be idle. The pound he has given you is gaining nothing for him now, and you can make no such profitable investment of it hereafter, as shall cover the present loss.

4. These claims must be complied with very soon, or never. There will be an end not to his rights over you, and not to your obligations to him, but there will be an end to your opportunities of discharging these obligations. Soon he will cease to call upon you to repent and to believe in his Son. He will not violently enforce these claims on you. But there is another set of claims that he will *exact* of you. He will not exact obedience, but punishment he will. Your will and consent are necessary that you should obey, but not that you should suffer. The question submitted to you to-day, for decision, must be acted on very soon, or the claimant will withdraw it forever, and the session will terminate. Will you then decide, and decide *now*, to comply with these claims; or will you continue to resist or to neglect them? Will you? How can you do it? I *dare* not. I am not afraid of any man, but God, I confess, I fear, and am not ashamed to make the

confession. But not *fear* alone ; *gratitude* forbids me longer to disregard them. Soon I must, whether I would or not, meet God. How can I, while these claims are not satisfied ?

Will you comply with them ? Will you do what the Lord requires of you ? Do not ask me what he requires ? Will you do what he requires, whatever it be ? Will the rich man go and sell all, if Christ should say so ? You may not hesitate because of the nature of the claims. The question is, whether you will submit to them, whatever they shall appear to be. How reasonable it is that you should ; that you should decide on doing what God requires of you ! Is it possible that you can hesitate ?

Alas ! unbelief, a secret, but most efficient unbelief, is the cause of all our want of success with you. If what I assert to-day about the claims of God on you, were believed, either you would immediately comply with them, or else be very ill at ease with yourselves and unhappy in the resolution not to comply. But now you neither comply, nor concern yourself because you do not.

The treatment which some of you give them, you express in language like this : "Some of these days I hope and mean to comply with them." Suppose you should treat other claims in this manner. Suppose that, on the day, a note falls due, you should go to the bank and say, "Some of these days I hope to pay that note," would this hinder the protest ? What trifling it would be ! Men will not allow themselves so to be trifled with. Will God ? You will find

that he will not. These claims have long been due.

We learn hence what *religion* is. It is to comply with the claims of God ; and *conversion* is the beginning of this compliance ; and *repentance* is sorrow for not not having complied sooner ; and *faith* is the act by which we rely on Christ for the satisfaction of all past claims. How reasonable a thing then is religion ! Why, it is to become an honest man in one's dealings with God. That is all. And if so, then it is not beneath any one to become religious. And it is no laughing matter to become religious ; and those that make sport of it, must themselves be rogues, since rogues only ridicule honesty.

A word now to you who have promised compliance with the claims of God on you. Remember to promise is not to perform ; and betwixt promise and performance the interval often is wide. You have each of you said in reply to the command of God, "Soñ go work," "I go, sir," but have you gone? You know what the Lord requires of you, to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with him ; to deny all ungodliness and to live soberly, to show forth the praises of him who has called you, to let your light shine ; that you should be blameless, and harmless sons of God without rebuke. This is the will of God, even your sanctification. So is the will of God, that with well-doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men ; to speak evil of no man, to be kind, tender-hearted ; having your conversation honest and holy. This he requires, and you profess and have promised to do. Are you doing it? He

requires of you to do more than others do ; to care for the souls of men, to labor to promote his cause and kingdom.

That some profess and promise to comply with the claims of God, and do not, is no reason why others should not comply with them. And yet how many continue to say, "Oh ! there are so many unworthy professors ;" and therefore you will be an unworthy non-professor. "I think I am as good as many of your professors of religion." I trust you are, and am sorry that you are contented to be no better. "Others do not comply with the claims of God, why should I?" What if they do not, what is that to you? Will you not *die* alone? Will you not meet God and be judged alone? Will it avail you then that you followed a multitude to do evil ; that you was one of many that were in rebellion against God ; and that in neglecting religion, you only did as did others?

Here are the claims of God on your soul. You see what they are, and how valid they are, and now the question is, will you comply with them? "Choose you this day whom you will serve, but as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord."



## SERMON XVI.

Oh! \* \* \* \* how often would I \* \* \* \* and ye would not.  
LUKE xiii. 34.

THE whole verse reads, "Oh! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee: how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!"

But I make no use of the intermediate words, those I have repeated expressing the ideas to which I wish particularly to draw your attention.

The salvation of the soul is the chief concern, the grand problem; the first, great, and almost I might say only thing to be done; the supreme business of life, the work given us to do. He who has not done this, has done nothing to any purpose. Infinitely worse than uselessly, and in vain he lives, whom death overtakes and finds it undone.

I shall not stay to prove that you have a soul, and that it is immortal, and that it is fallen and lost, a soul both cursed and corrupted by sin, the subject of a great ruin and therefore needing a great salvation. I may assume without formal proof, what the entire volume of revelation, and the whole work and passion of Christ proceed upon as true.

The salvation of the soul of man has excited a

deep and thrilling interest wherever the history of his fall and ruin has been made known. Much has been felt about it, much has been done for it; and still more suffered. God has manifested any thing but indifference to the immortal interests of men. The whole trinity has been employed about them; and all holy creatures of all worlds have felt and acted in concert. Nothing ever awakened a concern so deep and wide; for no object were ever such labors undertaken, and such sacrifices made. Still it is not accomplished. Some indeed are saved, but not all, not the greater part; not, I suppose, a moiety of this assembly. And this leads me to observe, that,

The salvation of the soul, after all that has been done for it, depends on the consent of two wills, either of which dissenting, it is not and cannot be accomplished; the will of him that saves, and the will of him that is to be saved. As God is the author of it, and he works only what he wills, if he be not inclined favorably, it is not accomplished, and never can be however much the soul may be inclined to have it accomplished. There is a sense, as I shall show you, in which it is of him that willeth, but there is another and very important sense in which "it is not of him that willeth, but of God that showeth mercy." So on the other hand, as man is not the mere passive subject of salvation, but active and voluntary in its accomplishment, it is equally true that if he be obstinately indisposed to it, it is unaccomplished, and while he remains indisposed, impracticable. It is manifest from the nature of the work that the will of the sinner must concur to its production. In every

reconciliation there is and must be the free and spontaneous consent of both the parties. A forced reconciliation is no reconciliation. And hence God never attempts to compel sinners to be saved, but saves them by making them willing in the day of his power ; working in them to will and to do of his own good pleasure ; and if he could not do this, he could not save them. The principal work of the Holy Spirit is to remove from the heart of the sinner, his deep-rooted indisposition.

There must then be the consent of both the parties. Both must be willing. If only one is willing, nothing is accomplished, however willing he may be. Was not Christ willing to gather the children of Jerusalem to himself ? does he not say, "How often would I," but they were not gathered, because though he would, they would not. Some are absurd enough to infer that they will be saved beyond all doubt, because Christ is so willing to save them ; but was he not willing to save the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and yet were they saved ? What if he will, if, at the same time, you will not.

Both the parties must be willing, and I add they must be willing *at the same time*. The consent of both the parties must be coincident in point of time. If they are willing only at different times, they might as well remain unwilling. If when one is ready to be reconciled, the other is not, it avails nothing though both should be ready at some time. You may think that this is a case which can never occur ; that the sinner can never be willing, without finding God willing, he being always ready with his consent

to the reconciliation, whenever the sinner signifies his. And there is indeed a willingness on the part of the sinner, which always finds God willing, but then it is that willingness which is of God's own production; a sincere, penitent, holy willingness. But there is also a willingness of which the same cannot be said. It does not always find God willing. I appeal to facts in proof of this. Have you never been yourself, or seen another in some sense willing to be saved, while yet there was no manifest interposition of God to save, and this disposition was not met by him by any thing on his part corresponding to it? Is not this the very case contemplated in Proverbs? "Because I have called and ye refused, I will mock when your fear cometh; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer." Here first God was willing, and in testimony of his willingness, he called, he stretched out his hand, he even intreated, as well as counselled and reproved; but all this while, and a *long* while it may have been the sinner refused, disregarded, set at nought, yea hated. Then afterwards, when his fear came, and destruction as a whirlwind, and distress and anguish came upon him, then he was willing, for men will be gracious when pangs are upon them, and he called and he sought; but then God refused, he would not answer, he would not be found. Is not this the very case I have supposed? both the parties ready and well-disposed, yet nothing accomplished, the sinner perishing; because, just because they were not both ready at the same time. God was ready and the sinner was ready, but at different times. God was to be found and the sinner sought

him; but he did not seek him when he was to be found. God called on the sinner, and the sinner called on God; but when God called, the sinner was inexorable; and then when the sinner called, God was inexorable. This is no figment of mine. It is a case that may occur, that has occurred. It may, and I fear it will, be realized in the experience of some of you.

Now he is willing, but you are not; he ready, you not ready, yet he calls, but you will not hear his voice, nor regard his outstretched hand. He may be found, but you will not seek him. And so I fear it will be with some of you a little too long. I fear you will never be willing till he is unwilling; you not ready till he has ceased to be ready. That you will seek God at some period of your history, and call earnestly upon him, I have not the shadow of a doubt, and, oh! that you would do it now, now while he is near and may be found; but, ah! I fear you will not seek him till he is not to be found; and not call upon him until he is out of hearing. Oh! shall it be, shall it be? Will you wait till he, wearied of waiting, has gone and hid himself forever from you? Will you never go to the mercy seat, until God has left it, and never approach the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, until it is sealed and shut up forever? Shall it be so?

And here I am reminded of another error that I would expose. You think that, if you ever have any disposition towards God and salvation, all will undoubtedly be well with you. But here you see that you may have some such disposition, and may

call on God and seek him, and yet it shall be totally unavailing. And, if it were not so, where would be the point of that exhortation, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found?" Does any one say this is very discouraging? So it is; and it is meant to be so. But whom does it discourage? Only those that are meaning to seek God at some future time; and ought they not to be discouraged? Do they expect us to encourage them in putting off what God is pressing on them? Is there in this assembly one that is saying, "Oh! that I knew where I might find him." We have said nothing to discourage him. Or is there one just gathering up himself to go to Jesus? We have said nothing, and have nothing to say, to dishearten him. Let him go on.

Both then must be *willing*, and *simultaneously* willing. And now I add, if they be, salvation is accomplished immediately and necessarily. When two parties that had been at variance both agree on certain terms to be reconciled to each other, they are by that very agreement reconciled. If those sinners whom Christ says he would have often gathered, had been willing to be gathered, would they not have been gathered? What more was wanting but their willingness that he should gather them? Gives he any other reason why they were not gathered, but that they would not? He would, but they would not. He exculpates himself and throws the whole blame on them. "Ye would not."

It follows from this last remark, that, if there be any persons in this house unsaved, not gathered to

Christ, not reconciled to God, in every such case this agreement does not exist, but one of the parties is not disposed to the reconciliation, because, if it were not so, no such case could exist here. The reconciliation would be universal, if the disposition to be reconciled were so.

Now there are in this house such persons. There is no question about it. Are all of you Christians in the Scriptural sense of that word, followers of Jesus Christ, servants of God, penitents, believers, subjects of regeneration, children, and heirs of the Most High? No, by no means. The fact is otherwise. The reason of the fact, then, I affirm to be, that there does not exist that concurrence of wills, of which I have been speaking. There is unwillingness somewhere. I do not say where now, but somewhere. One of the parties, either God or the sinner, is indisposed to reconciliation. Either you, hearer, are not willing that Christ should save you, or else Christ is not willing to save you. Which is it that is unwilling? You or Jesus Christ? If you say that it is not you, you, in effect, say that it is he, since it must be he, if it is not you. Is it he? Is it Christ? You are not disposed to take that ground. You hesitate to lay the blame on him. And yet how can it be you, if you are indeed a rational being? How can you be unwilling to accept of such a gratuity as salvation? unwilling to have all your sins pardoned, and to be made an object of the divine favor, to be delivered from the wrath to come and from the slavery of sin, and to become an heir of heaven, how

can you be? I do not wonder that you hesitate to acknowledge that it is you. The presumption on many accounts is that the unwilling one is Christ, rather than you. It seems easier to suppose that, for some good and wise reasons, he is not willing to save you, than that you should be unwilling to let him save you. When a negotiation is on foot to bring about a reconciliation between two parties, and there is a reluctance in one of the parties, the presumption always is, that the reluctant party is not the inferior, the necessitous, the offending, the suffering party, the guilty, the one that is to gain every thing by the reconciliation. No, we say he cannot be the reluctant party, the one that hesitates; it must be the other. And, as in the case in hand, you are the inferior, offending, guilty, necessitous one, and the one that is to be the gainer, the presumption is that the unwillingness is not on your part, but rather on that of Christ. This is the *presumption*, but not the *fact*. The fact is just the reverse of the anticipation. Christ is the willing and well-disposed party. That language of lamentation is his. That interjection of grief expresses the deep sorrows of his bosom. It is not those ill-fated inhabitants that we hear lamenting over their doom, but it is Christ that laments over it. The concern and the grief are all on his part. It is not they that say, "How often would we;" but he that says, "How often would I." It was not he, but they that would not. And he can most sincerely adopt the same affecting language in reference to all in this house



that are unsaved, "Oh! how often would I, and ye would not." He can exculpate himself in regard to every one of you. Your condition is not what it is to-day in consequence of any unwillingness on the part of Christ to make it better, but purely because you have been unwilling that he should improve it.

There is no one here to whom Christ has not signified his willingness to save him, and that *often*. How often, he says, meaning very often; how often! he calls upon us to see and admire how often; "how often would I have done that for you, which the hen does for her brood; have comforted and cherished and protected you; how often!"

Has he not signified his willingness to save you? Was not his coming, in your nature, to your world for the single purpose of saving sinners, a testimony of his willingness to save? Does not his uniform language, while he was on earth, express even more than willingness, anxiety to save? Can he be unwilling to save those whom he died to save? If you should make any very great sacrifice to benefit another, could it be doubted that you were disposed to benefit him? If Christ is willing to save some, why not you? Has he excepted you? Does he not say, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—"If any man thirst, let him take the water of life freely"—"Whosoever will, let him come?" Has he not given as many testimonies of his willingness to save you, as of his willingness to save any others?

Has he not called you to him? Is he not always calling you by his word? Has he not often called you by his providence? and sometimes has he not stood at the door and knocked, and waited for you to open it and admit him? Has not the Spirit of Christ sometimes striven with you? Do you think if you were to go to him now, that he would reject you?

Then why are you not saved? The answer is easy. "Ye would not." When heretofore Christ would, ye would not, and now while he will, "ye will not come unto him that ye might have life. This expresses the true state of the case in regard to every unsaved person here. He is the reluctant party. He the unwilling one. The sinner declines the proffered terms. He will not consent to the reconciliation. I do not say that you are unwilling to be happy, to be saved from such a place as hell is described to be, or to go to some sort of heaven. Christ does not say this. But you are unwilling to be holy, to be a follower of Jesus Christ, to be saved in the only way in which you or any can be saved. You are unwilling to be and to do what the Christian Scriptures require of you.

What an affecting contrast is here presented! "How often would I, and ye would not." The Saviour willing; the sinner unwilling. God saying, "Hear, oh! my people, and I will testify unto thee, oh! Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me. Oh! that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways. But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of

me." The contrast! Look at it; look attentively. God willing to be reconciled to you, and you unwilling to be reconciled to him. He offering you his friendship, and you unceremoniously declining it. He giving his Son to die for you, and you refusing to accept of him. Just see the figure you make in this contrast. See, and blush, and tremble; be ashamed and be afraid. And oh! that you might be differently affected too; that you might be grieved and weep.

Just think, sinner, think here, and go home and think, why you are not now a child of God and an heir of heaven, a Christian; that it is because you have no disposition to be so; no inclination to it in you, that is at all worthy of that name. Let your reflection be now, what, if you go on in your present course, it will forever be, "I perish because I would not go to Christ. I fall by my own hand." Every subject of the second death will hereafter appear to have been a suicide. Will you be one? Will you sink to hell under the infamy and self-reproach of having been a self-soul murderer? Oh! turn from your murderous intent; stay the hand you have lifted against yourself. Spare, oh! spare your soul! Be willing.

Shall that obstacle remain, when every other is removed out of the way? Shall your will oppose, when nothing else opposes? Resolve that that shall not remain to obstruct.

It is characteristic of Christians that the same mind which was in Christ, is also in them. They sympathize with him. Then do ye sympathize with

him in this sorrow? Lament with him over fallen and lost sinners. Behold them and be grieved. Look at their character; look at their prospects.

And pray that God would make them willing, for for this he will be inquired of to do it for us.

“Dear Saviour! draw reluctant hearts.”

## SERMON XVII.

What wilt thou say, when he shall punish thee?—JEREMIAH xiii. 21.

IT was in view of certain threatened calamities that were to come on Judah from the hand of the Lord, that this question is asked of her, “what wilt thou say? now wilt thou justify, or excuse thyself? what reasonable complaint will you be able to make, in the day that God shall *visit upon* thee, when these threatenings are executed, when he shall punish thee?” Think now what you will be able to say. Consider the case, and prepare your plea. Will you be able to say any thing?

I put this question now to each impenitent person in this assembly, to each individual present who is not obeying the Gospel of Christ; if I should say to all the wicked I put it, perhaps many of you would improperly except yourselves from the number designated by that odious term; and therefore I use the other language. What wilt *thou* say, dying as thou art living, appearing before God in judgment as thou appearest to him now, continuing impenitent, persisting in disobedience to the Gospel, if the character thou carriest into eternity be that which you are now forming for it; on this condition, a condition but too probable, and becoming more so every day,

what wilt thou say, when the season of the Lord's long suffering shall close, and he who has long waited to be gracious to you, now waits no longer ; and the sceptre of mercy which he extended to you, and you would not touch, is exchanged for the sword of justice, and he who delighteth in mercy, proceedeth to that which is his strange work, when those hands of the living God that were held out to thee in entreaty, and were ready to clasp thee to that bosom, thou fearfully fallest into, in the day that he will deal with thee in judgment ; who would not be dealt with in mercy, when he shall punish thee, and the pangs of a begun perdition come upon thee, then what wilt thou say, for thou wilt be permitted to speak, if thou hast any thing to say, why the long suspended sentence of justice against thee, should not be executed ? *What wilt thou say ?*

But perhaps you have no faith in future punishment ; perhaps you do not believe that you, or any sinner will ever be brought into these circumstances. Then you have no faith in the veracity of God, or in the Bible as his word, for it is written, "these shall go away into everlasting punishment ; except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, taking vengeance on them who know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who shall be punished with everlasting destruction ;" and much more to the same amount is written. And it is all explicit. What will you do with that word *punishment*, and that phrase *everlasting punishment* ? Explain them away ? You cannot. Expunge them ?

you can, but for the same reason another may expunge *everlasting life*; you may and should expunge the whole. You do not believe in future punishment? Neither did the antediluvians. Neither did the inhabitants of the cities of the plain; but punishment came, notwithstanding their unbelief. You are fulfillers of prophecy, for it is said (1. Peter iii.) there should be such as you. But you say, the belief is unreasonable; it conflicts with all our ideas of benevolence and justice. What! that a righteous moral governor should punish incorrigible offenders, sinners that will not repent, rebels that refuse to be reconciled to him, though often invited, and earnestly entreated, and long waited for, and the mean while most kindly dealt with by their injured sovereign; and when the terms of reconciliation are easy as they could be made, and the whole expense of bringing it about is borne by God! Is it unreasonable and contrary to what is just and benevolent to punish such? It were hard then to say what is reasonable, and what comports with justice and benevolence, if this does not. There is a way of talking on this subject, adopted even by sensible men, which, but for its melancholy consequences, might well be smiled at for its silliness. They do not believe that God ever made a man to punish him; as if it followed from that that he never made a man whom he will punish. True, he never made a man to punish him, neither did he ever make a man to deserve punishment. He made no soul to *suffer*, neither to *sin*. But men have sinned, and they do suffer; and God has declared that they shall suffer,

not in fulfillment of his original design in their creation, but in righteous retribution for their manifold and unrepented sins. He made men to be happy, not only hereafter, but here too; but at the same time he created them capable of making themselves miserable; and we see they have done it for this life and who shall say that in the exercise of this free agency they may not do it for that life which is to come? The reasoning which I oppose is much as if a hard drinker should say, "I do not believe that God ever made a man to die a sot," and so sustained by his logic, he goes on drinking deeper and deeper, and finds at last that the benevolence of God will not preserve him from the natural tendency or just punishment of his misdeeds. But to an assembly of persons professing faith in the Bible, what more is necessary than to adduce an explicit declaration of God that he will punish; and this has been done as in the text. "When, therefore, he shall punish." It is not said "if he should," but "when he shall;" he will do it. Do you not sometimes fear that he will? Does your conscience within you never forebode evil from him? Does it not sometimes intimate to you that God may treat you, as that same authority pronounces that you deserve? for whose heart does not condemn him? and God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things.

What *then* will you say? The question is not, what *now* you have to say, for now you imagine you have a great deal to say. And some can speak long and fluently in a strain of self-exculpation; but *then*, when confronted with your Maker and Judge;



and when all things are seen by the clear and searching light of eternity; *then*, what wilt thou say? Anticipate the answer you will then give; consider and con over the plea you will offer then. *What* will you say?

My object is to show you that none of the pleas, which, under such circumstances, are usually offered, will you be able to allege; that, in short, you will be unable to say any thing; and that, by your speechlessness before the throne, you will, however reluctantly, justify the sentence which consigns you to destruction. What wilt thou say?

You will not be able to say that you were *ignorant* of the existence of the law, for the transgression of which you are condemned. You know *now* that God has, in the capacity of your sovereign and moral governor, enacted a law, the great principles of which he has written upon the heart, and the details of which constitute a portion of his external revelation.

Nor can you say that this law is *unintelligible*. Whatever obscurity attaches to the *doctrines* of the Bible, none rests on its precepts. Who, having a heart, cannot comprehend what is meant by, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself?" Who knoweth not what he would have others do to him, and, consequently, what he should do to them? And doth not nature itself distinctly intimate how a dependant and highly favored creature, like one of you, should feel and act towards his supreme benefactor. Unintelligible!

Nor, again, can you reasonably complain of the *character* of this law. "The law is holy and the

commandment holy, just, and good." Its spirit is love; its tendency happiness. That one word, in which all the law is comprehended, children what is it? Is it equity? No; it is *love*. It is all it ought to be. It is nothing it should not be. Wherein could it be amended? Which of its requirements ought to be dispensed with? What one of its demands lowered in the least?

Nor can you complain of any want of *adaptation* in this law; that it transcends your capacities, exceeds your natural powers of performance. No; you want no new faculty to obey it perfectly. You want only a rectified heart. You want but the will. It suits every thing belonging to you but your inclinations. No man could ever say that, with every disposition to obey it, he was unable.

You cannot plead ignorance of its *penalty*. It would not avail you, if you could, for the grand reason why you should obey the law of God, is not derived from its penalty. But you know that it has a penalty, and what the penalty is. You read "the soul that sinneth, it shall die. Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." It seems to you *excessive*, and yet it does not *deter* you from sin. You cannot say that you were not *warned* of the consequences of disobedience; and that God strikes, before he speaks. No; he speaks first, and often, and long, and loud, and terrifically, and affectionately, and only strikes, when all has been said in vain, and then reluctantly, for he hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked. How often hast thou not been warned,

and by how many voices, some external, and one still and small within thee, and reasoned with, entreated, expostulated with! What has not been done to deter and to dissuade you from sinning? What obstructions have not been thrown in your way to destruction! But you surmount them all. What then wilt thou say, when he shall punish thee?

That you have never transgressed this law, or only once, or but seldom, and then inadvertently, through infirmity? This you will not say; you cannot. Who has not sinned many times, and deliberately? What if you were strongly tempted; you were not necessitated to sin; and if there were impulses that urged you on, were there not also restraints to keep you back? Why should not *these* have prevailed rather than those? Will you plead a *corrupt nature* as your apology? The Psalmist recognizes that truth, but he does not plead it in exculpation. And it is certain that God will not receive it as a valid apology. Why then should you urge it? Ought it to be received? Should the sinfulness of your heart justify the sinfulness of your life? Can the strength of your propensity to evil excuse your actual evil doings?

Will you say that your sin did no harm, injured no one, no one but God? But you must allow the law-giver to be the judge of that. The consequences of a particular sin he alone is able to trace out. There is no such thing as an inoffensive sin. Adam might have urged this plea, with as much propriety as any one of his offspring. What parent, whose authority has been disregarded in a particular instance

by a child, will accept from him the plea that his offence injured no one ?

Will you be able to say, that, when you had sinned, God hastened the execution of the sentence against you ; struck the blow immediately, waited not for a second offence, and gave you no opportunity to evade the stroke ; that, as soon as you found you had sinned, you were sorry, and penitently sought his face, but was spurned away, and that you found no place for reconciliation with him, though you sought it carefully with tears ; and that, seeing your case to be hopeless, you went on sinning in despair ; that God showed no disposition to be reconciled to you, and did nothing to promote a reconciliation ; and that even after your sin, God dealt only unkindly with you, spake only roughly to you, looked only frowningly upon you, and just barely supported you in being, grudging you every comfort, or distilling good into your cup only drop by drop, instead of filling it to overflowing with his bounty ? In short that refuge failed you, and no one cared for your soul ? Wilt thou say this ? Can you ? Has God showed no disposition to be reconciled to you ? What ! when " he so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ;" when he spared not his own Son ! Has he done nothing, has he not done every thing to bring about reconciliation ? done, until he asks " what more could have been done, that I have not done ?" And now he *beseeches* you to be reconciled to him, and requires in order to reconciliation, only that which is involved in reconciliation,

your repentance and submission to him. And he waits long with you, gives you ample time for reflection and decision ; and the meanwhile looks benevolently towards you, speaks soothingly to you, calls you his son, his daughter, and treats you as a father does a child, and follows you with such affectionate importunity that if a man were equally urgent with you, you would suspect him of being influenced by some sinister and selfish motive ; and the first faint sigh of the sorrowful heart he hears, and the feeble resolution to arise and go back he encourages and strengthens, and goes out himself to meet the returning penitent, interrupts his confession, embraces him, honors him, rejoices over him. Ah what wilt thou say, when *he* shall punish thee ? That refuge failed thee ? What, when there was this refuge, Jesus Christ, open, accessible, and ample, the stronghold of his righteousness to which you were invited to turn ? That no one cared for thy soul ? Ah, did not God care for it when he *so* loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ? Did not Christ care for it when in Gethsemane he agonized and on Calvary bled for souls ? And would the Holy Spirit follow and strive with thee as he does, if he cared not for your soul ? Would angels rejoice in the repentance of the soul, if they cared not for it ? Ah, you are not that friendless, deserted being, that no one cares for you. There are many now on earth who care for you. Faithful ministers care for you and therefore they plead with you. Real Christians care for you,

and therefore in secret pray and meet to pray for you. And have you no pious mother that careth for you, whose tears daily fall, and prayers ascend for you? or is she now in heaven, there with angels, waiting, wishing, rejoicing and wishing it was her son and daughter? No one careth for you! You would not believe us, if we were to tell you the concern that we have for you. *No one* careth for you! Ah it is only infernal spirits, selfish men and yourself that do not care for you.

What will you say? That there was an irreversible divine *decree* that stood an insurmountable obstruction in your way to heaven, and even impelled you in the downward direction? You will see by the light of eternity that that was not the case, nor indeed the doctrine of those who were supposed to hold it. I hesitate not to say that no purpose of God stands in the way of any soul's salvation. The decrees of God are promotive of salvation, not obstructive of it. Predestination is unto life. Men are not chosen to be lost, but to be saved. What is reprobation, but God's determination to punish incorrigible offenders, and you, if you are one. And can you object to that? Can you complain that God purposes to punish all who obstinately refuse to repent, and obey the Gospel?

What then wilt thou say, when he shall punish thee? I can think of nothing, nothing exculpatory, nothing extenuating. You will be speechless, as he was whom the king when he came in to see the guests, asked how he came in thither not having on a wedding garment. Yes, you will be silent, not

through intimidation, but from conviction, not as unable to speak, but as having nothing to say ; self-condemned, as well as condemned by your judge ; conscience consenting to and confirming the decision against you, and your ownself through all eternity reproaching you, and thus engendering and nourishing a worm gnawing within worse than the fire that shall burn about you. And shall it come to this ? Shall this be the issue of life ? Will any of you lie down in sorrow, and dwell with devouring fire ? You *will*, you *must*, except you repent and be converted. The Lord God gracious and merciful, will by no means clear the guilty. He does not desire to punish you. *That* he has shown you, he is long suffering because he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, but if you will not come to repentance while there is space for it, his determination is taken that you shall perish. He would that you should turn and live ; but if you will not turn, you must die. And it is *just* that you should ; yea *more than* just. Jesus consents to it, and mercy while she laments the necessity, approves and acquiesces in the doom.

Is there truth in what I have said ? And do you believe it ? And shall it not affect you ? Will you, can you remain any longer unconcerned and inactive ? Is it possible that you can sleep on under such circumstances ? Will you not awake and arise, and attempt something this very day ; and not wait, and not defer, but act and act immediately ? Remember that the way to get repentance is to exercise it ; and the way to obtain faith is to believe ;

and that there is no other manner of entering at the strait gate, but by striving. I call upon you now and here to make the secret, solemn resolution that you will seek and serve the Lord your God. I ask you not to express audibly the purpose. I ask you not to rise up in token of the resolution being made. But I ask you, I exhort you, I beseech you to breathe it now into the listening ear of God. Say, oh! say, "I will arise and go to my father." Fear not to make the resolution, rather fear not to make it. Will you refuse, will you resist the Spirit of God? Remember he will not always strive with you?

I solicit the prayers of Christians here especially in behalf of any that may this day form the resolution to return to God. And may he have mercy upon you all.



## SERMON XVIII.

Out of thy own mouth will I judge thee.—LUKE xix. 22.

IN that part of the parable of the talents in which the Lord of the servants replies to the apology of the third servant, his answer is worthy of our solemn consideration. The fact, as related in the parable, is shortly this. The third servant offers as a reason for letting his talent lie idle, and giving himself no concern to promote the interests and secure the approbation of his Lord, that he esteemed him a hard and austere man, who was in the habit of reaping where he had not sown, and of taking up where he had not laid down. In reply to which, his Lord, in place of repelling the false and injurious accusation, upbraids him with the insufficiency of his reason, on the supposition of its being true, alleges his inability to defend himself on his own ground, and convicts him of having acted inconsistently with his own avowed belief. "Out of thy own mouth," that is, by thy own confessions, reasoning with thee on thy own false and unworthy principles, "will I judge thee."

Now the general truth that I would deduce from this narrative, and endeavor to establish, may be expressed in these terms. That insensibility and inac-

tion with which mankind are to so great an extent chargeable, as touching religion, are indefensible on every ground, unsusceptible of apology from any quarter, and incapable of being justified on any principles whatsoever, being inconsistent with what is enjoined by every man's belief, however loose and erroneous it may be. Preachers of our cast and connexion are not unfrequently complained of, as being too precise in our statements of duty, too rigid in our interpretations of Scripture, too austere in our views, and too unsparing in our condemnations. We are supposed to be in the habit of representing the principles of the divine government of moral agents, as more strict and severe than they are, in reality, and of placing the standard of the final judgment altogether higher than the Judge himself will place it; and our hearers are sometimes offended, and they feel discouraged, and they say with a kind of indignant despair, "Who then can be saved?" Who can realize such a virtue? Who bear such a measurement? Who can pass through so fiery a trial and be unconsumed? And some of you, perhaps, feel inclined to seek another and a less troublesome style of sermonizing. Well, my hearers, you shall not have this complaint to make to-day. We will try you to-day by nothing more sublime or more severe than your own common confessions and your own acknowledged principles; and, if you are cast, you shall not have to charge it on the Bible, or on any sectarian interpretation of it. We will not go, as our manner is, to the unaccommodating word of God for the criteria; but you shall say what they shall

be, and may choose the standard by which you will be judged ; and out of the declarations of your own mouths will we judge you. And what if you should be condemned even by these ? You acknowledge that you will have every thing to dread from the issues of the judgment day, if our interpretations of the word of God be correct ; but what if it shall appear in the result of this day's inquiry, that you will equally have every thing to apprehend, if no other principles are recognized and adhered to in the final judgment, but what are universally held and daily acted upon in the cabinet, and the counting-house, and the work-shop, and have always been in force among men of all sorts and professions ? What if we shall be able to prove that, in the solemn and momentous affair of religion, you set at nought the truths which guide you, and the principles which govern you in every other affair, and without any good reason for it, act totally unlike yourselves, when the soul and immortality are the matters in question ? If it can be proved, it is worth your while to weigh the evidence, and to ponder seriously on the conclusion.

I would not exaggerate the fact on which my observations proceed. I would be far from misrepresenting the state of the human mind, as it stands affected to religion. I would not, by a single shade, darken beyond the actual reality the picture of its insensibility and inertness ; but is it not a fact that generally speaking, and with very few exceptions, the great truths of religion are almost without place in the thoughts and without power over the affections of men ? Has not something frozen the heart

into insensibility on this subject, and benumbed the faculties of the soul into inaction? Whether you look abroad, or turn the eye inward, do you find any matter of great importance and general concern, to which the bulk of mankind feel so indifferently, and in which they act so indolently? Are we not sometimes amazed at the degree of our own unconcern? And when we come out of a state of thoughtless security, is not our own insensibility the first thing of which we become sensible? I will not suppose the fact questionable, but proceed immediately to enumerate the common and acknowledged principles which are set at nought and sinned against by this insensibility.

1. It is a principle universally admitted among men that every subject should receive a degree of attention proportioned to its intrinsic magnitude and our personal interest in it; and in things purely secular, they endeavor to carry this principle into practice. A subject, in which they have no personal concern, will sometimes attract their attention by reason of its abstract magnitude, and the address which it makes to the principle of curiosity in man. Every subject, however trifling in itself, engages them, if they have an interest embarked in it. But if the subject be itself grand, and the value of their stake in it great, then it assumes a paramount consequence in their estimation, and occupies the chief place in the soul. And it is so just and so natural that this should be the case, that every one is willing to have his conformity to this principle put to the test. But will not this principle condemn your in-

sensibility to religion? By religion, I mean here not the peculiarities of the Christian or any other system. I use the term in a more liberal and enlarged sense as expressive of our relations, our duties, our interests, and our prospects as accountable and immortal beings; and now I ask if the subject, which comprehends these, is in itself so insignificant, or, in its relation to man, so theoretical, that it is undeserving of any more attention than what he bestows upon it? I ask if it is not the subject, in comparison with which all other subjects are little and mean, and to man uninteresting? Does it not spread wider, tower higher, and reach farther than any other? Its object is God, its field is the universe, and its duration is eternity. Whatever be your belief, it does not affect the magnificence of the subject, or diminish the interest which you have and which you ought to feel in it. The mode of your belief can only change the nature of the interest you have in it. Atheistic indifference and infidel insensibility are as indefensible as the same states of mind in connexion with any other creed. If there is no God, that discovery ought to affect the mind as powerfully, as the finding that there is one, only in a different manner. There is as much in the belief of annihilation to affect the heart as there is in the cherished sentiment of immortality, and infinitely more in the one than in the other to trouble it. In the latter doctrine, whatever be our views of the immortal state, whether cheerful or sad, it cannot be denied that there is every thing to interest and engage us both as speculative and sensitive beings. If we are certain of a happy futu-

riety, can that justify our insensibility and our practical irreligiou, and our devotedness to the world? Should the heir of heaven cleave so closely to the earth? Why is he not weary of his minority? "The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant." If he is not certain of being happy hereafter, yet ought he not to be concerned to make it certain; and if the subject does not admit of certainty, yet ought not the uncertainty, in which he is doomed to continue until the moment of his entering on his future condition, to fill him with concern? Let me lay the truth fairly before you. It cannot be denied that the most brittle and precarious thing in nature, is all that separates us from an eternal condition of happiness, or of misery, or of nonentity, and that in one of the three we shall be in a few years, and may be to-morrow. Now, whether we know which one of them shall be our portion or know it not, it is in either case unreasonable and unnatural to remain in a state of unconcern and thoughtless indifference. Two of these conditions are abhorrent to our nature, and one of them is infinitely undesirable. The bare possibility that the last may be our condition, is distressing to the soul; and if there be any thing within the compass of our knowledge which goes to create a probability that it may be ours, every such consideration ought to increase our concern. Now, does not the incontrovertible fact that we are sinners, diminish the probability, to say the least, of our being destined heavenward? Does not God sometimes punish sinners? Are you ignorant of history? Are you perfectly

sure that there is no truth in the Bible? May he not punish sin in a future world? Would it be wonderful if God should treat us as we deserve? May it not be strictly right for him to do, what might be very painful to us?

What is heaven, the character of its inhabitants, the kind of its joys? Are we qualified for it? Are we qualifying for it? Is it certain that Jesus Christ never existed, or that he was not the Son of God, or that he never said, "strait is the gate and narrow the way and few find it?" I could continue until nightfall these questions and these suggestions, and every one of them should be calculated to create painful doubt in the mind as to your futurity and to deepen the darkness of your prospects for eternity, and every one of them should be such as no reflecting man of honest mind can be regardless of. There is indeed one character that may rise superior to doubt and look forward with confidence and triumph, but he is a Christian in such a sense as few are, and he is infinitely far from that insensibility which I arraign. But not to dwell too long on this, I pass to another principle of common life,

2. Which is sinned against in religion, that of employing the present for the advantage of the future. What man of you is there whose schemes do not contemplate the future, and whose labors do not look to that which is to come? Who of you is satisfied to-day, if you have not laid up something in store for to-morrow? Who is in the habit of leaving it for the morrow to take care of the things of itself in every sense of that phrase? Do you not anticipate

its wants and endeavor to guard against its accidents, and often are not your anxieties for the time to come far more fatiguing to you than the cares which respect the present? And is not all this so reasonable and so requisite, that you despise the man who is not careful and provident for the future? How then can you justify yourselves in not carrying this habit into religion, and pushing this principle a little farther? Why stop you short at death? If there is a future beyond the grave, why is it not as reasonable and as requisite that provision should be made for it, as well as for that which is on this side of it? Why do not your plans embrace the eternal future? Why do you not labor and lay up for it? Wherefore so much carefulness and so provident a regard for the days that shall precede death, and none for the duration that is to ensue upon it? Why may not neglect and improvidence in the latter case be as disastrous as they are known to be in the former? If to-morrow shall be an addition to life, it has been consulted for, and provided against, but if it should chance to be the beginning of immortality, it has no provision made for it, it has no stock laid by for it. Why is one class of your affairs left at such loose ends? Why has not the accident of death, if I may so call it, been guarded against? Can nothing be done now that shall have a felicitous bearing on that ulterior future, and are you therefore unconcerned and inactive about it? It is not so. A course of action, a plan of life may be readily suggested that shall be as propitious to our interests in eternity, as any that can be pursued is conducive to the prosperity of the



next week or the next year. There is as intimate a connexion between our present doings and the happiness or misery of the farthest future, as of the nearest future. We have full as much encouragement to be anxious, inquisitive and diligent for eternity, as for the time that separates us from it. Is eternity less certain than the time to come? It is more certain. We are sure that we shall live forever, but not sure that we shall live till morrow. Is eternity less important than time? It is infinitely more so. May we confidently trust God for all that is beyond the grave and give ourselves no concern about it? Why not then as unreservedly confide in him for that which is antecedent to it? Ah we know that disgrace and disaster would ensue upon that, and that it would be the ruin of every thing temporal to trust God, without at the same time tasking ourselves; and how know we but that an indolent confidence in God will be just as destructive to our spiritual and eternal interests? Is not the presumption in favor of it?

3. And here I am reminded of another inconsistency into which many fall. I refer to the unjustifiable and unauthorized use which they make of the fact of the divine benevolence in their speculations upon religion. A use which they would blush to make of it in reference to any other subject. What would you think of the man who should found all his expectations of health, and affluence, and happiness, on the simple fact of the divine benignity, and should infer from the truth that God is good, that he shall never know want or feel pain? Would he not be

regarded by you as the miserable victim of a deplorable infatuation? Yet some among you are calculating on an acquittal at the day of judgment, and a ready entrance into the kingdom of heaven for no other reason, and have not a hope beyond the grave but what is based upon the pure fact that God is a benevolent and merciful being. Because he is good, they confidently conclude that they cannot perish and so give themselves no farther concern about the matter. The conclusion is wholly unauthorized by the premises. We might as well infer from the goodness of God, that there has never been any suffering in the world, that sin has no existence, and that all mankind are this moment as happy as they are capable of being, in defiance of the notorious fact to the contrary. If the premises will justify the other conclusion, they will justify this. If because God is good I may be certain that I shall be happy in eternity, I may for the same reason infer that I shall be happy to-morrow and the next day and throughout life. If my persuasion that God wishes well to his creatures may reconcile me to be unconcerned and inactive for eternity, I am chargeable with gross inconsistency if I do not suffer it to reconcile me to an equal unconcern and inaction for all of time that remaineth to me. Why do I labor for my daily bread, why am I careful for any thing, why do I not let all my faculties sleep, why do I not spare myself all anxiety and exertion for any thing, if the truth of his goodness will bear such an inference? The conclusion is unwarranted, else the old world had not been deluged, nor the cities of the

plain buried in fire, and Jerusalem had never fallen. God is as good when he threatens as when he promises, and as good while he executes his threatenings as while he fulfills his promises. Yes, and he may shut all the wicked out of heaven without disparagement to his goodness.

4. There is another common principle unhesitatingly admitted among men, on which I would remark in this connexion, as being denied a place among the first truths of religion ; the principle of not expecting any acquisition of considerable value without much precedent labor and pains taken for it. Who calculates on riches, honors, literature and philosophy as immediate communications from God ? Who does not expect and is not contented to toil long and laboriously for them ? What man is ignorant that it is not simply by the divine blessing, that he may ordinarily hope to come into the possession of any earthly good, but by that blessing upon his own exertions ? And does not the same law hold in religion ? Why then is it practically disregarded ? Why are you expecting to be enriched with the opulence of the skies, and to be learned in the love of heaven, ay, to be made kings and priests unto God forever and ever, without putting forth any efforts, and making any spiritual struggle for it ? Did the Son of God repeal this old law of nature ? What ! when he said, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force ;" or "strive to enter in at the strait gate ;" or did he commission his apostles to release souls from the obligation of it ? What ! when he directs them to say, "work out your

salvation with fear and trembling ; let us labor to enter into that rest ; let us lay aside every weight and run our race with patience, and give all diligence to make our calling and election sure." How, at the last day, will ye be able to apologize for the indolent expectation of heaven ? How answer to the charge of having set aside that law of nature, and reason, and inspired religion, which indissolubly connects human efforts with human attainments, and which forbids man to hope for that for which he does not labor ? Ah ! when your history shall be unrolled, and it is seen with how much assiduity and anxiety you pursued after earthly good, and, at the same time, with how much unconcern you looked forward to that which is heavenly, will it not be in the power of the Judge to condemn you out of your own history ?

5. There is yet one other principle of common life, which, we have to complain, is not acted upon in religion. It is that of adopting always the safer course. In our secular affairs, we have not at all times absolute certainty to guide us. It frequently happens that we find ourselves in a dilemma, in which we must take one of two courses, and we know not which we ought to take. In such cases we carefully inquire and estimate, and we finally adopt that which has the stronger probability in favor of it. Now, in our opinion, there is no such dilemma in religion. We need not act upon an uncertainty. The course that it is our duty and our interest to pursue, is strongly marked. But if, in your opinion, there is such a dilemma, and you see two

ways before you, of which you know not the one that you ought to take, ought you not to apply the same principle here that you act upon in the common affairs of life? Is it not unquestionably your duty to inquire, and to compare, and to estimate the probabilities in favor of each, and to be influenced by what shall be found the stronger reason? But do you so, and do you adopt what appears to you the safer course? Is not such a manner of life as the Scriptures recommend, (even honest infidels themselves being judges,) more likely to bring you to a happy end than any other? Is it not safer to be devout than to be undevout? to be just than to be unjust? to be chaste than to be unchaste? to be a man of prayer than to be a man of profaneness? an observer of the Sabbath than a violator of the same? Is it not safer to adopt the Christian system than to reject it? to be like St. John than to be like Herod? to follow the example of Moses than that of Pharaoh? Is it not safer to trust in Christ than not to trust in him, and safer to do all things whatsoever he commands than not to do them? Who will not give a ready affirmative to all these questions? In the one case we cannot lose any thing, and we may be, yes, we shall be, infinite gainers. In the other case we cannot gain any thing; it is not pretended; but we may lose every thing. In the former case we run no hazard; in the latter we hazard our heaven, our immortality, our God. How shall we be able to answer, at the judgment day, for our dereliction of so familiar and rational a principle?

I could easily find materials to extend this dis-

course to a much greater length ; but it will be much more to your advantage if you will yourselves continue and conclude the subject which I have commenced. And if you should find that the prudential maxims and common sense principles, which hold and govern in the affairs of time, are set aside in the affairs of eternity, ought not the discovery to alarm you? Can it be safe to pursue a course with respect to the business of the soul, which, if adopted in relation to any other business, would inevitably lead to the most disastrous result? Is not the God of this life also the presiding Deity of that to come? Is not the governor of this world the governor in every world? Is not the same immutable Being the author of nature and the legislator of religion? And when you shall find that even your own principles and opinions will not bear you out in your unconcern and inaction, will it not be time, high time, to make some change? Oh! that men were wise, that they understood this.

And do you, Christian hearer, be careful that your own principles do not condemn you. You cherish sentiments and entertain opinions that ought to act upon you with infinite power. You believe that Christ died for you, that the Holy Spirit inhabits you, that angels encamp about you, that eternity is your home, and heaven your inheritance. What manner of persons ought ye to be, holding such opinions, in all holy conversation. If Christ died for you, how profoundly thankful, how devotedly attached to him! if the Spirit dwells in



## SERMON XIX.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve.—JOSHUA xxiv. 15. How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him.—1. KINGS xviii. 21. I would thou wert cold or hot.—REVELATION iii. 15.

THESE three passages of Scripture are selected, because they agree in recommending and urging *decision* in religion. It is not any particular decision which they recommend, but *simply* decision; not this or that branch of the alternative, but one branch of it, or the other; the taking of a side, not designating the side, but leaving that to the choice of the individual; the being one thing or another, cold or hot; for Jehovah or for Baal, mammon, or whatever god or idol the person may see it good to prefer. And this is what I am going to recommend now to you and to urge upon you *decision, choice*. And since I am not about to dictate *how* you shall decide, but only to recommend *that* you decide, I trust I shall be heard with even more than your wonted attention. I need not say that I am not indifferent *how* you decide. I need not avow my anxiety that you should not only come to *some* decision without delay, but that you should come to such a decision as you shall never, never have cause to regret having made. I



pray, and trust that many unite with me in the prayer, that in choosing to-day whom you will serve, you may be inclined to choose to serve the Lord. But to recommend a decision in his favor is not the primary object now, but simply to recommend decision. Choose, this is all I have to say now. I leave all the rest with you.

That some of you are undecided, and these selections of Scripture therefore not inappropriate to your case, is manifest. You yourselves are conscious of it. When, however, I speak of you as being undecided, I do not mean all that is sometimes conveyed in that word. I do not mean that your hearts now fix on nothing, that there is no object on which at present your affections are supremely placed. I do not mean that there is any solid neutral ground on which you do or can stand ; but I mean that while on the one hand you have not decided for the service of God, neither have you on the other dispassionately and deliberately decided neither now, nor ever hereafter to engage in it. The state of mind to which I refer is real, and I believe is understood by you all.

And I ask now what you, whose state it is, can say in favor of it? Why do you not decide one way or the other? Indecision in reference to other matters, is never an agreeable state of mind. It is indeed positively and sometimes extremely painful, to have the mind alternately drawn in opposite directions, the judgment vacillating between contrary opinions, now inclining to this, then reverting to the other, uncertain, and not knowing what to do, when some-

thing must be done ; you have all had experience of its painfulness. And you have subsequently felt the relief of decision, as if some heavy burden had been taken off, or some irritating annoyance removed ; and that though you may have made a most unwise decision. I do believe that if some of you were now to decide against God, you would be immediately afterwards more at ease, and happy than you now are. If any one affirms that he does not find this state of mind painful, it is not his really ; he has secretly decided, and in all probability against God.

My first argument then in favor of decision, is derived from the *painfulness* of indecision. My second is from its *disgracefulness*. I appeal to you if it is not considered dishonorable to a man to remain long undecided on other subjects. What is thought of one who is always making up his mind and never does it, who now expresses this preference, and anon the opposite, and never takes a side, in politics for example, *on the fence* ? Is he not accounted weak or something worse than that ? And yet how long have not some of you been undecided on the subject of religion, hesitating whether to give the heart to God or not, vacillating between God and Mammon ; unable to make up your minds, and to this day apparently on no side ; neither fully for God, nor wholly against him. Is it creditable to you, to say no more ?

But I plead, in the *third* place, the *unnecessariness* of indecision. I know that immediate decision is not in all cases practicable. It is often necessary to occupy some time in weighing arguments and comparing advantages. The course which a man ought

to pursue does not always reveal itself immediately. Hesitation under such circumstances is reasonable and honorable. But this state of mind rarely continues long. We soon discover which scale predominates. We very soon see or think we see an inequality of excellence in two objects between which we are to choose. It does not take long to decide on the comparative merits of two rival candidates for office. It does not take ten, twenty, thirty, or fifty years to settle such questions as these and to determine the side we shall espouse or the course we will pursue. Yet this length of time some of you perhaps have been deliberating on the subject of religion, and you have come to no decision yet. Perhaps there is but a single subject on which you remain undecided, and that is the subject of religion! You find no difficulty with any other but this. What is the reason? Are the arguments in favor of either choice, in weight equal, or so nearly equal that you cannot determine which preponderate? Do you find reasons as many and as strong why you should not, as why you should serve God? Have you never yet been able to decide whether or not the Bible is the word of God; or that question having been decided affirmatively, are you still in doubt about its meaning; and though anxious to know, and diligently seeking, yet unable to discover which is the path of duty? Have you still some lingering fears that if you should decide for the service of God, and the discipleship of Jesus Christ you might be doing wrong? Do you stop and hesitate between the two courses, as not knowing which you ought to take? If this were the

case, you would have some apology for your indecision. But it is not the case, and you know it is not. Conscience has long ago decided the question of duty ; and the decision of that one question, is a decision of every other, for that cannot be safe, or honorable, or, on the whole, advantageous, which is wrong. If one has found the path of duty, he has found in it the path of peace, and safety, and profit, and glory too. You know *how* you ought to decide. There is no inability in your case to come to a decision ; for, if you cannot decide for God, you can decide against him. You can form to-day and execute the purpose, not to engage in the service of God. There is no want of power to do this. Why then do you not decide ? I will tell you. Your conscience dictates one course, and your inclination another. The one will not let you decide against the service of God ; the other will not allow you to decide for it. And these carry on within you a perpetual conflict, there waging the worst species of that worst kind of war, *civil* war. How many a soul is now the arena and the object of such a conflict ! Sometimes it is terminated by the submission of inclinations in the case of not a few of you, I trust ; but sometimes it is terminated by the capitulation of conscience, as in the case of some of you, I very much fear. There are those, who, having chosen, and now pursuing the course that is agreeable to their inclinations, have been able to persuade themselves that it is the right and safe course, and, consequently, have no disturbance from conscience, or from any quarter. Perhaps they think that they are serving God, though it be

notorious to every one else that they are not ; or not being under that delusion, they think that God is too good a being to allow any course which a creature of his may pursue, to terminate in destruction. And so they adopt secretly, if not avowedly, that pestilential doctrine, which is now proclaimed among us, that everlasting life and glory are equally the end of every moral course that a man may pursue ; and that whatever one soweth, whether it be good seed or bad, whether it be to the flesh or to the Spirit, he shall reap the same everlasting life. Be not deceived. God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. These have decided, and to a worse decision they could not have come ; for, if there be another more criminal, there is none so dangerous. He who does wrong, knowing that he does wrong, is more criminal than he who does wrong, thinking that he does right ; but, for the former, there is more hope than for the latter. The case, involving the greatest guilt, is, I suppose, his who adopts an evil practice in opposition to good principles ; but the case which is attended with most danger is his, who, having adopted an evil practice, has been able to bring down his principles to the level of his practice. Both make inclination their rule of action ; but the latter has somehow brought himself to believe, that, in conforming himself to that rule, he is obeying the law of God. Is it not shocking ?

Some have done this. But others have not been able to do it. In them conscience has been too well enlightened, and too carefully cultivated, perhaps,

by the early assiduities of some pious mother, to be so easily overcome ; and, in their breast, the struggle still goes on. The state of indecision continues. They are not disposed to choose the good part. The other, they are afraid to choose. Conscience draws them one way, inclination another. They cannot make them draw together. Now the first seems about to prevail, but then the other rallies, and victory seems ready to crown it. They wish they could reconcile God and the world, and so serve both ; and they try, but they cannot succeed ; and yet they try again. This is the double minded character. Here is the divided heart. This is the history of many, until death comes in, and the question is no longer open for decision. The alternative of life and death, of good and evil, of heaven and hell no longer exists ; evil, death, and hell alone remain, and these must be taken. There is no choice left.

The principal cause of indecision I have mentioned. There is something, however, which very much promotes it, that I have still to mention. It is the impression existing generally, that, to be undecided in religion, is vastly better than to be decided against it ; to halt between two opinions, better than to adopt the worse of the two ; in other words, that the temperature of lukewarmness is preferable to a lower temperature. One says, if I decide now, I shall decide against the service of God. I had better, therefore, come to no decision ; better make no choice, than a bad choice. And the person that reasons thus, secretly solaces himself with the reflection that he has not decided against God, though he

must acknowledge he has not decided for him ; if he has not embraced religion, yet one thing he knows, he has not renounced it ; he has always respected it. But is there any ground for this complacency ? What think you of a child who says he has a respect for filial obedience, but don't obey ? Is it so much better to halt, to be lukewarm, to come to no decision ? What says Joshua ? " If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose ye whom you will serve." Make any selection rather than none. What says Elijah ? " How long halt ye between two opinions ? If the Lord be God, follow him ; but if Baal, then follow him. What says an infinitely higher authority than either ? " I would thou wert cold or hot ?" These all declare in favor of decision, whichever way it be. Their language is, *choose*, whether it be good or evil, right or wrong, God or mammon ; but *choose*. It would appear from these passages, that, of all states of mind, in regard to religion, indecision is the most despised by God, and more than any other to be avoided by man ; and on every account, and in every view of it, we should guard against it. But that it is so on some accounts, we have the express authority of inspiration for affirming. It is certainly, of all states of mind, the most unreasonable. And then how dishonoring to God to hesitate and to be undecided when his service and favor constitute one part of the alternative presented ! What can be more so ? How would you regard a child, who should be always hesitating whether to renounce your authority, or to submit to it ? Would you not, on some accounts, and perhaps on the

whole, prefer that he should renounce it at once? So long as he cannot make up his mind to be subject to you, of what service is he to you, or of what credit? Would you not as lief have a person reject you at once, as vacillate in indecision between you and another in every great and good quality of character manifestly and immensely your inferior? What could offend you more than to be put in competition with such a one, and to have it implied that there is great difficulty in deciding on your comparative merits? And yet this the great and blessed God has to endure continually. He sees you acting as if unable to decide which is the better portion, he or the world; and which the worthier master, he or Satan. He sees you hesitating whether to give your heart to him, your creator, preserver, friend, and father, or to some corrupt creature or odious object of earth. You do not say, as some do virtually, "I will not give God my heart;" but you say what is harder to be borne by man or God, "I will think about it. I do not know what to do. I cannot make up my mind. I wish God would not demand my heart, or would be satisfied with half of it. I must have more time to determine." And you are undecided still.

In such a case of indecision, there is a degree of decision; in this negative state, something positive. "He that is not with me," says Christ, "is against me; not merely *not with me*, but *against me*: and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth." He who is not a friend of Jesus Christ, is not necessarily his declared and determined foe, but he is always more



than not his friend. He who vacillates between God and the world, inclines much more to the world than to God. If he indeed literally divided his heart between them, giving half to one and half to the other, and if his influence and his services were thus impartially bestowed, the case would be different, and indecision, though still hateful, would be less offensive to God.

I am reminded of something else which frequently reconciles sinners to a state of indecision. It is the impression that it will be easier to decide right hereafter than it is now. They expect to gain some advantage by deferring to decide. They suppose that a less effort and a lighter sacrifice will be necessary in deciding for God, when they shall have made a nearer approach to the grave. It is a delusion. Never were men more mistaken. If it were as they suppose, then it would follow that it is easier to become a Christian in old age than in youth. But is it so? And it would follow that there is next to no difficulty in becoming one on a death bed, which, whatever the living may say, no dying man ever testified. Is it so that the ease with which a heart will melt, is in the direct proportion of its hardness; or is it not a fact that the heart increases in hardness as long as it persists in impenitency? Is it true that the long indulgence of evil propensities does not increase their strength or that sinful inclinations are most easily overcome, when they are in their greatest strength? one of which must be true, if the theory can be maintained that a right decision is facilitated, by being postponed. Is it a fact that age impairs avarice,

or that one loves the world less, as the time of leaving it approaches. It is not a fact. It will never be easier with any one to decide for the service of God, than it is now. It will never require a less effort than to-day; and if the sacrifice will ever be smaller in reality, it will never appear and never be felt to be smaller than it is now. You may have less to give up hereafter, but you will never think so. What if external circumstances should become more auspicious? How little depends on them. How frequently are sinners converted under circumstances most unfavorable, while others under circumstances the most propitious remain unconverted. The huge obstacle is within. And it is daily rising and spreading and fixing itself more firmly; and there can be no external change for the better, to compensate for this internal change for the worse. No it is not becoming easier, it is becoming every day more difficult to make the right choice. The probability decreases, the prospect darkens daily and hourly. If one of you were assured of being within an hour of death, you would find repentance no easier than now it is, and it is a thousand to one you would die in your sins. The motives to repentance would perhaps be stronger, if indeed they can be stronger than now they are, but motives alone have never prevailed and will never prevail.

I have assigned the reasons in favor of immediate decision. And now bear with me while I state the case and distinctly tell you what I want you to do. Well, then, I want you to choose a *master* to-day. You must have one. To serve is incident to

your finite nature and dependent condition ; and you cannot serve two masters, God and mammon. Choose then between them. Here they are. Compare their claims and their merits and decide for the one or the other as it may seem good to you. Will you have for your Sovereign, Lord and Master, the great and good Jehovah, your beneficent creator, your unwearyed benefactor, your father, or some other? Will you bow to his authority, or some other's? Will you obey his laws, or be governed by other rules? Will you fear God or man? Take which side you please, but do take one or the other, for the arguments in favor of either cannot be equal. If it be reasonable, right, obligatory, the safer course, the more prudent part to serve God, serve him, commence his service now ; if otherwise, decline his service altogether. I want you to dispose of your heart to-day, to give it away ; the choice of the object I leave with you. If the claim of God to your heart be paramount, if he have the better right to it, if he has done most to deserve its affections, give it to him ; if not, give it elsewhere? Place your supreme affections on that which is most deserving of them. If any creature is more excellent than God, or if you owe more to any creature, or any creature can make you happier than God, give it to him. Do not think to divide it between them. That cannot be done ; "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him ; know ye not that the friendship of the world, is enmity with God?" Dispose of your heart, I say. And indeed you will do it. Its affections will, like the ivy, climb and cling to some object, if not God. It is

their nature. You have disposed of your heart for the present. Then I say dispose of it finally. Detach it from the object it embraces to-day, if you ever mean to do it. Why let it clasp itself more closely to that from which you mean hereafter to tear it ?

I want you, to state the case in another form ; to decide to-day whether you can get along safely and happily through life, and death, and immortality, without Jesus Christ. Through life, alas, I know you can, for some of you have got almost through it without him. And yet not in every sense without him ; without loving him and living to him, but not without many favors and much unrequited care and kindness from him ; but can you through death, and after death, amid the scenes and through the trials of the final day and so on immortally ? Can you get along and get through safely and triumphantly without the conduct of this guide, the defence of this protector, the care of this good shepherd, the aid of this divine helper, and the ministrations of that friendship, which for its objects not only toiled, and wept, but even bled ? Oh ! can you ? Into what other hands can you with safety commit that inestimable and deathless soul ? Have you not sinned ; and is there any remission of sin without shedding of blood ; can any blood cleanse from sin but his ; and can his, without being applied ? I want you to decide this question to-day ; you can do it ; and it is time it were decided. If you can do without Christ, say so, and give him up. Let your final decision be made at once. There is no advantage in keeping the question open any longer. Give him up. Resign all

expectations from him. Repel his advances. Reject his proposals. Tell him that you want nothing of him. And when he says come, do you go. And yet "to whom will you go?"

If your decision should be, however, that you cannot do without him, that you need his hand to lead, his arm to defend, and his blood to cleanse you, then this day apply to him, embrace and obey him; commit your soul to him, and take his yoke upon you. Is it not reasonable? To put it off another day argues weakness, and involves ingratitude the most shameful, presumption the most daring, and danger the most imminent.

But to present the case under one other aspect, I want you to-day to decide this question, whether the present state of your heart and complexion of your character is such as accompanies salvation; whether it be compatible with the favor of God, and consonant to heaven; whether some great change be not necessary in your heart and character, in the affections of the one and the habits of the other to make the worship and service of God delightful to you, and heaven a fit and agreeable place to you; whether you have not a deeper and different kind of repentance yet to exercise, and some sins which yet remain to be given up, and holiness to cultivate? It is right that you should decide this question to-day. If your decision be that no such change is necessary, that your heart will answer as it is, and that your character will pass, that your affections and your habits are such as they should be, and that you have that holiness without which no man shall see

the Lord, or else that it is not necessary to the blissful vision of God, though an inspired apostle says it is ; if this be your decision, as I should suspect it to be of many of you, judging from your unconcern and inactivity, give yourself no uneasiness about it ; go on as you are going ; live just as you have been living. ↓

But if you should come to a different decision, if some change should appear to be necessary, then I say go about it immediately. You decide it must be done. You acknowledge it is not done yet ; and you know it will never be done without you, though not done by you. If then, in view of this necessity, and in view of this fearful uncertainty of human life, and the hopelessness of any moral change after death, and the tremendous consequences of its being left undone forever, you can refuse to undertake it immediately, and will still put off, and be undecided, you may as well give up at once all pretensions to rationality, and conclude, when you are called up for trial at the bar of God, to put in the plea of insanity, and if you acted in other matters, as you do in religion, that plea would sustain you.

And now will you decide for the one part or the other ? Will you be one thing or the other ? Follow one of the opinions, be cold or hot, and not continue in that state of lukewarmness, nauseating even to God.

Will you choose God for your sovereign and portion, or some other ? Will you decide for or against repentance ?

Say, will you have this Christ or no ? Behold he

stands at the door ; he has knocked ; he has called ; and now he waits your decision. Say not, "I will *by and by*." I had rather you would say, "I will not." The former is a little more respectful than the latter, and that is all. Both mean the same ; and the first response has this disadvantage, that it deceives the person who makes it. He thinks that he only defers, when, in fact, he declines altogether. What is the difference, in reality, between "I will not" and "I will not *now*," when now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation ?

What are you waiting for ? To be willing ? You will be as unwilling the moment before you decide, if you ever decide for God, as you are now. Waiting for some impulse ? You will never feel it until you make the effort. Wait not then, but work, and interlace with all your efforts, prayer, hearty, honest, humble, fervent prayer.

## SERMON XX.

Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

GALATIANS vi. 7.

Is it not strange that the Apostle should have thought it necessary to draw out into a formal proposition, a truth so obvious, and admitted as that whatsoever a man soweth, that and not something of a different kind he shall also reap? Is it not universally understood that the product of a field will be according to the nature of the seed sown in it? The contrary proposition involves an absurdity. Yet how gravely and solemnly he states the truth. And not only so, but prefaces it with a caution against self-deception and trifling with God. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Men are indeed very prone to deceive themselves; and there are many cases of *gross* self-deception, but is any one in danger of so egregiously deceiving himself as to expect from a sowing of seed of one kind, a reaping of grain of another kind? Would you think it necessary to caution the least experienced farmer against harboring such an expectation? Why, then, does Paul so solemnly introduce and so formally express this truth, or *truism*, as I may call it. Because, though this proposition is assented to as expressing a truth in



agriculture, it is denied or disregarded as expressing a principle in morals. "Whatsoever a man soweth, if it chance of *wheat* or any other grain, that shall he also reap." And he is out of his senses, who cherishes any other expectation. Now it is equally true in a figurative sense that whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap. It is equally true of the conduct and actions of men as of seed cast into the ground, that they produce after their kind. Men receive according to their doings. Retribution proceeds upon a previous probation. "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." They shall reap as they have sown. "He that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." On the other hand, "Woe unto the wicked; it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him;" and again, "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices, for the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." They shall reap according as they have sown." "He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption." "For we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Thus we establish the doctrine. But though it be equally true of the moral conduct of men, as of literal seed, that it produces after its kind, it is by no means as unhesitatingly and universally admitted. Perhaps not many deny the naked proposition, but many,

almost all, act as if it was not true. They sow of one kind, yet hope to reap another totally different kind. They set at nought in morals, the established principle of agriculture that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. They cherish an expectation in one order of things, which, were they to cherish it in regard to any other order of things, would prove them to be out of their senses. They would be ashamed of themselves were they to calculate on reaping a crop of a kind different from that of the seed sown. And yet they do confidently expect to receive of a kind totally unlike the character of what they do. Wicked men do not expect to eat of the fruit of their own way, and to be filled with their own devices. They sow the wind, expecting to reap not the whirlwind, but a calm. (Do you expect to reap according to what you have sown? Would you not quake if you thought you were going to? For though you have done some things in some sense good, and not been as bad as possible, yet you have not glorified God.) They overlook the doctrine of *natural retribution*, as I may express it, to distinguish it from what is equally a doctrine of the Bible, that of *positive retribution*. It is a most interesting fact that God has so arranged things, that a man's own conduct shall call him to account. He may deny his accountability to God, but how can he deny his accountability to himself? He may temporarily deny or forget it, but he cannot always evade the scrutiny of himself; he must stand at his own bar, if not at God's; he must hear the verdict which his own reason and conscience give against him; and to

carry that verdict into execution there is an inviolable law of nature, which God will not exert his power of working miracles, to counteract. The thought that I am now upon, is most strikingly expressed in that admonition, "Be sure your sin will find you out." That pursues you, and that, your sin, will detect, and deliver you up.

But I say that this truth is now generally denied or overlooked, and men expect to escape the natural consequences of their conduct, as well as those also which the Bible declares shall infallibly follow. On no other principle, is their conduct capable of explanation. Would they sow as they do; indulge such feelings, cultivate such tempers and habits, cherish such thoughts, give way to such language, do such prohibited deeds, and disregard such commanded duties as they do, if they expected to reap accordingly? With what alarm, but for their unbelief, would men read or hear that appeal and declaration of Paul, 1. Corinthians, vi. 6, 10, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God and Christ." They *may*, notwithstanding, and they *shall*, is the secret belief, or cherished hope of many. And what is the ground of their faith and hope? The mercy and goodness of God. As well may that be relied on to make fire freeze, and ice burn. Yea better, for God hath expressly said that these shall not inherit his kingdom. His word is given. His veracity is pledged. He delighteth in mercy, but he delighteth also in truth. He is very merciful, but not so merciful as to be false. He is willing men should be saved, but lie he cannot.

It is so manifest that men on this point do deceive themselves, that no wonder he precedes the declaration of the truth with the caution, "Be not deceived." It was needed. Nor is it strange that he added, "God is not mocked." Would it not be a mocking of God, a trifling with him as the lawgiver and governor of nature, to expect him to interpose to give a man a crop unlike in kind the seed he sowed? And is it not equally trifling with him to expect him to set aside the laws which govern the moral world, in compliance with our wishes?

The error involved in the denial of my text is among the most mischievous in its effects. And here I may remark that the human family has never been visited by any scourge so destructive as error. Many speak of error as harmless, or scarcely an evil. Where have they been all their lives? Have they *read* nothing? Have they never looked about them? Have they never reflected? Why, almost all the misery and mischief that have been in the world may be traced back to its source in error, and all the happiness and order of the world are owing to truth. And just think how by certain *truths* mankind are restrained as much as they are, and God enabled thereby to carry on his moral government; and imagine what the world would be but for the influence of those truths. Now just conceive what would be the consequence, if the error of *atheism* were universal, or cherished by a majority, or that of *polytheism* connected with idolatry, as it of course is, or that of *annihilation*, or that which takes from con-

science all its power, the denial absolute of accountability. Could *famine* prove such a scourge, or *sword*, or *pestilence*, or the three united? No; for these but kill the body; while error attacks man in his soul, blinds the guide within us, and poisons the affections at their spring head, the heart.

I design not now to attempt the saying of all that might be easily said on the subject; but only to submit a few thoughts which the topic suggests.

1. It is a most interesting view to take of human conduct, that it is a *sowing*; that all our acts and exercises are as if they were planted in a rich soil, and to produce many fold; that we are to eat of the fruit of our doings, of whatever kind they are. If every act expired in its performance, and every exercise of mind and heart terminated with itself, it would not be of so much importance to attend to the nature of our acts and the character of our exercises. But it is not so. They are seeds sown and abundantly producing each after its kind. Then of what importance the kind. Of what immense moment the spirit I cherish and the life I lead now, when I am to hear from them again through God, aye, and to reap forever according to them. How important how I spend this day! centuries answer to it.

If this is a true view of human conduct, how important that every man should take it, and keep it continually before his mind. I am an accountable being. I am passing through a brief probation, preparatory to a long retribution. God has constituted me in some sense the author of my own destiny. I am to eat of the fruit of my doings.

I must be careful, therefore, what I do. I cannot reap different from what I sow. Let me not so deceive myself. Let me not so trifle with God as to indulge any such expectation. I must be attentive to the nature of the seed I sow. It must be precious seed. If a quantity of grain is converted into flour, made into bread, and eaten, there is an end of it. But what if it be sown in a fertile field, that is but the beginning of it. We are not consuming. We are sowing. We shall never have done with our conduct.

2. The *seed* we sow consists not merely of overt acts, but comprehends whatever goes to constitute or to manifest character. For every *idle* word a man shall give account to God; much more then for every *profane, false, slanderous, uncharitable, lascivious* word. And God will bring every work into judgment with *every secret thing*. If every secret thing, then every *thought, every feeling*, each exercise of mind and heart. Why not? If every secret thing, then the *temper, disposition, spirit*; the state of the affections; our *aims, our motives*, those most secret things, that lie lowest and most latent in the soul. "All a man's ways are right in his own eyes, but the Lord pondereth the hearts; weigheth the spirits." It is said of one, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart."

If this doctrine be correct, then attention is requisite to much more than our overt actions. We must beware of our *words*. We must take heed to our spirits. We must keep our hearts with all diligence. We must not only consider what we are doing, but

from what motive, and with what aim we are doing it.

3. How much seed every man sows even in a short life, seed of some sort or other ! How many acts, words, thoughts, and feelings enter into the record of every day, and each is a productive seed ! Now let these be multiplied by the days of the life of man, and what an aggregate they make ! What an abundant harvest of good or evil each of us is destined to reap, and that not merely because we sow a great deal of seed, but because,—

4. Nothing which is sown is so productive as human conduct ; nothing so fertile in its consequences ; so abundant in results. For the truth of this remark, I need only appeal to your observation and experience. Just think of the consequences which often follow from one wrong act, one misstep, one deviation ; how *lasting*, how *melancholy* ; what long remorse ; what abiding infamy ; what irretrievable adversity ; what bitter, protracted regrets ; what floods of tears ! How much of pain and woe even here, in this state which is not retributive, from one evil seed !

Thistles, thorns, and tares are not so productive as *sins*. Oh ! who can estimate the produce of one sin only ? Ah ! what then must be the reaping from a whole busy life of disobedience to God ? Ah ! what must be the eternal hereafter of the man who passes in impenitence through the days and years of life ? and especially if his course is under the bright light of the Gospel, and he is attended on his way, perhaps annoyed, by the calls and warnings of God, the

sweet invitations of the Saviour, and the winning whispers of the Spirit.

5. The season of sowing precedes that of reaping. Yes, my friends, be not deceived. It does. You may wonder that I so gravely assert this. The reason is, that some deny it. They make sowing and reaping, probation and retribution, *contemporaneous*. They say we reap while we sow. Every farmer knows better; and every sinner ought to know better. They say there is no reaping; no retribution hereafter. There is a consequence of that doctrine which I suspect its abettors have never contemplated. It is this. If men receive all their punishment here, it must follow that they receive all their reward here. If they receive their evil in this life, why not also their good. If, from sowing to the flesh, they reap the entire harvest here, why not also from sowing to the Spirit. If the consequences of evil conduct do not reach beyond the grave, how shall it be shown, with what consistency can it be maintained, that the consequences of good conduct transcend those limits?

This doctrine cannot be sustained. It is at war with all analogy. There is the *sowing*; then an *interval* longer or shorter, and then the reaping. That is the order. It is true in some cases, retribution commences here. Some men's sins anticipate the judgment. Sin often finds out its perpetrator very soon after the offence is committed. But this is not the general fact. Ordinarily, it takes a sin a good while to find out the offender. The consequences are long and late in developing themselves. Then how contrary to *Scripture* this doctrine is.



"Sentence against an evil work, is not speedily executed," it declares. And the wicked know it; and it is on this account that their hearts are fully set in them to do evil. There is such a long interval between sowing and reaping, that they are emboldened to believe there never will be a reaping. "Where is the promise of his coming?" they say. I would ask *when*, according to the Scriptures, we are to receive the things done in the body. While in the body? Not so. "We must all appear before the judgment seat, that every one may receive *then* the things done in the body." "It is appointed unto men once to die;" *and after that*, the judgment; not before, but after.

6. As it regards the *duration* of the reaping, we have nothing to rely on but the declaration of holy writ. Christ says, "these shall go away into everlasting punishment; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." He speaks of the dividing gulf as not only great, but impassable. If any one chooses to take an appeal from this decision of Jesus Christ, he can do so.

We may *learn* some things from this subject.

1. Some suppose that, if a man is only *sincere*, all will be well with him, however erroneous his views may be, and however wrong his conduct. But can *sincerity* arrest and alter the tendencies of conduct? If a man verily thinking he is sowing wheat, sow tares, will he reap wheat? We must take the consequences of our conduct. If we make mistakes, we must suffer the evil which results from them. We are under no such necessity of error and mistake as

some suppose. The mistake of infidelity is not necessary. Men voluntarily fall into it. No man need be an infidel. It is the error of his heart, propagating itself to his intellect. Many an infidel has acknowledged that he never read the book which he disbelieves. The mistake of fundamental heresy is unnecessary. He who errs in regard to the way of salvation, errs unnecessarily, voluntarily. That we are saved by *grace*, through faith in the atonement of the divine Jesus, and through sanctification of the Spirit, how, as with a sun-beam, in large letters of light is it written on the pages of inspiration !

2. We may learn the importance of beginning right ; that the first seeds we sow should be good, because they are the *first* ; they sink *deepest*. And the first may be the *only* seeds we shall sow. If you begin not early to sow to the Spirit, you may never sow to it.

How reasonable then, how wise early repentance and religion ! How absurd for a man to say, " I will first sow of bad seed ; and then afterwards of good." And yet many think children and young persons may very well pass a few years in thoughtlessness, and the neglect of God and religion. He judged not so who said, " Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

We have all sown to the flesh, and therefore all deserve to reap corruption. We have sinned, and death is the wages of sin. And we have naturally no disposition to sow except to the flesh ; and never such an inclination, an inclination to sow to the Spirit, exists in us, unless the Lord put it there.

Wherefore it is certain that if left to ourselves, we shall go on sowing to the flesh, and shall reap corruption and death.

But God has interposed ; and now the nature of the crop may be changed. Christ hath expiated the guilt of our sinful living, and provision is made to arrest the consequences of our sinful living. Now, he who, whatever evil seeds he may have scattered, and however long sown to the flesh, sows in tears, indicative of true repentance, shall reap in joy. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall return with joy, having his sheaves with him." Now, he who looks on him whom he has pierced and mourns ; he who beholds the Lamb of God, shall have his sin taken away. Nothing now but faith and repentance will produce eternal life ; and this they begin to produce even here.

You have sown that from which you shall reap *disquiet* only ; but Christ says, "Come unto me and ye shall have *rest* unto your souls." He descended, died, rose, went up, took his seat on the throne, ever lives to intercede. You rejoice ; but why ? Have you any interest in him ? Do you *love* him ? Are you *following* him, obeying him ? Is his *yoke* on you, his *Spirit* in you ? A Saviour he is ; but is he your's ? Hast thou looked on him as pierced by thee and mourned ? seen him through thy tears ? If not, thou art a *lost, condemned* being still ; and, remaining so till death, lost forever, *worse* lost than if there were no Christ.

## SERMON XXI.

How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?—JOHN v. 44.

Is it not strange, say some, very strange, how can it be accounted for, if Christianity comes well attested, if the evidence in support of revelation is sufficient, that there have always been and are now so many infidels and that so large a proportion of the talent, learning, and distinction of the world should be found on the side of infidelity? Is it not singular, does it not look suspicious, must there not be some capital defect in the evidences of Christianity, that so many minds, and highly-gifted minds should not admit their sufficiency? Can that be true which so many of the sons of genius, literature and philosophy reject as untrue? It is upon this train of thought that many go off into infidelity. It is thus that many of the young men of the nation reason themselves into scepticism. They are drawn away from the faith into which they were baptized by the attraction of some great intellect, that went off in the pursuit of some phantom of ambition, which the faith of Christ exposes, or for the indulgence of some lust which the pure system of Christianity condemns. They think it manly to follow where such a one

leads, and if it be to err, yet they cannot think it very dangerous to err in such company. I do not know that it is any more respectable to be led by a philosopher or politician, than to be led by a priest. It is unworthy of an intelligent and accountable being servilely and blindly to follow any mere man or class of men ; and the Protestant priest, (I speak for him, let the Catholic speak for himself,) desires no followers, but points all who would be his disciples to his, and their master, one to follow whom involves no degradation of mind, nor any danger of mistake or mischief. But not to go off too far on this track, suppose it is strange and hard to be accounted for that there should be so many infidels, and infidels of so much literary and intellectual respectability, is it not equally strange, indeed may I not say more strange that there should be so many believers, and so much intellect and learning on the side of the faith. How can it in any way be accounted for, if Christianity is not well attested, that it should be believed by so many, and by such men as Newton, Locke, Bacon and Grotius, men that occupied higher places of intellect than any infidel ever reached. Have we not reason to suspect the cause of infidelity, when such numbers, and so much talent and learning are arrayed against it? The infidel has something to account for, as well as the believer. Will he say, those men did not believe Christianity, they could not have believed such a system ; it is true, they found it convenient to profess their belief of it? Then they were hypocrites ; and this is the charity and good breeding of infidelity, that when their boast of

great names, (a vain boast under any circumstances,) is met by a boast of greater names, they turn round and will have it that these more eminent men were but infidels in disguise. A cheap kind of logic this! how conclusive it is judge ye.

I contend that however it may be now, yet in the primitive ages of Christianity, the difficulty is not to account for the existence of unbelievers, but for the existence of believers, on any other supposition than that which admits the truth and complete evidence of the system. There was nothing in Christianity to attract the men of those ages, but its truth. Its beauty and utility appeared not until after it was believed; they depend on its truth. There was no temptation to become a Christian. Every worldly consideration dissuaded from it. Until the fourth century of the Christian era all the suffering was on the side of the Christians. They inflicted nothing. It was all endurance. "If in this life only we have hope," says Paul in writing to the Corinthians, "we are of all men most miserable." Now was this avowal well calculated to make converts to Christianity? or the prominent exhibition of this indispensable condition of discipleship, "So then whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple?" How could such a system have been received by so many, and at so great a sacrifice, if not true and well attested to be true? That question has never been answered, and never can be. Let the infidel cease to sneer, the blush better becomes him, and be ashamed of his infidelity,

as one day, when the grounds of his unbelief are revealed, he will.

I have for the sake of argument admitted the supposition that it is strange and not easy to be explained, that there should be so many infidels, and infidels so distinguished. But I do not admit the fact that it is strange. I wonder not that there are so many infidels. I wonder that there are not more. I wonder that every great man is not an infidel. I know that all such men are not infidels, and I rejoice that they are not. I rejoice on their own account, not on account of Christianity, and for the credit which their adherence gives to the Christian cause. The Christian religion stands in no need of their testimony. It has higher and more satisfactory attestation than any man or all men can give it. Were they only the poor, the illiterate and the despised of men that embraced it, still its credentials would be complete, for they are divine. It has the signature and seal of God to it. It has received the repeated homage of nature to it. It is a fact, which comes to us on evidence as complete as any moral evidence can be, that nature's great laws were suspended to bear it witness. And on almost its every page there shines a light sent back from futurity, and revealing to man the things that are to be hereafter. And it attracts and fixes the profound attention and profounder admiration of minds which are to ours, what ours are to the scanty and equivocal intelligence of the brutes; minds, of the expansion and growth of six thousand years; minds whose bare intuitions penetrate deeper far than our most studious investi-

gations, and whose easiest and most ordinary exercises reach far, far beyond our most laborious projections of thought. It has the consenting testimony of these. It wants not ours. Let the great men of the world, (how little they are, I say not when compared with God, but when compared with the least, and last-created angel,) do as they please about believing the Christian religion. It is willing to save them, but it wanteth not their testimony. It cares not to receive any thing from them, though it has much to give them, if they will accept it. It is not dependant for its glory on any man, or any number and order of men. There is a feeling of commiseration in some hearts towards Christianity, in view of the multitude and might of its enemies ; but pity was never so inappropriately exercised. It is mightier through God than all its foes. Many it has conciliated and many destroyed, and all that remain must submit to its sway, or perish by its sword, for God himself is pledged for its triumphing.

I said a little while ago that I was not surprised there should be so many distinguished infidels. I am not, for the reason mentioned in the text ; "How can they believe, who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" Proud men, men ambitious, swollen with self admiration, and seeking with supreme desire the admiration of others, and caring less for the approbation of God, than for the applause which mortals can give, how can these believe ? The politician that does all his sacrifices at the shrine of popularity, and obeys the will of the people rather than that of God, and to party



sacrifices conscience, and justice, and humanity ; the man of honor who dreads more the sneer of the world than the power of the Almighty, and will rather run the risk of dying and being damned, than encounter the certainty of being despised by a few, whose approbation is the deepest disgrace ; the hero who tramples on the laws of God and man, in the hot pursuit of military glory, and the woman of fashion, who, to that fickle goddess, pays her daily adorations, and he who, whether he writes or speaks, or whatever he does, has human distinction for his object ; how can these believe, how can they admit the claims of a meek and lowly Saviour, how can these supreme lovers of the world become the subjects of him whose kingdom is not of this world, and who has not one secular honor or terrestrial distinction to confer, how can these who live on admiration consent to run the risk of being, what all his followers may expect to be, despised of men ? How can they embrace a system which not only forbids them to court the applause of others, but even requires them to abhor themselves ? How abhorrent to the proud must be a system whose first object is to mortify pride, and superinduce humility ! How can these believe ? That they should be real Christians, while such moral dispositions predominate in them, is impossible ; and it is on many accounts surprising that they should be even speculative believers.

But how is this ? you say. If the evidence in favor of Christianity is sufficient for conviction, how should their courting honor one of another, be any hindrance to their believing ? Is not faith the invol-

untary assent of the mind in view of testimony? And can the moral feelings of a man interpose to hinder that assent, when the testimony is satisfactory? Has a man power to believe that to be false which he wishes to be false? Are we not involuntary in our belief, and therefore irresponsible for it? This is the current opinion, I know; and among no class of men has it gained greater currency than among the more distinguished. Often has it been proclaimed from lips esteemed oracular; and I have seen it reported as having been expressed on the floor of Congress, that we have no sort of control over our belief. It is true to some extent; but as a universal proposition there is nothing more false; and there is nothing more pernicious than to receive it as true. It is to adopt infidelity at once. The sentiment is abhorrent to the Scriptures, and he who embraces this very common opinion, is an infidel, whether he knows it or not. How can he intelligently adopt a system which suspends salvation on the exercise of faith, when such are his views of faith? But I would not have you reject a notion simply because I say it is unchristian. Let us look at it.

Evidence is of several kinds, *sensible*, *mathematical* and *moral*. If the evidence in support of any truth or fact be sensible or mathematical, we confess that the control we have over our convictions is very slight. It extends no farther than we can restrain the exercise of our senses. We can shut our eyes and stop our ears, but that is all. If the evidence is presented, we cannot help believing according to it. In the case of a proposition supported by mathemati-

cal evidence, our only power is to refuse to pursue the chain of reasoning to its completion. If we do trace it through, we arrive at the demonstration, and that is irresistible. We may hate the conclusion, but we must admit it ; however much we may wish not to believe, yet we cannot help believing. It is quite different, when the evidence is moral, of that kind on which Christianity claims our belief. In this case, our power over our convictions extends much farther. In the first place, we can decline, and this much more easily and effectually than in the other cases, to contemplate and weigh the evidence. And this is what the majority of infidels do. They do not believe in the truth of the Christian religion. How should they ? They have never studied its evidences ; they have never examined its credentials. Peradventure they have never read the book which gives an account of this religion. Some distinguished deists, among whom was Hume, have acknowledged that they had never read the New Testament through ; and, I doubt not, candor would draw forth the same confession from very many. They have too much to do to undertake the regular perusal of the Bible, and the careful examination of the documents of Christianity. They are too much taken up with the pursuits of ambition ; too intently occupied with their schemes of self-aggrandizement, or with their devoirs to fashion. Yet these are they who tell us there is no truth or sense in Christianity ; and the mightiness of their intellect is considered as a good reason why it must be as they say, and they lead astray many, when, in fact,

the subject has never been submitted to their intellect.

But even when the moral evidence is brought before the mind, our control over our convictions does not cease. When the thing to be proved is what we do not like, and would wish not to be true, who knows not in how many ways the mind may resist the force of the evidence presented to it, and how easily it may prevail to remain unconvinced in view of what amounts to absolute moral demonstration; how ready it is at making and magnifying objections! how keen to discern and invent difficulties, and how prone, when they fall in with its prejudices, to lay an undue stress upon them. Take any literary production of antiquity, about the authorship and credibility of which there exists now no doubt, and suppose its contents to be as objectionable and abhorrent to us, as the statements of the Bible are to many; suppose it to contain the same sombre description of the human character, and to indulge in the same gloomy prediction of wrath and ruin, so that we should feel ourselves deeply interested to make it out untrue, and do you suppose that we should be at any loss in imagining objections to it, and that we should find any very great difficulty in persuading ourselves of its incredibility? We do not give the Bible the same fair chance to work conviction in us, that we do other books. We come to the examination of its credentials, if we come at all, with a host of prejudices against its contents. We are not merely indifferent to its truth or falsehood; we are more. We positively wish it may not be true. I

personate many when I say this. They perceive that, if the Bible be a book of truth, there is no good ground for that self complacency which they have been wont to indulge, and no foundation for that confidence with which they have been accustomed to look forward to the future. They see the contempt it pours on human pride, the condemnation it passes on the course which the men of the world are pursuing, the dark colors in which it portrays the character of man, the humiliation to which it would bring him down, the change of heart and life which it pronounces necessary to his salvation, and the infinitely fearful consequences if he goes on in the path, which they are conscious they are pursuing. They see that there is no chance for them, if the Bible be true, unless they submit to a change, to which now they feel a mortal aversion. If they admit its truth, unless they can interpret away its plainest statements, they can have no more peace, remaining as they are; they must repent or perish; they must renounce sin or be ruined by it. Now they have no disposition to repent; they have no objection to be a little sorry, but they like the course they are pursuing too well to abandon it. How can they, under such circumstances, believe? How easily they can disbelieve! With how little difficulty they can overlook or set aside the evidence in favor of a book which tells them such things! There is the whole heart persuading them to it; and have you yet to learn how great an influence the heart has upon the understanding? Ah! this is the way

that **infidels** are made. Let them look at it and be **ashamed** at the process by which they arrive at their **scepticism**. They adopt a practice incompatible with **the** principles of the Bible, and not willing to **change** their practice, and not willing to entertain **principles** which condemn their practice, they reject them **as** unsound. They are bent on doing evil, and "every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be **reproved**." The free thinker is apt to be first a free liver. Show us a praying infidel; let us see a holy **sceptic**, an unbeliever, who from religious considerations crucifies his lusts, and denies himself; show us a society of infidels laboriously exerting themselves and liberally contributing to do good to mankind, and for the existence of such infidels we may find it hard to account; but how there should be such as are, it is no difficult matter to say. They never pray; they ask no favors even of God; and what they call their gratitude, is rendered to nature; they have no fear of Jehovah before their eyes; religious considerations have no weight with them; and what is the good some of them would do? They would dissolve the holy tie of marriage, they would break in upon the family circle, and overturn the domestic altar, and consign the education of children to those who have no natural affection to secure their fidelity, they would trespass on the sacred right of property, and give to the winds the consolations and hopes of Christianity, and all, that men may be freed from the *superstition* of fearing God, and foreboding

a future punishment of their crimes ; this is the good they would do. And to this is the tendency of all infidelity ; though some stop short of this extreme.

The term faith means in the Bible not merely speculative belief, assent to the truth of Christianity in view of its evidences. It frequently stands for the whole of religion. To believe is to be a Christian. Now if there are moral dispositions, which are incompatible with even theoretical faith, how much more are they with experimental and practical Christianity. How can they believe, that is, be real Christians, followers of Jesus Christ, who court honor, who are bent on the pursuits of ambition, who are greedy after fame, and seek more a reputation among men, than to be in good repute with God ? How can they cordially adopt and submit themselves to the system of Christianity ? I may ask the same question of others ; how can they who are so bent on the accumulation of wealth, as to be in God's sight guilty of that covetousness, which is idolatry equally as Hindooism is ; how can they believe, who supremely love this world in any of its forms ; they who enamoured of pleasure, pursue her in all her paths, and follow her into all her haunts ; who serve divers lusts and passions, or one only ; they who supremely seek their own, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's ; they who cannot consent to deny themselves and take the cross, how can they be Christians ? they who tread what is called the path of honor ; that cringe and bow for popular favor ; that follow in the train of fashion, how can they believe, how can *ye* believe, my hearers ?

Are there not many things in your character and conduct incompatible with saving Christianity? See, if there be not, and what they are. Must there not be a great change in you, before you can be recognized as Christians in view of the statements of the word of God? Here is this you must do, for the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires it, and there is that you must leave undone, for the same Gospel forbids it; and some of you have formed habits which you must break off, and selected companies that you must forsake, whatever be the sacrifice, else how can ye believe and be saved? There are obstacles which you have raised up in your way, and must surmount; difficulties that you have created, and must remove. You must repent and be converted, or else realize the doom of unbelief, die in your sins, and where Christ is be forever forbidden to come.

How can ye believe that receive honor one of another? And will ye not renounce and forsake and deny yourselves that, whatever it be, which is incompatible with your being Christians, that which hinders you from going to Christ, and will hinder you from going to heaven? Oh! pluck out the right eye and cut off the right hand, though it pain, incommode and deform you, if it be necessary to enter into life. You know the sin that besets you, the lust you indulge, the reason you are not a Christian, and will you cling to it? What if the fruit be luscious, the core is poison.

What if the first draughts of the cup are sweet, the dregs are death and hell; if you drink on, you must drink all.



## SERMON XXII.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate.—LUKE xiii. 24.

How much of human life, short enough at best for the business that is allotted to it, and always to be presumed to be short in the remainder of it by its subject, ignorant as he is of the future, is occupied with mere impertinences! How we waste that of which we have none to spare, and which may be worth as much to us, as the very soul itself, in curious questions, in fruitless speculations, or in action that has no bearing on any of the mighty and momentous objects for which we live. Do we not sometimes think within ourselves, and perhaps in a spirit of murmuring, that it is a very short season indeed which God has allotted us for a long, long eternity; that he might have allowed us more time; that the magnitude of the work we have to do, requires a day of greater and less precious length? And yet we seem to have enough and some to spare. Why should we complain that we have so little, when we make no more use of that we have? If we began our work in the morning as soon as we are capable of understanding what we have to do, and thence forward labored diligently and constantly at our work, and wasted none of the day in unnecessary

speculations, or on by-concernments, and still the night should shut in upon us, with our work unfinished, we might with more appearance of reason complain. But this is never the case. Our work, though great, is soon accomplished, if undertaken with earnestness and pursued with energy. And though a Christian would find something to do, however long he should live, yet the same Being who cuts short his life, cancels at the same time his obligations, so far as they are connected with this world. The truth is that men desire a longer life of God, not for the sake of the work, which he has given them to do, but for the accomplishment of that, which they have cut out for themselves, for the compassing of their own schemes of profit and pleasure. The secret of their complainings is, that they have not time enough for that for which it was never intended that they should have any time. After all, what is the grand business of human life; I say *only* not the business, because while there is one supreme end, there are subordinate objects, to some of which we may lawfully, if we please, and to some of which we must in duty apply ourselves; but the *grand* business, which a sinner has to accomplish, that, the doing of which makes him ripe for death, however young he may be in years; safe in dying and secure of immortal life and happiness? It is to ask one practical question, "What must I do to be saved?" And to act agreeably to the answer, which God gives to it, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; enter ye in at the strait gate." For this who can say that he has not time enough? Might he not ask this question, while he

is asking, "Who will show us any good?" And in some of the hours in which he is occupied in the vain pursuit of the good he asks for, might he not successfully strive to enter in at the strait gate? And though it would require a different effort from any he now makes, yet would it require on the whole a greater effort? But, alas! he has no heart to it.

I have been led into this train of observation by the circumstance, which drew forth from our Saviour the words of the text. A certain person asked him this question, "Are there few that be saved?" Behold here a man enjoying the rare and precious opportunity of an interview with the Son of God, and see what use he makes of it; permitted to interrogate the divine Saviour, and hear what a question he asks, how impractical, how impertinent. What was it to him whether many or few would be saved? Whether there were few or many, would not affect the conditions of his salvation. Why this curiosity on the subject of other's salvation, without any apparent anxiety about his own? He wants to know how many would be in heaven; but not how he might get there. What a foolish man, that he did not avail himself of this opportunity to ask what he must do to be saved, and to draw forth from the great teacher something that he might make a practical use of!

The man that asked this question has long been dead, but the character lives, and it is not among the rarest exhibitions that we see. See what opportunities we have! What privileges are afforded us by the Sabbath, and by the services of the sanctuary;

and above all by the having in our possession and ever at hand, this volume, containing the record of what the Saviour said, and the history of what he did, and the writings of his immediate and inspired disciples. Have not we too an opportunity of interrogating the Son of God? Does he not answer from this oracle? Yet peradventure we make no better use of our opportunity, than the man of whom we have been speaking, did of his. We carry to the Bible, if not the very same question he put to the Saviour, yet questions as unpractical and irrelevant, or if not in every sense irrelevant, yet premature and of minor importance; and so it is when you have the opportunity of conversing with clergymen and others, for whose theological knowledge, and science in the Scriptures, you have some respect. Your questions are such as these, "what is likely to be the future condition of such as die in infancy?" Cannot you trust them in the hands of God? Are you afraid that he will do them injustice? "What is the probability of the salvation of the heathen?" And why do you wish to estimate that? Is not this one thing clear, that their condition for the present life, and their prospects for the life to come would both be far better, provided they had the Gospel? And is it not manifestly your duty to do all that is in your power to send them the Gospel? What then do you want more? Why expend all your charity in wondering, and wishing, and hoping, and pitying? Let it rather flow forth in its appropriate channel, in action. Do something. Promote foreign missions. That is the way to care for the heathens. Another

is curious to know if we shall recognize each other in heaven. That is taking it for granted that we shall get there. Let us make sure of heaven, before we agitate the question of recognition. And then let us be satisfied with this, if our heavenly Father sees that it will be conducive to the happiness of the children whom he has adopted from earth, that they should recognize each other, and recollect the relations and renew the intimacies of life ; it will be so, and if not, it will be otherwise. Another is anxious to know if there will be different degrees of punishment in a future world. Why does he not rather consider what the lowest degree will be, how intolerable ; and that whatever may be the varieties of intensity, the duration in every case will be equal, because everlasting. Or his question is perhaps whether the instrument of future punishment will be material fire. Why is he not satisfied with this, that if it will not be literal fire, it will at least be something of which that is the fittest similitude ? Others carry to their Bible such a question as this, "When may the millenium be expected to occur ? and is it to be presumed that, in that blessed period, all the individuals of the human family will be righteous, or only the generality of mankind ?"

I say not that such inquiries are never under any circumstances innocent, and proper to some extent to be pursued. But I ask what he has to do with them, who has a soul unsaved, and exposed to all the terrors and torments of an imminent perdition, and who has never yet asked what he must do to escape this great impending evil ?

There are those who investigate the Scriptures primarily for some historical purpose, or to resolve some prophetic question. Others consult these oracles but as critics; and still others, only as cavillers, anxious to see how much they can discover to find fault with. They wonder what this passage means, or how it is possible to reconcile this part of the Bible with that, or what could have induced our Saviour to express himself as he is reported to have done on certain occasions which they will specify; and the conclusion to which they come, perhaps, after all, is that this is a very strange and unintelligible volume; they can make nothing out of it. Ah! and is it so that they can make nothing out of it? Can they not make out of it what their duty is? Do they not but too plainly perceive that it is something, which they have no disposition to do, and is not this the secret of their fault-finding? What if that passage be obscure, does it render unintelligible this, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish?" What if, with all our efforts, we are unable to discern the coherence and consistency between this inspired declaration and that other? Does it follow that they are incoherent in fact, and that the Bible is an imposition on mankind? Were there, therefore, no miracles ever wrought, or was the present extraordinary condition of the Jewish people not foretold some 4000 years ago? Is the Gospel false and nothing worth, and is there no benevolence in the plan of salvation, because there are some things in Paul's Epistles, which are hard to be understood? Or, does it follow that there was no meekness and

gentleness, no condescension and love in the character and conduct of Jesus Christ, because he once uttered what his disciples conceived to be a hard saying?

But I am dwelling unintentionally and disproportionately long on this part of my subject. I have thought it necessary however to let you see with how much curiosity, and with how little concern men read the Bible and hear the Gospel preached. What a number of inquiries they have to make about the mere circumstances of religion, while about the thing itself they have scarcely a question to ask. How few of you, my hearers, bring to this place, and carry to your Bibles the great practical inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" And is not this reason enough why you are profited no more by your reading and hearing?

But, to return. The man asked, "Are there few that be saved?" "And he said unto them," (for there were many standing by, waiting for his answer, and he directed it to them all,) "He said to them," not what they expected him to say; he replies to what the question ought to have been, rather than to what it was. He does not tell them whether few or many would be saved, though, on another occasion, when no such question was asked, when he was enforcing the duty of entering in at the strait gate by various considerations, he introduces among others this "and few there be that find it." Then when a duty was to be urged, he does not hesitate to avow the fact; but here, when mere curiosity was to be gratified, he withholds it; and he acted consistently.

He was always a practical preacher ; he would not amuse ; he would instruct and admonish. He came to the world, not to answer curious, but useful questions ; not to demonstrate theorems, but to solve the one grand problem, "How shall man be just with God ?" "What must he do to be saved ?" And this is one among the proofs of the divinity of his mission ; as it is an argument in favor of the truth of the Bible generally, that it is manifestly a book never intended to gratify curiosity, a book whose aim throughout is usefulness, a practical work ; and, by-the-way, it would be of essential service to us, if, in reading the Bible, we would ever bear in mind this characteristic of the book. We should cease to wonder why so many circumstances are passed over in silence, and why so many explanations are omitted, and why some of its narratives are so void of detail in their progress, and so abrupt in their conclusion. How different a book the Bible would have been, if it had been gotten up by uninspired men. How much particularity it would have contained ; and, if we may judge of what it would have been from what the contemporary writings of the Jewish doctors are, what niceties and what puerilities would have been found in it ! How much would have been written merely to gratify a vain and morbid curiosity ! And what arts, intended to recommend the work, would have been apparent throughout it ! The Bible, on this supposition, would have been what the Apocrypha is now ; and we should have had in our New Testament, what we have in the Apocryphal New Testament, such pieces as the



Gospel of the birth of Mary, the Gospel of the infancy of Jesus, and the correspondence of Paul and Seneca. The more familiar I make myself with the Bible, the more firmly am I persuaded from the internal evidence alone, that it could not have been the work of unaided men, that it must be the work of God. In its details, as well as in its general characteristics, how exceedingly unlike the productions of men it is ; especially how unlike the productions of the age, in which it appeared among men. But to return from this departure also. "And he said unto them ;" hear what he said to them, for he says it to you also. Instead of telling them how many, or how few would be saved, he would put them on doing something to secure their own salvation. He recommends that they should make an immediate, direct, and powerful personal effort towards a single, distinct, and definite object. "Strive ; all of you and every one for himself, for it is a personal concern ; there can be no partnership in this business. And do it now, and not lazily and feebly. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

Observe the object which Christ directs them to have in view, entering in at the strait gate. Heaven is represented to us as a goal, and eternal life as a prize, hung up, as it were, at the goal ; and we are told of a way, which conducts to it, and it is said to be a narrow way, and there is but one. All others are but paths in the broad way, which leads to destruction. Now the way to heaven and life, this narrow way, is entered by a gate yet more narrow, called here "the strait gate," for there is only one,

and this gate communicates with the broad way, in which the Gospel finds us all travelling. The object proposed is, that they should leave the broad way and enter by this gate into the narrow way; that they should change the direction of their goings; that they should set their faces and their feet toward heaven; that they should essentially alter their course; in other words, that they should begin the business of religion. And as religion begins in regeneration or conversion, this great change is that which they are to propose and for which they are to strive; or we may say it is faith and repentance, inasmuch as these are the first and immediate exercises of a regenerate nature. This then is the object they are directed to propose to themselves. And you see it is not merely to do better than they had been accustomed to do, to cast off some few bad habits, to reform their conduct in some respects, and to be more attentive to the external duties of religion, (for this would not be to change their direction, but simply to walk more circumspectly in the broad way, to choose out and pursue a more respectable and less frequented path to perdition; and this is all that some propose to do, all that they think necessary to be done;) but our Saviour recommends much more, a radical reformation of the heart, a great spiritual change of the inner, as well as of the outer man, a final forsaking of the broad way. And this object he directs them to set distinctly and definitely before them; they must propose and pursue it, they must not expect to reach it by any random efforts, they must aim at it. The eye must be on it, and the ef-

fort direct to reach it. They must make exertions with salvation for their definite object. What multitudes never do this, never propose their salvation and pursue it as a separate object ; they expect it by the by, as the result of certain indirect efforts, they endeavor they say to do their duty, to lead an upright life, and to act suitably to the several relations they sustain, and they hope by the mercy of God to get to heaven at last ; but this is not striving to enter in at the strait gate, as we are commanded. And we are commanded also to seek the Lord, not to expect to find him without seeking him, or while we are seeking something else. Such persons do certain things, hoping at the same time to be saved, but they do nothing to be saved, that is, with salvation in view and in aim. And the probability is that they never have felt any anxiety about their salvation as a specific object. Oh ! my hearers, if you would be saved, you must be sensible that you are lost ; and under the pressure of that feeling you must seek and strive to be saved. You cannot happen in at the strait gate. No one ever entered it by chance. You must go directly up to it, and then with singleness of object, and strength, and perseverance of effort, strive to enter in.

This then being the object to be proposed, and nothing short of it nor any thing aside from it, and to be distinctly and definitely proposed ; the next question is, what are we to do to attain it ? What does Christ tell us to do to enter in at the strait gate ? Does he say, *wish* to enter in ? No ; yet this is all that some persons ever do ; they wish, and perhaps

with some sincerity and strength of desire to enter ; but the way to heaven is not so entered. Does he say, *hope* to enter in ? No ; for Christ never encouraged a hope, for which there was not some reasonable foundation. And besides, he tells us in this very connexion of some, who would most confidently hope and expect to enter in ; and yet be totally disappointed. Nevertheless is not this about the whole, that some ever do to enter in ? they hope to enter in, to be saved. Ask them the reason of the hope that is in them, and they have none to give, or they give one that is far from justifying their hope. Now a hope without any foundation to rest upon, or with an insufficient foundation is really no more than a wish, and ought not to be called a hope. But again, does Christ say, *wait* to enter in ? This is what, according to the views of many, he ought to have said, for they contend it is all they can do, to wait ; which is to do nothing. And they reason with some plausibility ; they ask, " What can we do ? Can we change our own hearts, raise ourselves from spiritual death, and repent of ourselves ? Does not the Saviour himself say, no man *can* come to me, except the Father draw him ? Must we not wait then ?" And these questions are asked with an air of triumph, as if in the opinion of the interrogator the victory must be yielded to him without a struggle. But I ask, does Christ recommend us to wait ? If he does, why then certainly we must wait, but if he does not, may we infer from any declaration of his, that we ought to wait ? May we infer from a declaration of his, what he himself does not infer from it ? If he has

taught any doctrine, which is a reason why we should not attempt any thing, it is equally a reason why he should not command us to attempt any thing. Yet has he not commanded us to attempt something? Has he not said to men unconverted and dead in trespasses and sins, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate?" And shall we say *wait*, when he says *strive*, and plead his authority for saying what we do? Did the Saviour contradict himself when on one occasion he said, "No man can come to me," and on another, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," or did he on the latter occasion forget, what he had said on the former? And is it necessary for us to set him right and to remind him? Suppose the question, which is so confidently put to us, were put to Christ, "what can we do?" would he not reply, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate?" And shall we give out or you adopt a different answer? No; Christ does not say "wait." Yet what multitudes have long been waiting, and are waiting still; waiting, as they say, God's time; as if they on their part were ready, but he not ready. What an insult to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is this! Did they ever inquire what God's time is? Oh! if sinners would only wait God's time, who would not be satisfied? for to wait God's time for duty, is to do it immediately, for his time is *now*; "Behold now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation." "God *now* commandeth all men every where to repent."

But to show the insufficiency of the reason that is given for waiting, "we cannot do any thing." This is true in an important sense; but not

*in every sense*, not in the sense intended by the apologist. The difficulty after all is a disinclination, more than an inability. You have no heart to engage in this work ; but as to say you will not engage in it would be not very respectful to God, and not very well received by your own consciences, you adopt a different mode of expressing yourselves. You say, *you cannot*, just as a child says, "I can't," when he means "I wont." And it is remarkable how early children learn the habit of using *cannot*, for *will not* ; nor are they very forward, as they grow up to maturity, to put this childish thing away, along with the others. But suppose that you *cannot* do any thing to promote your salvation, does that excuse you from attempting what Christ commands you to attempt ? If a father command a child of his to do what is manifestly impossible, he may well make use of the apology that he cannot do it, for, in that case, he who gives the order, is unable to communicate the power of obeying it. But it is altogether different, when it is a divine being that issues the command, for, in this case, the same who gives the order, can give the power of obedience. If a mere man had said to him, who had the withered hand, "stretch it out," he might have replied, "you mock me, I cannot ;" but when the being who created him, bade him to do that thing, it was obligatory on him, and most reasonable that he should attempt it. And he did attempt it and was successful. Let it be remembered that it is the very same being, who says to you, "Repent ; strive to enter in at the strait gate." Will you plead that you cannot, even *if* you cannot,

when it is he who commands? Cannot you do all things, through Christ strengthening you? Because you cannot climb a certain steep by your own unaided efforts: is that any reason why you should not reach up your hand to take hold of him who occupies the eminence, and who extends it down for your help? Is it unnecessary that you should reach it out, because there is a power above, which alone can help you up, when it is only by your taking hold of him, that he will help you? Are your strivings unnecessary, because they by themselves are unavailing? Is it not sometimes important to try to do, what at the same time we know, that unaided we cannot accomplish? Have we any reason to believe that we shall be saved, while we remain inactive? Who has been saved by this waiting? Where are the converts indolence has been instrumental in making? Has God's time come to those who have been so long waiting for it? or does it seem likely to arrive? Verily there is not, there never was, nor can there ever be devised a plan more unscriptural, more absurd, more certainly and more extensively destructive, than this same most common plan of waiting. Waiting to see if God will not save you! Why do you not also wait to see if he will not feed, and clothe, and cure, and enrich you? No; Christ does not say wait, and let the sinner beware how he waits, for time does not wait, nor does death wait, nor does judgment linger, nor retribution. If they would wait for you, you might with more propriety wait.

But what does Christ say? *Pray* to enter in at the strait gate? No; except as praying is included

in striving. It is in prayer that the soul makes some of its mightiest efforts. Prayer is, therefore, necessary to striving; but it is not the whole of it. You may pray; and, if you are concerned for your salvation, you will pray; but you must not rest in that, any more than you may rest in waiting. Some wait and pray; but that union falls far short of what the Saviour commands. "*Strive*," this is what he says; "strive to enter in at the strait gate." Do something; endeavor; make efforts; exert yourselves; contend; contend earnestly, strenuously, painfully. Strive. The original Greek word is very expressive. It is that which was employed to denote the painful exertions made by those who engaged in the celebrated Grecian games, the efforts of the prize-fighters. It is the primitive of our word *agonize*, yet not properly translated by that, because our word *agonize* expresses the pain attendant on great exertion, rather than the exertion itself. Strive; contend with painfulness of effort, as in a conflict for a prize, as those who entered the lists for a corruptible crown; be in earnest, as they were; cast away every incumbrance, as they did; spare no effort; forbear no act of self denial. This do to enter in at the strait gate, to obtain the incorruptible crown.

My dear brethren, let me ask you if you are doing any thing like this? Are you making, or have you ever made such exertions to enter in, as this word expresses? And if not, what then? Have you entered, or do you expect to enter without them? Are they not necessary? Would Christ have commanded us to make them, if they were not necessary?



Does he command us to strive to enter, for the purpose of making certain more certain? Is it a work of supererogation to strive to enter? If it be necessary, and you have not done it, nor are doing it, what then? I will leave you to make the inference.

In view of this declaration of him who spake as never man spake, whose word stands fast forever, what shall we think of his prospects, who not only is not striving, but is not doing any thing to enter in at the strait gate? Is he likely to get in?

Again; with this passage before us, what must we think of the doctrine of universal salvation? Christ teaches us that striving is necessary to enter in, and he speaks of many who shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able. But, according to the universalist, one cannot help getting in; not only need he not strive to enter, but though he should strive to keep out, he would not. He has not to force his way to heaven, but heaven is forced upon him. It is a very comfortable doctrine, however, to those who do not like the straitness of the gate, and narrowness of the way to life; and yet the comfort of it does not last long.

But while this passage inculcates the necessity of striving, it also holds out encouragement to strive. Strive to enter and you shall succeed in entering. Your efforts shall not be in vain. This direction was never intended to mock sinners, as if it were said, "Strive, but after all your strivings, you may never enter in."

There is a caution I would give to those who conceive that they are striving to enter in. It is that

*they* take care, that, while they are doing some *things* to get in, they be not doing other things, *calculated* to keep them out, and thus defeat their own *efforts*. This is frequently the case, but I have no *time now* to illustrate it.

The subject is now before you ; and what will you do ? Will you presume that you have entered in, in the absence of all scriptural evidence that you have ? Or, will you say that it is not absolutely necessary to enter at this gate that life may be obtained without it ? thus staking your soul on the peradventure that Jesus Christ may have been mistaken. Or, will you contend that you are not a lost creature ? Or, whether you are or not, will you come to the conclusion that you will give yourself no concern about your salvation ? Or, not taking any of these grounds, but admitting the necessity of entering in at the strait gate, will you linger idly about the gate, hoping for some power to thrust you in ? Will you wait ? How can you ? Will you not strive ? Will you not exert yourself, commencing now, and throwing your whole soul into your efforts, and persevering unto success or death ? Will you not ? Dare you do otherwise ? Dare you travel longer in the broad way to destruction ? See what progress you have made towards it. It is the courage of madness that emboldens you to go on. Stop at this step ; strive and be saved.

What ! are you waiting for God ? How know you that he is not already at work within you, and that your inaction is a resistance of him ? Waiting for God ! Why, he has been waiting for you these

many years perhaps ! Do you expect that the presence of God with you, and his influence upon you, will be manifested before you begin to act ?

Would you not strive if you supposed that your salvation depended entirely on your own efforts ? But your efforts are as necessary now as they would be in that case. But I must leave it to Him who can, to give enforcement and effect to this exhortation.

## SERMON XXIII.

Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.  
2. CORINTHIANS, v. 17.

THIS may be considered as the Apostle's own commentary on his previous declaration, "he is a new creature." The words of the text are an expansion and explanation of the meaning of what precedes them. I observe,

1. That the change which grace makes in the human character is a *visible* change. It is to be seen by the eye, for we are invited to look at it; "*behold all things are become new.*" It is visible, not merely visible, but truly so; there is a visible change, because there is an invisible one; a change without, the expression and effect of a change within; an alteration of life, consequent upon an alteration of heart. It *must* be visible, if *all things* become new, for a part of these things are external, and the renovation as it respects them is necessarily obvious to the senses. The visibility of which I speak, will appear both to ourselves and to others. The alteration that grace is supposed to have made in our character, we must ourselves discern. And if a man entertains a hope that the change has taken place in him, and yet is not able to perceive that he is in any wise different from

what he was ere he entertained the hope, that man ought rather to fear than hope. It must appear also to *others*. It behooves us so to live and conduct ourselves that men shall take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. We must pass for Christians in the world. We must *seem* to be religious as well as be so actually. How otherwise can we be the lights of the world? Are we not commanded to let our light shine before men, and is not a most important and benevolent object to be accomplished thereby, that they seeing our good works may glorify our heavenly Father? Must we not show our faith by our works? And are we not directed to abstain from all appearance of evil? Hear what Peter says, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil doers, (for the best men are liable to be spoken against; our Saviour and his Apostles were,) they may, by your good works, which they shall behold, (what! be silenced and put to shame? Ah, much more than that) glorify God in the day of visitation." You cannot live so as at all times to avoid calumny, but you can live so as to give the lie to the calumny, and perhaps so as even to convert the calumniator. Yes, we must pass for Christians, we may not live in such a manner, that men shall lift up their hands in expression of astonishment, when it is announced to them that we profess to be Christians. "What! they Christians, followers of Christ, possessors of the Spirit of the Son of God, like him, I should not have thought it! is it possible?" Brethren, are any of us so living that those who see us are sur-

prised when they are informed that we are professors of religion and guests at the Lord's table—and these not our personal enemies, and not a few, but many, and they not at all disposed to think ill of us? It ought not so to be. Is it so? Let us enquire. Let us honestly tell each other, whether it be so; and if such be the case of any of us, it requires attending to, and that forthwith; for there is no life that any man leads that is more dishonorable to the Son of God, and more injurious to religion, than such a life. I know we sometimes say of one who leads not upon the whole a good life, that he may have a good heart notwithstanding, but how can the heart be good, if the life is not, when out of the heart are the issues of the life? A man's life is good, just in proportion as his heart is good. As the stream cannot rise higher, neither will it fall lower than the fountain. He is not pious internally, who is not so externally; he has not a kind heart, who does not do kind acts; and he is not honest in disposition, who is not in dealing. It is an absurd apology, to make for ourselves or for another. It is true, the life of the best man is imperfectly good. But why? because his heart is but imperfectly good. The holiness of his life is in proportion to the sanctification of his heart.

2. The change of which we speak is an *admirable* change, "*behold* all things are become new." It is a change not to be contemplated merely, but to be contemplated with high-raised emotions. The interjection is thrown in not barely to attract attention, but to excite wonder and admiration. Its use is the same as in another place "*behold*, what man-

ner of love" &c. It is admirable, if we consider its author. It is God. "All things new and all things are of God." We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Every work of God is admirable. What a noble piece of work is man, even in his ruins! how much more then in his restoration! The Christian is the highest style of man. He is the result of a new creation; and if at the first the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, neither are they mute at this, the second, for angels rejoice whenever a sinner repents. Have they rejoiced on your account, hearer? Has the fiat of the Almighty created thee anew?

But, again, the change is admirable if we consider the loving-kindness displayed in making it. "Behold, what manner of love" is here! It was love that gave the first impulse to creation. And man came forth from his Maker's hand, the work of love, and love sustains holy beings in their purity and dignity. But the love that redeems the lost and raises the fallen is of another, a peculiar kind. It is pitying, condescending, sacrificing love; love in every sense unmerited; love exercised where wrath was deserved; and though injured and abused, yet patient and meek. Again, it is worthy of being admired in view of its nature and connexions. It is a *singular* change, infinitely superior to any other of which the human character is susceptible; no other change is *like* it except in some external features. Even in its outward show, and to the eye of superficially seeing man, it can be counterfeited, but very

imperfectly and for a while. What is the breaking off of one bad habit, to the renovation of all the deeply seated habitudes of the soul? What the amendment of the life in this and that respect, an amendment suggested by selfish considerations and made without any regard to God, to the rectification of the heart in all respects? What comparison can be instituted between the reformation which sinners sometimes make in their moral conduct, and that repentance which breaks the heart in ingenuous sorrow even for its own unseen sins? Other changes are necessarily superficial; this is deep and radical. It goes to the bottom. It inserts a new main-spring. What evils other changes restrain or abate, this eradicates; and this communicates the reality of the good, of which they do but put on this appearance. Those are concerned about men's acts, this regulates the principle of action; they repress anger, this implants meekness. The sin which those changes may enable a man to avoid, this inclines him to hate. After all other changes, still self is idolized; but this enthrones God. It is indeed an admirable change. When every thing else has been done to the human character to amend and adorn it, that can be done, still it is essentially defective. All those changes leave it unlike God, alien from him, unapproved by him, and unfit for heaven. But the change that is wrought by the spirit of grace, assimilates man to God, restores him to the divine family, commends him to the divine favor, and prepares him for the divine abode. Wherever this change has been wrought, and the character it pro-



duces exists, there sin is forgiven, justification has taken place, and sanctification is in progress. Over it angels have rejoiced; around it they encamp; they minister to it. Man may frown, but God smiles upon it; earth may cast it out, but heaven stands open to receive it. It is an admirable change; and,

3. It is a *thorough* change. It has respect to the whole man. It does not affect him in a few particulars only, but in all. "All things are become new." There may be a partial reformation, while the heart remains unchanged; but if the heart is changed, the reformation must be universal. A fountain of sweet waters, sending forth many streams, doth not and cannot communicate the quality of sweetness to some, and of bitterness to others. If the principles of action in a man be revolutionized, there is the same reason why all his conduct should be changed, as any part of it. If, in the productions of nature, there are monsters, yet, in those of grace, there are none. Where one trait of the Christian character is found, there they are all found. Where faith is, there is love, for faith worketh by love; and where these are, in inseparable society is found the whole sisterhood of graces, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance. And so the heart that hates one sin, hates all; and is equally disposed to renounce all. It is impossible that a man should be a believer, and not a penitent; or penitent, and yet not obedient; or obedient in one respect, and not in another. A man cannot be meek, and yet haughty; nor can he be humble, and yet selfish and unkind; nor can he

have the benevolence of a Christian without having also his spirituality. These qualities, though different, are kindred. Whenever, then, there is a real and radical change in a man, there is a universal change in him. But is this truth regarded as it should be? Would not many a professing Christian resign his hope, if, in his self-examinations, he regarded it? Do we not often hear it sarcastically said of a person professing godliness, "Well, he may be a Christian; but he does not look much like one, he does not talk much like one, he does not act altogether like one. He may be a Christian, but he has a most ungovernable tongue, or a terrible temper; he may be a Christian, but he is not a very grave one, not a very temperate one; he may have piety, but I am sure he has not got honesty; he may render to God the things that are God's, but he does not do as well by his fellow creatures. A Christian he may be, but he is a very mean and niggardly one; a prodigiously cross and churlish one. A Christian? Why, he is a very tyrant in his household! A Christian? Why, he is as fond of the world as any of us, and as closely conformed to the world as any of us! A Christian? Well, then, I am a Christian; we are all Christians!" This is a serious matter. There is often too much truth in these sarcasms. There are persons professing to be Christians, and appearing in some respects to be Christians, while, in other respects, they appear quite unchristian. Grace seems to have been at work on some parts of their character, but on other parts of it there is seen no sign of its operation. They are better men as it re-

gards some things ; but, with regard to others, there is no improvement. What shall we say of such ? Are they Christians ? No ; if they were, there would be an improvement as it regards every thing. There is a passage of Scripture which decides this question for us : "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain ;" that is, if a man be ostensibly pious in every other respect, yet if he bridle not his tongue, (and the same may be said of many other things, if he indulge a morose or malevolent temper, or if he give the rein to any one lust,) all those appearances of piety must pass for nothing, the man's religion is vain. Grace is not partial in its operations, though it is progressive in them. It does not immediately make its subject perfect in any respect, but it makes him better in every respect. Therefore if any of you find that your religion is not universally influential, you may conclude that it is vain.

4. I remark that this change is of the nature of a substitution, and not a superaddition. There is a passing away of the old things, and a coming in their place of new. The new man is not put on over the old man, but the old man is first put off. The soul becomes dead unto sin, before it is made alive unto righteousness. Religion is eclectic, not cumulative. There are many things that must be thrown out of the character, as well as many that must be taken into it. When a man becomes a Christian, there is as much subtracted from him, as is added to him ; as many old things left undone, as new ones done ; a giving up, as well as a receiving,

a loss as well as a gain. Nevertheless this truth seems not to be regarded by many. They go upon the supposition that religion is a super-addition simply; they take some new things to themselves, but the old ones do not pass away. They think to live soberly, righteously and godly, without first denying ungodliness and worldly lusts. Self-denial forms no part of their religion. It all consists in doing. They receive baptism, they partake of the Lord's supper, they are more frequent at their prayers and more attentive to their religious duties generally, and this is all very well in its place, but a man does not become a Christian by this accumulation merely. Yet is not this all the Christianity of some? They are more constantly at the church than they were once, but they are also occasionally at the play. They will go to the prayer-meeting, but they cannot give up the ball room notwithstanding. They fast one day, but they *feast* the next, and the excess of the second day more than counterbalances the abstinence of the first. They use the name of God in earnest more frequently than they used to do, but they have not given up using it in jest also. Why, my hearers, there are those who both pray and swear; there are those who grind the poor with one hand, and give to the poor with the other. The religion of those of whom I have been speaking is much like that of Herod; he did many things in consequence of the preaching of John the Baptist, but he would not give up his brother Philip's wife. It is like that of the motly race which the king of Assyria planted in Samaria after the carrying away of the

ten tribes. It is said of them "they feared the Lord, *and* served their own gods." It is a very easy and agreeable kind of religion. I do not know who would not adopt it, if he thought he might get to heaven thereby—who could have any objection to serve God, if with the same heart he might serve mammon. Let a man hold the world in one hand, and he will let you put what you please in the other. Let a man only be allowed the privilege of indulging his lusts, and there is nothing he will not do to save his soul. The difficulty of Christianity lies in the self-denial and sacrifices it requires; there's the rub. It is a religion of self-denial. Paganism is not. Mohammedism is not; and there are corruptions of Christianity which are not. No other religion, but the religion of the Bible is; hence its unpopularity, and the popularity of the others. It is no wonder that those religions have made such progress in the world, and taken such a hold of men, they are agreeable to depraved nature; the wonder is that pure Christianity has made any progress in the world; and but for the power of God it would have made none. And, by the way, there may hence be derived an irrefragable argument for the truth of Christianity. It is true, because it is unpopular; because it is a religion of self-denial. It is true, because while other religions indulge the depraved propensities of men, this condemns and corrects them. It is a religion which imposition never would or could have originated. Its aim and effort being to make men holy, its source must be holy.

5. It is a *great* change. It is hardly necessary

to affirm this, after what has been already said in illustration of its magnitude. It is a work of God ; a new creation ; Christians are his workmanship. It is called a passing from death unto life, a being born again, a translation out of darkness into marvellous light, a resurrection. Let this suffice now for proving it a great change.

*Finally.* It is a *permanent* change. It lasts. The old things once passed away, never come back again. The new creature continues a new creature ; his progress is habitually forward ; his path is as the shining light. Once raised from being dead in trespasses and sins, he never relapses again into that state of death. God destroys not the works of his new creation. He annihilates neither in grace nor in nature. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. They went out from us, but they were not of us. Much more then, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life, if, when enemies, we were reconciled by his death. God takes back no pardon ; Christ casts out no one that has once come to him. Angels never are called to sorrow over the apostacy of one, for whose repentance they have once rejoiced. But do you believe in the dangerous doctrine of the perseverance of the saints ? Yes. Well then, says one, I am safe and I will give myself no more concern about it, for I am sure I was once in grace." But not so fast. Your conduct proves that you are not a Christian now ; then, as we hold to the perseverance of Christians, it is clear that you never was a Christian, for you have not perse-

vered. You cannot possibly have as much proof that you were once a Christian, as you have that you are not now one. Therefore there is no danger in the doctrine, if it be understood. We do not believe in the permanency of spurious conversions, in the perseverance of hypocrites and self-deceived persons. It is the perseverance of the saints that we hold to. Or rather their conservation by the gracious power of God.

In review of this subject, ask yourselves a few questions.

1. Am I visibly a Christian? Am I reputed pious? Am I regarded by the church and by the world as a consistent professor of godliness? Do I seem to be religious? Do my good works and my holy conversation give occasion, and offer inducements, to others to glorify God?

2. Am I a Christian throughout? Do I hate, and renounce, and avoid all sin? Do I possess all the graces of the Spirit? Have I a conscience void of offence towards both God and man? Am I a Christian in my discourse, in my temper, in my desires? A Christian every day and in all places; (not an occasional or local Christian merely;) in the family, as well as in the closet; in the office and in the counting-house, as well as in the church?

3. Have the old things passed away in my case? Have I denied ungodliness and worldly lusts, and died unto sin? Is my religion a religion of self-denial? Do I serve mammon as well as God?

4. Am I a Christian now? Have I present evidence of it? Or, am I relying on past experience?

Am I calculating on going to heaven, because a long time ago I had certain convictions and feelings, which I thought were those of a Christian? Ask yourselves such questions, and you will make a proper use of this discourse.

Perhaps some of you may think that I make too much of this change, and too much ado about religion generally; that I am over strict in my representation of things. This doctrine of conversion and a change of heart, perhaps you have been wont to regard as mere methodism.

I wish then you would examine the Scriptures on this subject. Possibly I may be right after all; and if I should be, then what becomes of you? IF I should be, do I say? I am right. Ye must be born again. What can be more plain? what more positive than that? And why marvel ye? Is it not manifest that you require such a change? It is not arbitrarily appointed of God that this change should take place; it is absolutely necessary that it should. You cannot go to heaven as you are. You cannot enjoy a holy God, while you are yourselves not holy. Yet when we speak on the subject, you hear, you wonder. I hope you do not despise, and I pray you may not perish.



## SERMON XXIV.

Ye did run well ; who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth ?—GALATIANS v. 7.

It is not saying enough of the Bible to say that its contents are truth. They are *the* truth ; as this is emphatically *the* book, as the word *Bible* signifies. All other truth is insignificant in comparison with that revealed here. This truth relates to the high matters of God and the soul, accountability, redemption, and immortality. And this is the truth which makes men free, and sanctifieth them.

Our first duty, in regard to the truth, is to *believe* it. But this is not the whole, nor yet the principal part of our duty in regard to it. It is to no purpose that it is believed, if that be all. Indeed it had better not be believed, if it is only believed. The belief of the truth is valuable only as preparatory to something else. That other thing which is due to the truth, is *obedience*. “ If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” “ Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.”

There is truth which requires only to be believed. It neither reveals nor creates obligation. It is purely speculative. It neither does nor should it affect the heart, or influence the conduct of him who believes

it. But the truth of the Bible is not of this nature. It is not merely speculative, but experimental and practical. It requires something to be *felt* and *done*. There are emotions of heart, and a manner of life, which are appropriate to it. It must be *obeyed*.

To obey the truth, is to feel and act agreeably to it. It implies such a state of the heart, and such a conformation of conduct as comports with the nature of the things revealed and believed. As, for example, the truth relates in part to the character of God, which it represents to be infinitely excellent and amiable. To obey that truth, is to admire and love the divine character, for those are the feelings appropriate to it. Is it the greatness of God that is the object of contemplation? The duty is veneration. Is it his sovereignty? The duty is submission. Is it his law? The duty is compliance with all its requisitions. Does the truth relate to the subject of sin? Then the duty is repentance. Does it relate to the Saviour? The duty is faith and trust in him. We may learn hence the high importance, yea, necessity of apprehending and believing the truth. It cannot otherwise be obeyed. Obedience to truth not known or not credited is impossible.

We may learn also the insignificance and worthlessness of mere faith and knowledge. To believe there is a God and not love him; to have a knowledge of Christ, without trust in him, or of sin without repenting of it, what is that worth?

*The obedience of the truth*, is religion. There can be no better definition of it, unless it be one which we find in Scriptures; viz., this "faith that worketh

by love." There is no other religion worth any thing, or availing aught, but that which answers to this description. The obedience of error is not religion, nor is the belief of truth religion. Sincerity is not religion, nor is orthodoxy, but the obedience of the truth. Religion is neither cold light nor latent heat, but a flame that enlightens while it warms. Truth is the light of religion, and love is its fire. Some have the light without the fire; they hold the truth in unrighteousness; their knowledge is unaccompanied with love. Some have the fire without the light; a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. Some have neither. The union of the two constitutes a Christian.

To obey the truth, is not any thing that can be done at once, or that requires to be done only at stated periods. Religion is not a job, which being done, there is an end of it; not a mere arrears to be paid up; or a mere score to be wiped off. The obligation is not cancelled when it is discharged. It exists still, and covers the whole of life. It is not a mere Sabbath occupation, but the business of every day. Each successive moment renews the obligations of the moments that went before. The Christian has never done his work, but is always *doing* it. The Christian life, as you know, is frequently compared to a race. To obey the truth, is to run well in this race. The Galatians had ceased to run well, because they had ceased to obey the truth.

The truth must be perseveringly obeyed. The Bible makes no account of past experience and past good conduct, unless it be sustained by a corresponding present experience and conduct. "When a

righteous man turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die." All the promises of God are made to perseverance in obeying the truth; "to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for honor and immortality; to him that overcometh; to him that is faithful unto death. He that endureth to the end, shall be saved; we shall reap, if we faint not." It is to no purpose to begin well, nor for a time to go on well. The thing is to end well. That is well that ends well. It is of no use to lay hold, except we hold on. There is fickleness and folly in setting out, and not going through. Yet this is what many do.

There is such a thing (would there were not) as declension in religion. The Galatians declined. Paul heard of it, and wrote to them on the subject. This epistle is what he wrote to them; and he expresses his surprise, his regret, his mortification that it should be so with them. "I marvel," he says, "that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ. How after that ye have known God, or rather known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements? I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed on you labor in vain. Where is the blessedness ye spake of? I stand in doubt of you. Ye did run well. Who did hinder you? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you." He was oppressed and grieved when he reflected on their course. How melancholy it is that men should turn away from

God, that they should grow worse, as they get nearer the grave and the judgment! that they should be becoming less fit for heaven, as they approach its confines, less diligent as their working time approximates its termination! It is particularly painful to ministers to discover indications of declension in those to whom they had hoped that they had been instrumental of spiritual benefit.

And now may I not say to some here, ye did run well; not ye *do*, but ye *did*, implying that ye do not now; that your running well is something *past*. Yes. I may. Ye did run well. Now let not the enquiry be "who does he mean;" but "is it I?" Do not look *around*, but *within*. Look just where God is looking, on your own heart. If I mean any persons more than others, it is those who hear for others, rather than for themselves. If they ever did run well, they do not now.

Sometimes there exists a real declension without any very marked external indications of it. We read of such a character as the *backslider in heart*. The person still walks apparently in the ways of God, but his heart has departed from the living God. He has lost his first love. All is dark and cold within him. He does not take the same interest in divine things that once he did. He is sensible of a strange indifference in his soul, to what once supremely interested him. He still reads the word of God but it is tame and tiresome in comparison with what once it was. He who seeth in secret seeth him not so often and fondly resorting to the place of retirement; and when there his intercourse with his God, is as if

some coolness existed between them. Now this may be the case with many of you. If we see no indications of declension in you, yet he who sees not as man sees may. In some of you, however, even *we* do see them. There is a *visible* diminution of interest in the things of religion. The sanctuary and the place where prayer is wont to be made are not so regularly attended by you. Some who once were uniformly here in the afternoon, now never are. What more profitable mode of employing the Sabbath afternoon they have fallen upon, I do not know. Some who once could give one evening in the week to the worship of God, cannot now. I do not know why, whether it be that they have paid off their dues to God, or that He has done something to offend them, or what. Some did never like a prayer-meeting, though so much is said in commendation of them in the Bible, and there be the example of men of whom the world was not worthy, in their favor. Some did seem to like them once, but have lost the relish; whether it be that they wish to spend all that time in secret prayer, or that they have got from God, all that they care to have, I pretend not to decide. Some were wont in time past to attend with us on the quarterly sacramental sabbath, but now no more. The services are too long. I have half a mind to ask you a question; if two hours and a half here weary you, and are intolerable, how will you get along, shall I say with an eternity in hell, or an immortality in heaven? It matters not much which. It is foremost among the most extraordinary absurdities I have ever heard of, that persons who are in this habit, should expect to be saved

through the broken body, and shed blood of Christ. But there are also those who once used actually to come to the Lord's table, who now come no more. Perhaps it is from consciousness of a want of preparation for the ordinance. That is the only tolerable reason that can be assigned for it. How it is in regard to family religion I do not know, for I employ no spies. In how many families the worship of God is maintained, whether in any it was once, but has been discontinued, whether the biblical and catechetical instruction of children is regularly attended to, whether any and what regard is had to the vows and promises made in baptism, I know not, except that when I assemble the children, not all of them are forth-coming. And how the Sabbath is observed in your families, I know not. I only know what your *duty* is in these respects. Some individuals in this congregation were once serious, thoughtful and inquisitive on the subject of religion, concerned in some degree for their salvation. Do you not remember that time, when you were sick; when you lost that relative; when you heard that sermon; when you were present at that sacrament; how tender and interested you were, and you betook yourself to the Bible, and to prayer; and you virtually asked what you should do to inherit eternal life; but now you have taken up other questions "who will show me any good; what shall I eat; what drink; what put on? Now you are very well satisfied with your condition. You have concluded to dispense with religion, at least for the present. We had hopes of you then, but they are dashed; and you have gone off

farther than ever from the kingdom of God. You have accomplished what you undertook, to grieve away the Holy Ghost, and now you have no trouble and no uneasiness. I cannot say that you did run well, with perfect propriety, for you never actually started on the Christian race, but you seemed about to do it. It appeared as if you intended to begin to obey the truth. But . . . something hindered.

As that which impedes Christians in running the race set before them, and that which hinders sinners from engaging in it is substantially the same, I shall not distinguish in speaking of them. If you did run well, and now no more do, there is a cause. So if you have never begun to run, there is a cause ; and in each case it is the same. The Apostle does not say what it is, but asks " who did hinder you ? " He was sure that something had ; he knew that he had not ; " this persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you." He asks then " who did ? " What person, what thing ? And I ask you, professor of religion, what it was that hindered you. What first drew you away ; how did this declension commence ; and where did it commence, and how did it first manifest itself. What sin did you fall into, what duty omit, what was it that you suffered yourself to become inordinately attached to ? And you who dost neither profess nor possess religion, I ask you what hindered you from becoming a penitent disciple of Christ, at that time to which I have alluded ? You were almost persuaded to become a Christian, but then some consideration presented itself that caused you to hesitate and finally prevailed to dissuade you. You thought, " well,



now if I become a Christian," and what did you think? Was it not something of this sort? "if I become a Christian, and a thorough-going and consistent Christian, (and I never will be any other,) what will be said, how will my family and friends like it, will it not grieve and disappoint them? Will they not oppose me? Will not some ridicule me? and how can I bear that? Then I cannot go any more to the theatre and the ball room. I must give up all such places of resort as those. I cannot serve God and mammon both. I must be one thing or the other. I can see how it will interfere with my comfort in many respects, and I fear it will affect my respectability, and my worldly prospects too; what shall I do?" It is hard to say the precise consideration, whose weight turns the scale against religion, in the case of a particular individual. The train of reflection which goes before the decision, is in no two minds exactly the same. With some there seems to be but a single obstacle. Others having surmounted one, find another and yet another to be surmounted. That which is a difficulty with one, is no difficulty with another. Here is one person who can cheerfully give up for Christ, every thing but that one thing. There is another who can with all ease sacrifice that thing, but there is another which he finds it impossible to give up.

Each of you has his hindrance; a sin that doth more easily than any other beset him. You know, or you can easily discover what it is. It is that which keeps you away from Christ, which prevents your reconciliation to God; and which is likely

forever to debar you from heaven. Look at it; do not conceal it from yourself; do not apologize for it; do not diminish it in your conception of it; do not say, "Is it not a little one?" and expect that God will spare it on that account. But, perhaps, you will see every thing but this, and you will wonder what it is that prevents you from being a Christian. That which does prevent you, the adversary of souls takes care to keep out of view. He knows how to accomplish his plans. He is willing that you should obey Christ in every respect but one. He does not care to have you retain more than one sin. He has no objection to your being devout in your intercourse with God, provided you will not be honest in your dealings with men. And you may be, for all he cares, as honest as Aristides, if you will only be satisfied with that. You may profess religion. That does not offend him. Indeed you cannot please him better than to profess religion, when you have none. Yes, profess to be a Christian, and live like a worldling, and you cannot please him better. He prefers that his servants should wear the livery of Christ. They can do more for him in that dress than in any other. *He* professes religion sometimes. Do we not read of Satan's transforming himself into an angel of light? And it is supposed he did so, when he went to do his darkest deed, the destruction of our race. He never opposes a soul until that soul has given up, or is about giving up *all* for Christ. When one of you begins to think about repenting and turning from all your sins to the Lord, then he begins to interfere and oppose. Why should he be-

fore? Your partial amendments he will never find any fault with.

Although, as I have said, the hindrance in every case is not precisely the same, yet there is a passage of Scripture which is applicable to every case. "A deceived heart hath turned him aside." Whenever one either totally or partially departs from the living God, it is because of an evil heart of unbelief that is in him. And there is another passage which applies perhaps to every case of defection. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." That phrase, the "world," is a very comprehensive one. It includes every thing which may be preferred to God. It includes persons and things. It comprehends profit, pleasure, and honor; your business, your profession, your family. One loves the world in this aspect of it, another in that. In what shape or phase of it, it drew away and destroyed Demas, I do not know. By what one of its many chains it binds you, I cannot tell; perhaps by one of such delicate materials, and so finely drawn, that it is scarcely, if at all, perceptible. Nevertheless, it holds you fast, and keeps you as really from the Saviour as any other. The world! Now be honest, and say if it is not the love of this that has drawn you off from God; this, that now stands in the way of your being a Christian; this, for which you give up Christ and resign the hope of heaven and barter your soul! What a bargain! The fading vanities of time purchased with the substantial glories of eternity! a mere creature preferred to the Creator of all things! What a choice! The service, the sweet service of Christ

resigned for the sake of the privilege and pleasure of sinning! Heaven lost, for the gain of an unsatisfactory uncertainty! The expiring breath of human applause chosen rather than the approbation of God! Strange that a being of immortality should choose to have his portion in this life! Poor Demas! He sees his folly now; he wishes he had not forsaken Christ. He had the world he loved, perhaps some two or three years; and he has been separated from it now these seventeen or eighteen centuries. All that time he might have been with Christ in heaven. Ah! it was a sorry speculation for him. Yet how many in every age have trodden in his steps; having loved this present world, have either forsaken Christ, or never in any sense gone to him. The Psalmist takes notice of it. "This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings," Ps. xlix. 13, 14. "Oh! Lord, deliver my soul from men of the world, which have their portion in this life."

See, backslider, what you are doing; forsaking the fountain of living waters for a cistern of your own hewing, and which you cannot make capable of holding any thing; a very sieve. Take care that you do not prove an apostate, that you do not go too far; take care, lest, at the next step, your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. Know now, and see, before you are made to feel it, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God. Return unto me, says God, and I will return to you. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal

your backslidings. Respond ye, "Behold we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God." "O Lord our God, *other* lords beside thee have had dominion over us: *but* by thee only will we make mention of thy name." Isaiah xxvi. 13.

And see, oh ! sinner, what thou art doing. Refusing obedience to the truth, even to the first principle of it, repentance from dead works, and declining altogether to enter the arena of the Christian conflict; neglecting the great, the only salvation; persisting in rebellion against your divine sovereign; treating with the basest ingratitude the best of benefactors; putting in peril the most imminent, your soul; despising heaven; daring the vengeance of the Almighty. And all for what? To avoid a slight inconvenience, it may be; to preserve some passing pleasure; to please some dying man.

Oh! do not strike such a bargain; do not make such a choice. You cannot even now yourself approve of it. Do not for any consideration, but especially for such a consideration lose your all, and yourself along with it, and for ever. No; rather for the pearl of great price sell all. Let every thing go for Christ; it is but little; and that little thou can'st not have long. And with him thou shalt have all things. He will not let thee lack, as he will never let thee perish. Do it; and then sing,

"Jesus, I my cross have taken,  
All to leave and follow thee."

## SERMON XXV.

But grow in grace.—2 PETER iii. 18.

You will recollect that two Sabbaths ago from the text, "The last state of that man is worse than the first," I discoursed to you on the progress in evil, and attempted to show how and under what circumstances men become worse and the human character suffers deterioration. And, by-the-way, one that heard that discourse is now in eternity, and he was in the forenoon of life too. Take heed how ye hear. In view of the tremendous uncertainty of human life, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness! I propose now to treat of the ways and means of becoming better. The subject, I am sure, is appropriate to all; and to all it ought to be interesting. I presume there is no one here, who, however good he may be in his own opinion, does not believe that he may and ought to be better. With whatever complacency he may contemplate his character, yet can he think that it is not susceptible of any farther improvement? If any are satisfied with themselves, (and it must be said, that some do approach but too near to this state of entire self-approbation,) I pronounce them to be the persons of all others, who should be most dissat-

isfied with themselves, and especially should they be dissatisfied with themselves, on account of that very self-satisfaction; for no truly good man was ever satisfied with himself, or thought himself good enough. The best men who have ever lived, have been most dissatisfied with themselves. They who have approached nearest to perfection, have been most sensible of their imperfection; they who have had in themselves the best ground for self-gratulation, have been most forward to condemn themselves; the men who have made most progress in goodness, have ever been most deeply sensible of the necessity of pressing on and making greater and more rapid progress. Witness Job, "Behold I am vile; I abhor myself;" and Paul, "Not as though I had already attained, either was already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. But, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do; forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those which are before, I press toward the mark." And witness the comparisons and self-condemnations of the most eminently holy men of every age. This statement may seem a paradox, unless some explanation is given. The explanation is briefly this. The truly good man, (I mean the regenerate man,) that is in progress to the perfection of holiness, has more acute perceptions of moral good and evil than any other man has. His standard, with which he compares himself, is different, far more elevated. He sees sin often where other men see none; and in all sin, he sees more evil and hate-

fulness than others take notice of ; he has regard to the motives of conduct ; he looks at the state of the heart ; he contemplates himself in God. Now, no imperfect man, who answers to this description, will ever look complacently on himself. They that think themselves good enough, do really not know what goodness is ; and even to their low and most defective standard, they bring only their overt acts. They take no cognizance of the state of the inner man ; they look not at what God looks ; they are regardless of motives in estimating character, especially their own character ; and they think and speak of themselves almost entirely in reference to the relations which they sustain to their fellow creatures ; they practically forget the first and grandest of all relations, that which is sustained to God ; they do not, like Paul, exercise themselves to have a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward man. They think themselves good enough ; but are they morally like God ? are they conformed to the image of his Son ? do they love God with all the heart and their neighbors as themselves ? are they holy ? are they perfect ? are they fit for heaven ? Ah ! they never ask themselves such questions as these. Such, if any such be present, will take no interest in this discussion. Neither will they, whose creed, or whose unbelief does not require them to be any better than they are, the Antinomian, who expects to be saved by a dead faith, and the Universalist who counts on salvation without either faith or works ; nor will *he* take an interest in this discussion, who, though he would have no objection to be-



come better by some spontaneous growth in grace, is yet determined, through indolence or fear of man, not to use the means and make the sacrifices which are necessary to such a moral improvement. Least of all, will he be interested, who, though sensible he is bad enough, has no wish to be any better; the sources of his pleasures being connected with sin, and the accomplishment of his avaricious desires, or ambitious projects, being incompatible with goodness.

We have selected for our purpose the apostolical exhortation, "*Grow in grace.*" Grace means favor. In the Scriptures it usually denotes the favor of God, and particularly that most glorious manifestation of it made in the Gospel. "By grace ye are saved." It is also by a very common figure, used to signify its various effects, as "my grace is sufficient for thee." That class of the effects of the divine favor referred to in the text, may be expressed by the general term *holiness*, and the meaning of the exhortation will be conveyed by substituting this word for grace; the propriety of which will be still more manifest, if we consider that men grow in favor with God just in proportion as they grow in holiness. Every regenerate person is under grace; that is, in a state of acceptance with God; but he becomes more and more an object of the divine complacency, as he becomes more and more conformed to the divine image.

"Grow in grace." It is something that we are exhorted to do. It is not to be effected without some exertions on our part. The growth of the human soul in grace is not spontaneous. It requires the most careful culture. No man ever became better

without making that his object, and taking pains for it. The process of moral deterioration will go on in the soul, while it is neglected, but not the opposite process. It sinks by its own gravity. To raise it, requires the application of a positive force. We are exhorted to *give all diligence* in adding to our faith virtue, &c. And Paul tells us that he, forgetting the things behind and reaching forth, *pressed* towards the mark; and we are admonished to *run* with patience the race set before us, laying aside every weight and looking unto Jesus. And the heart we are commanded to *keep with all diligence*, and to *labor* for the enduring meat. Yet this principle, I fear, is very much disregarded. What is more common among men than a total neglect of the keeping of the heart and the cultivation of the moral powers? How few they are who are making exertion and giving diligence in pursuance of a purpose to become better. What multitudes there are, who, in the multiplicity of the inferior objects they propose, never propose this! The neglect is most extraordinary and alarming.

1. In growing better, the first thing is to become good; or rather this is preliminary to all improvement. You cannot make that better which is not good. You cannot stimulate and strengthen life, where the very vital principle has no existence. The foundation must be laid before the building can rise. No digging about and enriching, no ever so auspicious alternation of sun and shower can bring forward a plant, which has no life in it. Yet in morals *this* is what some are endeavouring to do; they

would feed death and cultivate sterility. They desire, and, to some extent, exert themselves to grow better, before they have become good ; they are attempting to rear an edifice without a foundation. They proceed as if the principle of moral excellence were innate in them, whereas in us, that is in our flesh there dwells no good thing. Now the way to become good is to exercise such a repentance, (as I briefly described last Sabbath,) as implies a spiritual regeneration. Regeneration is the commencement of holiness in the heart ; before regeneration there is in the heart nothing akin to holiness ; no seed capable of producing it, no principle capable of developing it. Until a man be born again, therefore, no anxiety, no effort, no abstinence can make any essential improvement in his character. The sinner must pass from the state of nature to that of grace, before he can grow in grace. He must realize that of which Paul speaks, (Rom. v. 1,) "therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand." See to it then that this change be wrought in you, the foundation laid, the vital principle communicated.

2. Then the soul being born again, the principle of spiritual life being communicated to it, so that the man is no longer absolutely dead in trespasses and sins, it must *have nourishment* in order to grow ; the principle of spiritual life is not independent of aliment, any more than that of animal life. Now truth is the nutriment of the soul, and it must be taken, or the soul will not grow, and in a little while will cease

to live. They say it is no matter what a man believes, or whether he believes any thing, so he but practises aright, which is as if one would say, it is immaterial what a man eats or whether he eat at all, so he but lives. Can he live without eating, and eating wholesome food? If error is not injurious, poison is not; and if ignorance is not hurtful, starvation is harmless. The man who is indifferent to the interests of truth, is also to those of virtue. It is impossible to love the one, without loving the other. Truth is the principle and pabulum of virtue. Yet, is he not, in many circles, regarded a bigot who contends earnestly for what he believes to be the faith once delivered to the saints? He is no more a bigot than the medical man who by his pen and tongue contends for a wholesome diet. What is truth? Pilate asked that question at the right source. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. This is truth; he says, "sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." Himself is truth; he also says "I am the way and *the truth*." The word of God must be understood, believed and meditated on, and especially its testimony concerning Christ, otherwise there can be no growth in grace. Peter exhorts "as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby;" and Christ says "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." I believe that one principal reason why Christians make such slow and interrupted progress in religion, is that they have such loose and indistinct views of the Gospel sys-

tem, and that they meditate on the Gospel and the Saviour so infrequently, and with so little concentration of thought. The truth has not the opportunity of producing its sanctifying effect, as the instrument of the Spirit. If you would grow in grace, if you would make progress in holiness, not only read the Bible, but understand it. Do you say "how can I, except some one guide me? The Spirit is given to guide you into all the truth. Not only hear the Gospel, but receive it into the head and the heart; ponder upon it and apply it; and become acquainted with Christ as revealed, in his person and offices; and love to contemplate him as the atoning sacrifice for sin in his death; for he says "except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." In regard to doctrine, be ye careful to separate the precious from the vile. So shall ye live and thrive.

3. The *exercise* of the moral powers and gracious dispositions in you is essentially necessary to their growth and expansion. How can one grow in benevolence, or in compassion unless he obeys its dictates? in temperance unless he habitually practises temperance? or in meekness, except he be in the habit of forgiving? how increase in humility unless he frequently humble himself? and in patience and fortitude, if he does not exercise these virtues? and as they cannot be exercised without trials and afflictions, hence the necessity of these to the growth of those virtues and the perfection of the human character. Paul understanding this matter says to the Hebrews, "he for our profit (chastens us) that we might be partakers of his holiness;" and to the Romans, "we glory

in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience." If then you would grow in grace, see to it that you regularly exercise gracious dispositions, and be willing that God should exercise them when and how he will. And I may as well take this opportunity of cautioning you to beware how you exercise and indulge the opposite dispositions, if you would not give strength to them. You cannot get rid of an unhappy temper by the daily indulgence of it. No evil disposition ever yet spent itself by exercise. The more you give way to irritability, fretfulness, impatience, censoriousness and the like, the more they gain strength.

4. According to the doctrine inculcated on the last Sabbath, God is the author, upholder, and finisher of good in us. No use of means, and no making of exertion are of any avail without his secret, spiritual efficiency; hence a spirit of dependance on God must be cultivated and exercised, and hence is *prayer* an indispensable means of growth in grace. The Holy Spirit is promised only to them who ask him. Prayer, (which is, be it remembered, always generated in the heart, and is its sincere and prevailing desire, inspired into a prepared form, or breathed into the words of him that leads in social devotion, or expressing itself in spontaneous language, or spending itself in groanings that cannot be uttered, yet are intelligible to Him who knoweth the mind of the Spirit,) prayer, I say, which has not unaptly been styled the *breath* of the spiritual life in man, if any man would grow in grace, he must abound in prayer. He must not only pray, but he must pray in the manner prescri-

bed in the Holy Scriptures. Every thing depends on the manner of praying. We have all had proof enough in our own experience, that the mere expression of desire is not effectual. There is a *faith* that is indispensable in prayer, and a cordial hatred of sin, without which the Lord will not hear, and a uniform doing of the will of God, giving the soul a confidence towards him. And the name of Christ must be the medium and plea, and there is an importunity and perseverance in prayer which are very frequently and strongly inculcated in the word of God. Bear in mind, then, that prayer is the means of obtaining the Spirit, without which there can be neither growth nor establishment in grace.

5. *Watchfulness* is another important means of growth in grace. *Watch and pray* is one of Christ's directions to his disciples; be sober, be vigilant, walk circumspectly. The plant of grace requires the most anxious attention and the most constant care. There is no plant that is reared with so much difficulty. It has many enemies; some that grub the earth, and some that infest the air; and it is exposed to many evil influences. It must be assiduously watched. The heart must be kept, as we are commanded, with all diligence. Nothing is so prone to wander from the right objects, as our thoughts and our affections. How frequently the Christian falls into sin, through mere inadvertence. He relaxes his vigilance, and presently he finds himself thinking evil, and sometimes speaking and doing it; he is surprised often to discover how far, without knowing it, he has gone in the indulgence of an evil

temper, and in the expression of unchristian feeling, and what a distance he has gone from God, the little time he has been off his guard, and what advantage temptation has gotten over him in the mean time. I believe there is nothing that interferes so seriously with the exemplariness of Christians before men, as this want of watchfulness. There are certainly few, if any more formidable hindrances to growth in grace than mere inadvertence, and the defect of vigilance.

6. Christians are members of a mystical body of which Christ is the head, and from him, in consequence of this connexion, they derive strength, grace, nourishment, and every needed good. Now faith is the bond of this union, and the stronger the faith, the closer the bond, and the more free the communication. Hence, if one would grow in grace, he must habitually exercise faith in Christ, and increase in faith. He should be able to say with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live, and yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God."

7. *Striving against sin* is all-important to growth in grace or holiness. Why is not the Christian perfect? Because sin remains in him. It is not dominant in him, else he would not be a Christian; but it is extant in him, active and ambitious, ever struggling to acquire its lost ascendancy, and frequently flushed with partial successes. It must be resisted positively, and strenuously. It must not only not be indulged, but active measures must be taken to keep it down and cast it out. One is naturally of an avaricious disposition. Now, what is the change



when his soul is renewed? Has he never another avaricious desire? He has many; but he does not suffer them to prevail; he will not gratify them; he positively opposes them; that is the change that has taken place. 'The same train of remark may be made of other evil dispositions. Pride is not indulged but mortified, as all the affections and lusts of the flesh.

Conversion does not put a man out of the reach of temptation. There is yet something left in the soul, which is disposed to listen to it and yield to it. Now the first rule is, fly temptation, if you can with propriety, (a rule that regulates very few; for many think it cowardly, and others are presumptuously confident in their strength to resist it.) If it cannot be evaded, then the second rule is, face it and resist it, depending on invisible and almighty grace.

'The Apostle in Hebrews speaks of the sin that doth most easily beset us; or, as it might more literally be rendered, the *well-circumstanced* sin. And it is a matter of experience with us all, that there are sins into which we more readily fall than into others, and that some species of temptation make a more effectual appeal to us than others do. Let special attention be directed to these, and peculiar defences reared up against them.

8. Sensual indulgence is a formidable foe to growth in grace; and, when carried far, is incompatible with its existence. Hence the necessity of abstinence and self-denial, without which, in some measure, piety can have no existence, and, without the practice of which, in a very considerable degree, emi-

nence in piety, we believe, was never attained. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself. Mortify, therefore, your members which are on the earth." There is a kind of evil that goes not out but by fasting and prayer. The lover of pleasure cannot be a lover of God. The man who makes the multiplication of agreeable sensations his chief study, how dwelleth the spirit of Christ in him!

9. The love of the world is another enemy to holiness. "Love not the world, neither the things therein. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." There is a wonderful moral efficiency in the cross of Christ to destroy this inordinate affection. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

10. Finally, *the promises* exert a sanctifying influence, when contemplated and applied. Peter writes, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that *by these* ye might be partakers of the divine nature."

I might multiply particulars; but I have said enough for this once. Let me recapitulate; *first*, repent and be converted; become good. Then, feed the soul with its appropriate food; exercise gracious dispositions; pray; watch; believe; strive against sin; fly or resist temptation; ascertain and combat more strenuously the besetting sin; deny thyself; gaze on the cross; contemplate the promises; and thus grow in grace.

I intended to discourse at some length on the *motives* which should induce us to employ these means

of growing in grace ; but I can only mention them, reserving it to some future occasion to enlarge upon them. They are these.

The fact that you have as yet made such small attainments in religion ; your obvious and most alarming inferiority to the saints of the Old and New Testaments.

The necessity of making progress in grace as an evidence of the reality of grace in you.

The auspicious influence which an increase of personal holiness would have in promoting your comfort and happiness, and in increasing your usefulness also.

The fact that the reward of glory hereafter will be in proportion to the measure of grace here.

The accomplishment of the grand design of the death of Christ, which was that he might redeem his people from all iniquity, and save them from their sins.

The glory of God, for herein is he glorified, that ye bear much fruit.

Your conscious unfitness, even in your regenerate state, to meet God, and to pass into the society of heaven.

The shortness of time and the uncertainty of life, earth being the place appointed, and life the time for making this improvement.

Each of these considerations has great weight ; together, they bear down all the considerations that can be urged in favor of any other course. Christians, I commend them to your remembrance and meditation ; and I charge you "grow in grace ;" follow holiness ; cultivate the soul. Let us go on to

perfection. As he that has called us is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect. Awake to righteousness and sin not.

Now, with one argument, *a fortiori* it is called technically, we conclude.

If there be so much reason why they who are good should become better, how much more that they who are, in the Gospel sense, evil, should become good evangelically? Nay, more, that they who are continually becoming worse and worse, (as it was shown in the discourse already referred to, that all unregenerate persons are,) should immediately arrest themselves and make no more progress in evil, but turn and take an opposite course. By this time, should you not have begun to be holy? should you not at least have repented? should you not have turned your attention to the subject of religion? It is high time, believe me. Believe me, your character requires immediate attention; your soul is suffering seriously, *fatally* for want of it. You are neglecting the most momentous concerns; you are hazarding the most important interests; you are running the risk of losing yourselves forever. It is time to awake, and inquire and exert yourselves. Awake thou that sleepest. Woe to you that are at ease in Zion. Know ye not that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force? Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

May God bless his word to your good and his own glory. Amen.

## SERMON XXVI.

Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?—PSALM LXXXIX. 47.

THE latter part of this psalm is of a deeply tragic cast. After reviewing the promises of the covenant, which God had made with David and his house, and his former merciful dealings with them, the writer refers in a very pathetic manner to the present afflicted state of the kingdom and the royal family, with earnest prayers and expostulations to God on account of it. He finds it difficult to reconcile the providences of God with his covenanted promises, and his known perfections. "Lord where are thy former loving kindnesses which thou swearest unto David in thy truth?" And, in the same desponding state of mind, he asks not merely in reference to Israel, but in view of the afflicted and mortal condition of all mankind, "Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?" There may appear to you to be a great deal of boldness and not a little impiety discovered in this interrogation of the Psalmist, in which he charges God with having made this race in vain, and calls upon him to give his reasons for having done so. But the writer meant not to make this impression. He does not mean to say that God has actually created men unto vanity, but only that there

are many things in his providence, and in our human condition which look as if he had made us in vain ; and that to reason, unenlightened by revelation, it is very hard, if not perfectly impossible, to reconcile much that we see of the providential dispensations of Jehovah with the moral attributes of that infinitely perfect Being. Now there is nothing more true than this. We can demonstrate it ; we feel it. Who has not sometimes found himself engaged in a train of thinking like this which the Psalmist details, and who when he has meditated on such facts, has not found himself brought to the same conclusion, and surprised himself in the act of asking questions to the same amount with this, " Wherefore hast thou made man in vain ?"

To direct your attention to some of those facts and phenomena which seem to prove that God has created us unto vanity is the *first* part of my design ; and the *second* is to show, by several considerations, which I derive from the inspired oracles of God, that these facts do not prove what they appear to prove, and that there is nothing we observe in the Providence of God, which revelation does not enable us to reconcile with the perfections of God.

1. The first fact to which I refer you is one that has frequently and strongly impressed my own mind ; it is the almost infinite disproportion which we find to exist between the faculties of man and his actual occupations ; his faculties how noble, how solemn, how efficient, his employments how mean, how frivolous, how unprofitable ! Who is not struck with the apparent waste of mind ? The human soul,

although in all much embarrassed in its operations, and in some making but few and faint discoveries of its real glory, has beyond a doubt, faculties and capacities of the same kind with the angels, and if not quite so high, yet but a little lower in degree than those heavenly beings whose never ceasing occupation is adoration and worship, and whose only study is God. Yet man with talents approaching to the angels, as fit by nature as they to love and contemplate, to praise and study God, how differently is he engaged! in employments some of which require no intellect at all, others but a very feeble degree of it, and all as far below what seems suited to his moral and intellectual nature, as the insignificant labors of an insect are below the dignity of the noble courser. It is like giving one the strength of a giant to do a pigmy's work. The disproportion is not less great. The unsuitableness is not less obvious. The wisdom of the great Dispenser is as hard to be established in the one case as in the other; and it is no wonder if a man finding himself possessed of such powers so meanly set to work, exclaims in view of it "wherefore hast thou made me in vain?" But I will advance a consideration by and by to show that this fact is far from justifying the exclamation.

2. When we contemplate the equal disproportion between human desires and human attainments, we arrive at the same conclusion. What an amazing inequality between what we find without us, and what we feel within us! The desires of the human soul do not merely transcend its actual attainments, so that it is not in fact satisfied, but they also trans-

pend his possible attainments, so that he cannot ever be satisfied from any or all of the things that God has thrown around him. Perhaps there could not be devised a more effectual method to make men miserable than to give them at once all they seek after on earth, and the whole that they could have from this world. They would then perceive immediately its unsatisfactoriness, which now they do not discover, because they are ever engaged in the pursuit of some unattained good that is before them; and there is much more to bear up and satisfy the soul in the pursuit of an unattained object, than there is in the actual attainment of what is sought after. And does not this bespeak vanity, and does it not look as if the God who has planted such unsatisfiable desires within us, has made us in vain? doth it not seem to justify the mournful exclamation of the Psalmist?

3. But it is particularly when we contemplate the dispensations of God with respect to life and death, that we feel ourselves, almost involuntarily, led to adopt the language of our text. At every step, that we take in the progress of our observations from the cradle to the grave, we find good reason for indulging in this melancholy strain of expostulation; but more especially when we stand over the grave itself, when we look on the last visible end of man, and look into that open place which receives all that is left of love and friendship, and the once warm heart, and the once loving eye and voice that revealed the secrets of the mysterious mind, and then think that there is no man that liveth that shall not see death. Who can



help crying out in agony of soul "wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?"

Is not this that I am going to describe with few exceptions, the inevitable lot of every man? We look at him now, and he is in trouble and tears; his soul is sunken within him; his spirit is sore wounded; and the world that yesterday looked so fair and flattering is now all a blank, a vanity. What has happened? The soul that mingled itself with his soul, and intertwined its life with his life, has been suddenly and forcibly disengaged, and is gone, he knows not whither, only he knows it is forever gone. Perhaps it is some poor orphan whose desolation has just been completed; or some lonely widow that has taken final leave of him who was the solace and support of life; or some hoary-headed parent going down mourning to the grave because he is bereaved of his children. We look at him again, and he himself is racked with pain or languishing with debility or loathsome with disease; and now the last sweat of toiling, struggling nature has risen upon him, the last current of life has been thrown out from the exhausted heart, the voice has only strength to whisper a parting and a prayer, the last long difficult breath that bears the soul upon it is breathing, is breathed; and the spirit is clean gone, where? The eye cannot follow it; reason cannot answer, revelation says (with a voice yet more awful than the silence of reason,) to the Judgment. The body is left voiceless, motionless, senseless and only above the other dust, as association endears it. But even that poor relic cannot be kept; it is offensive to the living; it must be taken

away and covered from the sight. And does it not seem as if God had created man unto vanity ?

A multitude of facts under this head come crowding upon me, all tending to confirm the same melancholy conclusion, all conducting us into a region of darkness with respect to God which reason has not one ray of light to relieve, and which but for truths which revelation discloses, would enshroud the character of our God forever.

The absolute brevity of human life impresses me ; and in this very composition, and in immediate precedence of our text the Psalmist reminds his Maker of it ; "remember how short my time is." What a mere moment is the longest term of years, which any are permitted to reach, for such a being as man to live, a being gifted with such intelligence, capable of forming such extensive plans, of engaging in enterprises so magnificent, and of contracting attachments so strong and so lasting ; a being above all whose first taste of life creates in him a thirst which nothing but immortality can satisfy. Does it not look as if it would have been better for him never to have lived, if he cannot live without seeing death, and seeing it so soon ? or at least would it not have been better to have given him an inferior measure of intelligence, and a less susceptible heart, and to have withheld from his constitution that eager desire of existence which makes death, when contemplated by the unaided mind, so very awful ?

That half of all who are born die in infancy and earliest childhood, die before the image of God is seen in them, before their distinctive nature develops

itself, is another fact, which, if I had no other teacher but reason, I should not know how to reconcile with the wisdom and goodness of my Maker. Why are so many taken out of life, before the one great object of life can be understood or entered upon? Are they not surely made in vain?

And here are other phenomena. I see a youth rising up into life, full of hope and of promise, on whose education much has been expended, who has studied and toiled long and hard in preparation for acting his part in life, but just as he has finished himself and is ready to engage in some useful and honorable employment he is cut off, his connection with this world dissolved forever, and all that he has done seems to have been done in vain. I see the purposes of ambition frustrated in an unexpected moment; and the plans of the worldly minded suddenly arrested. I see them that occupy the places of honor and usefulness dislodged; the idols of public affection are cast down, and the pillars of the state totter and fall one after another. This city has of late covered herself with the garments of undissembled mourning for one of her most beloved and honored sons, whom her anxieties and prayers were ineffectual to save, and for whom she could do nothing of all her heart desired to do, but deeply bewail and magnificently bury. Four weeks ago and none of you stood firmer or promised fairer; no eye beamed clearer, no foot stood firmer, no lamp burned brighter. Now you know how it is. No more forever shall that familiar voice be raised in defence of innocence and in advocacy of right. No more shall be ex-

changed the friendly salutation. And never, never, more shall the door of that desolate home open for him to enter, who was the light and comfort of it. Where now is all that activity and enthusiasm gone? Who can contemplate such a case without feeling in spite of himself as if God had made us all in vain?

I need not add to this melancholy catalogue of facts. It is time that I should redeem my promise to solve these difficulties and to show that the facts alledged prove not what they appear to prove. How to do this, if I had only my own mind to consult, I should not know. It seems to me that the pensive language of my text is that in which reason naturally expresses herself. She knows nothing about immortality and little of God. I get no light upon this subject except from revelation. I find no difficulty solved and no doubt removed, till I read these pages. Reason, you may depend upon it, teaches man much less than is generally supposed, and has the credit of giving much information which she herself has acquired from the word of God. Man, in the school of mere reason, would be quite a different being from what any one professed pupil of reason has ever been. There was never that heathen man lived, whose views and character were not in some degree affected and modified by traditionary revelation : and there was never the infidel however determined in his intention to reject all revelation, who has been able to distinguish exactly and reject all the notices he has received from revelation. Neither the philosophy of heathenism nor the philosophy of infidelity is the sole work of reason ; but the most important truths in either sys-

tem are the truths of revelation, and had they not first been intimated to man in this way, they would never have had a place in any philosophical system.

The truths of revelation which throw light upon this dark yet most interesting subject are many. I shall briefly enumerate a few.

1. It affords a clear and satisfactory demonstration of a future and immortal state. Death, it informs us is not the end of our being; it is not even an interruption of it. It is but an event that befalls a man at a certain point of his endless existence. It is but a change of place and circumstances. It is not true that God has brought such a being as man into existence to destroy him again in a day. He lives forever, and, therefore, every conclusion that reasons on the supposition that he does not, is false and must be set aside.

2. Again; it brings to view this most important truth, which alone is sufficient to explain almost all the difficulties of our present state, that this beginning of our being is probationary and preparatory to an endless retribution that is to follow. If this be true, it is not wonderful that man should be subject to such a multitude of trials and afflictions; and those trials and afflictions, so far from proving the vanity of his state, may be made to contribute most effectually to the ultimate perfection of his character and happiness. Then, again, if this life be a period of probation, it is fit that it should be short; and it is kind in God to make it so. It is better, both for the wicked and the righteous, that it should be so. And, when we remind God how short our time is, we do

in reality remind him how benignantly he has dealt with us. The inequality of human life appears not so strange on this supposition. There may be excellent reasons, though we cannot fathom them, why so large a proportion of mankind should never actively engage in the great business of life, and why the term of probation to some should be much shorter than it is to others. And that which we call a premature death, may be far from premature. If the grand design of life be answered and the work of life be done, no death, however early or sudden, deserves to be called premature; but if otherwise, the longest life is vanity, and the latest and most lingering death is premature. Nor do I see any thing in the uncertainty of human life that is not ordered in wisdom and kindness, if life be probationary. It is fit that man should be in the momentary expectation of being called to give up his account; it is fit that he should, at all times, have the necessary part of his work done, which would never be the case could he calculate with certainty on the future.

There is another truth of revelation which I think appropriate to the design I have now in view. We learn from it that the things which we do here on earth, are not of so much importance as the manner of doing them. It is not of so much consequence whether a man tug at the oar, or stand at the helm of a mighty state, whether his occupation be mean or honorable, but it is of infinite consequence that he acquit himself well in that occupation, whatever it be. And he who, in what he does, maintains the supremacy of the fear of God, and makes every

thing bow to conscience, and has a steady regard to that tribunal at which all the external and internal things of man are to be scrutinized and decided upon, is nobly employed, and the dignity of human nature suffers nothing from him, though his daily labor be to shovel the dust of the earth. Whereas he, whose business is to study the stars, and his daily employment to meditate on Him who made them, if he have not the fear of God before his eyes, and does not keep up a constant recognition of his amenableness to the bar of God, is still but meanly occupied. It matters not so much on what our faculties be employed, as that they be employed aright; and, therefore, God has not made us and furnished us in vain, though for a time he suffers us to be occupied in things that seem far below what behooveth the nature he has bestowed upon us; and that our attainments here are altogether disproportioned to our desires, is no necessary proof of vanity, if the time shall so speedily come when the objects that are adequate to them shall be within their grasp.

Let these considerations suffice to show that the conclusion implied in our text, is hastily drawn. God has not made all men in vain. He has made no man in vain. We think so only because we do not view things in their connexion, because we confine our observations to this infancy of our existence, because we overlook the great object of life, and the constitution under which God has placed us here. We may indeed, live in vain, and worse than in vain. Many do. Many, on the bed of death, are brought to confess, in the anguish of a remorseful conscience, that they

have lived to no purpose ; and more, who are so deep asleep, that the shock of death cannot awaken them, make the same lamentable confession, when, from eternity, they look back on the schemes and labors of time ; and they are not able to take to themselves the consolation of charging God with being the cause of it. Oh, yes, the man of the world is indeed made in vain ; but it is his own work. His life is a life of splendid vanity, as, when at last he comes to gather it up, he finds it. He has done nothing, he has gained nothing. The supreme business of existence has been disregarded ; eternity has been laid out of the question ; God has been forgotten, and no reference has been had to the account which he takes of man. As a probationer for immortality, as a candidate for heaven, he has done nothing ; and whatever may have been the splendor and the success of his secular enterprises, the wealth that he amassed, and the honor that he has acquired and preserved unto an old age, vanity is the solitary word that deserves to be written in capitals as the only appropriate inscription for his monument. There is but one way of living to any purpose ; and that is by being a Christian in reality and in heart. There is nothing vain, nothing negative, nothing necessarily profitless in the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ, and a child of the heavenly adoption, no matter what scenes he passes through and what events befall him on earth. How can there be when God promises that all things shall work together for good to them that love him ? His very bereavements, and disappointments, and failures, and these various



trials, which cause him to exclaim at the vanity of human life, do send a most benignant influence over the whole of the immortal future. Affliction worketh for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; he suffers not one unprofitable pain; the sicknesses of his body are all turned to meet the necessities of his soul. And he dies just in the manner and just at the time that he ought to die for the greatest good of his soul; his works follow him; he finds death gain.

I will presume to take the liberty of inquiring of you in what manner you are living, whether for eternity, whether with an hourly reference to the bar at which you are to be arraigned and tried, whether in continual remembrance of God, whether with the grand design of life steadily in view, whether as plainly becometh a being whom the Son of God has suffered for? Ask ye, and answer the questions. It is not only vanity, it is madness to overlook them. If ye live otherwise, ye not only live to no purpose, but to the worst of all purposes,

## SERMON XXVII.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.—PSALM xc. 12. X

It may be known to you that David was not the author of all the Psalms of the collection which goes under his name. Among those which he compiled, that from which the text is taken, is one. It is entitled, "*A prayer of Moses, the Man of God,*" and it is supposed to have been written somewhere in the wilderness. The immediate occasion of it is thought to have been the spectacle of one of those sudden and signal displays of the divine displeasure, which visited the journeying Israelites with great and general mortality, sweeping off their thousands, and carrying them away as with a flood. We should suppose from the tenor of the Psalm, that the writer had under his eye, death, not as he advances by slow and natural steppings, but death as he passes along with the drift and destruction of the storm. "*Thou turnest man to destruction.*" "*Thou carriest them away as with a flood.*" "*We are consumed by thine anger.*"

The meditation which he pursues is, however, of universal interest, because the condition of man on earth which it contemplates, has been found to be

the same in every subsequent age. And the very reflections of this ancient man of God, are continually obtruded upon our minds by facts almost as striking and revolting as those which fell under the observation of Moses. The same hasty work of death is going on upon the field which our eyes survey. And now, as well as when Israel was in the wilderness, that which in the morning flourisheth and groweth up, is cut down and withered in the evening. The tide of destruction sets as strong as ever, and floats upon each successive swell, as many spirits to eternity. There has been no repeal, nor even a relaxation of that law, "*Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.*" Life is now that vapor, span, handbreadth, vanity, told tale it ever was. The unseen execution of the sentence that went forth from God against man, the angel of death has passed down the ages, sweeping away all that was good and beautiful and great; and reducing all to the same low level of torpor and corruption. Generation has followed close upon generation, with its burden of souls for eternity, as wave follows wave, commingling and losing its waters in the ocean. In the current arithmetic of life which never stands still, each day, and hour, and minute is subtracting spirits from time and adding them to eternity, until now the living are as nothing to the dead, and the grave has the immense and overflowing majority.

There is then a *general* appropriateness in these reflections; but, besides this, there is a *special* propriety in them, now that we are standing by the

grave of one year and witnessing the birth of another; looking back upon the facts of the past and forward to the probabilities of the future. Who, when he reviews the year that has just gone, though it was like all the years that went before it, can forbear to pray, "*Lord, make me to know my end and the measure of my days; teach me to number my days?*" How wide and awful the ravage which that single twelvemonth has made in the population of the world. Thirty millions of this great brotherhood, who, but a year ago were living, or had not begun to live, now know the secret of eternity. Others have crowded into their places, while they have gone willingly or unwillingly, to join that great assemblage of mankind, incalculably more numerous than that which now peoples the earth, who wait and wait and wait for the long-lingering wind of the last trumpet to the dead. It is not right to call this earth the abiding spot and home of mankind. It is but their short breathing place. A large proportion of the race are only born here, as if it were but to leave a body behind them, ere they go to join the great concourse of spirits. And, oh! who, when he turns from a review of the past, to the anticipation of the future, will not, with yet more feeling, repeat the prayer, "*Lord, teach me to number my days?*" When he thinks that the new year shall go on with the same steady step to crowd away other millions, and that this shall be succeeded by another and another, until the now living generation shall all be swept away. There is something in the very progress

of the work by which generations pass away, which makes it yet more melancholy to contemplate. It is truly an affecting thought, that, of all who are now listening to me, there shall not be, in a few years, one survivor on earth. And yet I think there is something still more deeply touching in the view of that gradual dropping away of one after another, vacating his seat and causing the place that once knew him, to know him no more, until the whole of us shall have passed away; and he who looks down from this pulpit shall meet other eyes, when all these are sealed in death, and speak of redemption to the future prisoners of hope, when we shall be enjoying all its fullness, or have forfeited its privileges, and are past its power forever.

*“ So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”*

I. Let us then inquire what is the true art of numbering our days, and how we may learn the correct arithmetic of life. The theoretical part of the business, *the science* of numbering our days is by no means very difficult. It is not hard, with all the facts we have, to come to a correct estimate of human life.

1. *Let us add them up and find the sum of them.*

The term of human life has been shortened at successive times, until fixed at its present limitation. The days of the years of man were once nearly a thousand years. But God, for reasons not at all honorable to man, viz. because the wickedness of man waxed great in the earth, and he had too long a time to plot and execute purposes of mischief, and perhaps

to prevent the necessity of a second deluge, cut short his days. The process of shortening the term of ordinary living was gradual. *Noah*, with his antediluvian constitution, lived to the period of his fathers 950 years. *Shem*, who had only the advantage of an antediluvian birth, was cut short, perhaps by the climate after the flood, 350 years; 200 years were taken from the lives of his immediate descendants and the average age of the three succeeding generations was about 440. The next change was in the time of *Peleg*, who, with his descendants for several generations, lived but about 240 years. And so the diminution went gradually on. *Terah*, the father of Abraham lived 205 years. The three Patriarchs reached the age of about 180. When Israel was passing through the wilderness, the boundary was fixed, as it is said in this Psalm, to three score years and ten; and now, when we speak of human life in the abstract, this is the amount at which it is reckoned; 70 years; this is the first number in our calculation; the short year that is gone seventy times repeated and no more. I know that when one looks forward from childhood, through youth and manhood, to old age, the term seems long, and the heart is ready to say "*it is enough.*" Hope is in the future, and in the soul's earnest aspiring after it, time seems to move but tardily. The fore ground is full of goodly prospects, and in the eagerness to enjoy, the space looks long to pass over. But when all that was in prospect has been seen and tasted, and hope has been attained or disappointed, and when the eye, from the other extreme of life, and with eternity full and near

before it, casts a returning look, how short and diminished appears the distance between this day, and the first remembered day ; and who of the aged will not exclaim with good old Jacob "*few have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage ?*"

But let your seventy years be as much, as your imagination can make them. I will not try to make the small number less. Think the term long, if you will. But you have not yet numbered your days. For,

2. *In the true arithmetic of life there is a subtraction to be made.* There is a great deal of existence which you must not count life. There are the days of infancy of which there is no memory left. There are the hours of sleep, which are as if they were not ; those intermediate deaths they may be called, in which we do not so much live as prepare to live ; and there are those many days and hours in which, from a great variety of causes, the mind is not fitted for exertion, nor the hand for labor. They must all be deducted. They are nothing in the correct estimate of life, and then how diminished the remainder of the hours of thought and activity, which alone deserve to be called life, is left to you. Greater, far greater are the intervals, than the actual, current life. But we have not made out our estimate yet. We have spoken of the abstract amount. We have been calculating the absolute of human life. But it does not stand unconnected ; and let us,

3. *Look at it as it stands related to that which shall come after it.* We must state the proportion between this life and the life beyond it ; and ascertain

the ratio of this part to man's entire existence. The terms *long and short* are relative and if we would know which of these belong to our life, we must compare our seventy years with the hereafter, eternity. There can be no comparison. There exists no proportion. Who can complete the ratio of the finite to the infinite? Ah, it is in this view that the Bible tells us of life, that it is a vapor, a morning flower, a handbreadth, a span, a vanity, a dream, a tale, a nothing. A single grain of sand bears some proportion to the sum of the drifts of the desert, a drop, nay, the least particle of exhaled vapor has a calculable relation to the aggregate waters of the ocean, that has scarcely a sounding or a shore. A moment, the present *now*, might be multiplied into the life of the earliest made angels but no multiplication of time can make eternity. This life can be no measure of the life to come; however long it may be, yet placed beside the line of eternity, it diminishes to a point, and the point itself is lost. What would you think of seventy years, if they were marked off from some distant point in the endless futurity? Would you not think that term, as but a little, trifling interval, would you not esteem it as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night, or as a sleep? And why not think the same of that seventy years, which begins the endless series?

But you may be thinking, what is the profit of this calculation, if death does not end nor even interrupt our existence, what if life be as it is represented by us?

4. *Hear then another part of this estimate.* We



have not yet taken into view *the bearing* of this life, on the life to come. If it were an unconnected quantity, no matter for it. No matter how short and how squandered, if when gone, it were gone forever and forgotten; if the consequences of time did not survive time itself; if no influence were sent out from it into and through eternity; if life and all its doings were not to pass under the eye and the review of God. But time is to give complexion to eternity. The moments that come and go in such rapid succession and are counted to be no more, are, every one of them, immortal in their consequences. Every moment that God gives to man, shall return at the appointed day and make its report of every deed, and whisper and thought before the judgment throne. *Time* is to man, in some respects, a more serious season than *eternity*. *Eternity* is absolutely the creature of time; derives all its cast and character from time; is troubled or serene, inviting or revolting, a blessing or a curse, as time, omnipotent time ordains it. Life is probationary, immortality retributive. The present is seed time, the future is harvest season. Take this into the estimate. In the numbering of your days, overlook not this most serious consideration.

*So then this is the result.* We have seventy years given us, diminished indeed by a few deductions; and though nothing in comparison with eternity, yet something in itself, and in this term we are to act for eternity, we are to make or to mar our endless future prospects, and this you suppose is the end of this alarming computation. No.

5. There is one thing more in the omission of which, we should be miserably out in our calculations. It is that which embarrasses the whole proceeding. I have been speaking as if all the items in this numeration were known and certain ; but ah there is one unknown and variable quantity in this arithmetic, and there is no algebraic process by which the value of it can be ascertained. We called it seventy years, but in the ten thousand cases it means nothing like that. It only *may* mean that, and it may and does also stand for any thing less, down to the infant's first and only moment ; and we can never know what it stands for, until it is too late to care for it. This it is that baffles us, and there is no rule in arithmetic which will help us out of the difficulty. There is a constant addition of days, but how many yet remain in the hand that tells them off, we have no means of knowing. It is the secret of the Lord, which he never tells, not even to them that fear him. He may have written for ten, or thirty, or fifty years, or he may strike the account to-morrow, or *this night*, he may break in upon your anticipations and hopes, and say to thee, when thy heart is beating high and strong, "*Thou fool*, this night thy soul is required of thee." Oh ! forget not this unknown number ; forget not this uncertainty, this embarrassing, most alarming uncertainty.

*And now what is the final result ?* Where ends our calculation ? What is life ? Not the probable life ; but the life we are certain of ; the life we can calculate upon ; the life which we have a right to call *ours*. It is this, and no more than this : the

present, indivisible, irredeemable moment added to the moments that are past ; and since, in some sense, and for all that is yet to be done, the moments past are as if they had never been, it is this moment only, which you cannot reflect upon, ere it is gone irrecoverable, and which, when gone, is past all ransom price to redeem. There was a price in heaven for the soul ; but there is none for lost and squandered days. Our days, when numbered, are reduced to this moment, this, and perhaps the next, and as many more as God will. It is *now*, and the very least which that word ever signifies. You sit unalarmed, ye dying men. I know why. You are thinking that the probabilities are millions to one ; that life, to you, is more, much more than I am making it. You are right. I am only contending for the one chance that is against you. I argue but for the possibility. That is enough for me. There is one against you ; and, oh ! it is a dreadful thing to play at a game, when the stake is eternity, at any odds, at any hazard. Great as is the probability of life, it is ever diminishing ; and the time will come, when the probability still continuing that you will live, the fact will be that you will die ; and that this is not a false or puerile calculation, how often does the alone arbiter of life make bare his arm to prove upon the man who counted on long years of life and pleasure here. I have finished the calculation.

II. And now do you ask me what lessons are to be learned ? And what inferences are to be drawn from this computation of our days ? Tell me first, oh ! man, after what I have said, have you laid up a

treasure for yourself in heaven? have you labored diligently and successfully for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life? have you sought already the kingdom and righteousness of God and found them? have you secured the everlasting things? done and well done the work given you of God to do? Hast thou repented, and believed? Art thou reconciled, renewed? If, brethren, I knew no more of you than that you form a part of God's intellectual creation, I should either not ask such questions, or not wait for an answer. Surely, I should say, they have done, they must have done all this. Man is not mad, surely. Made, as he is, in the image of God, he cannot be the infatuated being to put off important concerns, yea, the most important, to an uncertain and precarious future. Knowing that the earthly house of his tabernacle is even to be dissolved, he has of course secured the tenant spirit, a mansion in the house not made with hands. But, alas! experience does not confirm these anticipations; and I must doubt, though it should bring you in guilty of moral madness, if there be not many here who have done none of these things. What says the conscience suffered to speak out? and let it speak freely, though it be a slave; yet once a year, let it speak the truth with freedom. What says it? that you have not done these things? And ask you then what *you* have to learn from this numbering of days? That your conduct is more infatuated than human language can express; that your neglect is inexplicable, except on the hypothesis that you are morally insane; that your procrastination argues

the highest presumption, in league with the most thoughtless folly ; that your joy is infinitely more melancholy than any sorrow. These are a few of the lessons.

You ask me what you are to learn from the calculation which tells you that, for the laying up of your store for the future, for the making of your peace with God, for the sowing of the seed for eternity, you have neither year, nor day, nor hour, which you can count upon without presumption. What you are to learn from the account which informs you, that, upon the uncertain pulsations of that beating heart, which plays not at your will, and stops at another's bidding, depends the making of your eternal destiny ; that, upon the moment, or moments, which remain to be told from the unknown amount, having infinite results, hang everlasting things ; and this moment gone, and another and another, the next succeeding may find your spirit at the last bar, before God, and hearing the irreversible award ! What you are to learn ? When nothing is done ! Oh ! if there be aught of truth in these statements, and they are all truth, it wants a seraph's burning words to tell the madness that is in the heart of man, while he lives as he does live, neglected of the one great and only needful thing and wasting away his moments, as if he had the bank of eternity to draw upon. Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise, for she provideth her meat in the summer and gathereth her food in the harvest.

I beseech you, impenitent man, if there be any power of thinking, or any susceptibility left, if

any care for consequences, if any shuddering dread of an endless hell, if any last lingering desire, in that desolate bosom, after the heaven of God, which eye hath not seen, nor heart conceived, if you are not quite prepared to give up all forever, and embrace damnation, I beseech you in the name of the Infinite, by that soul which stirs within you, that soul immortal as God; that soul, that now tenants a frail and perishing body, by that soul, which hangs balancing over an eternal abyss, by that within you that is bound for God, have mercy upon that soul, that it may not die. Bring it to Jesus that he may wash it in his blood and array it in his righteousness. Oh! come, he waiteth. To-day; this first of days.

I wish you a happy new year all. Yet perhaps not one of your own happy years; no more of those gay, unthinking, merry ones that have past, and that will only return again to be wept over, but the happiness of a year devoted to God; not such a happiness as you seek to kindle for yourselves, and which is as a forced fire, lighted up in the midst of a surrounding and overshadowing darkness, but that which resembles the clear and cheerful shining of the sun after a night of storm and sorrow.

*Christians*, this estimate of human life may teach you many important lessons. I suppose you to have attained the one great thing, but with the same loud voice with which it calls on the impenitent to seek God, it calls upon you to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. You are habitually prepared to die, but are you actually ready, standing with

your loins girded about, and your lamps trimmed and burning, and in the attitude of mind which becomes those, who are waiting for their Lord's coming? Are you weaned from a world which is so rapidly passing away from under you, and aspiring after glory, honor and immortality? and loathing all these earthly vanities which are served up for you, do your souls pant after God and thirst for God, even the living God? Your treasure, you suppose is in heaven; are your affections there? Is your conversation there? The time is short and the fashion of the world passeth away, for the day of the Lord to you is at hand. "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" There is that in this meditation which should break you away from the world and bind you close to your Saviour; which should moderate the joy of prosperity and sooth the sorrows of adversity, which should repress your anxieties, and check your anticipations.

And have you no work to do for others? Jesus Christ had no work to do for himself, yet he worked while it was to-day, the work which his Father had given him to do for others, knowing that the night drew near, in which no man could work. Care you nothing for the souls that he cared for and that are falling around you; for them whom nature has made near to you, or friendship has endeared to you? Care you nothing for the name of God, and for the kingdom of Christ? Resolve; for this is the day for resolutions.

III. There is a third part to this subject, but I shall not detain you long upon it. You observe that the

text bears the form of a prayer, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." But is there need of praying on such a subject and for such a purpose? Are not the facts and truths on which we built our computation, obvious; and were not the inferences fair? Can any one doubt that life is just what I have represented it to be? And being such, ought not man to be and to do as I have said? Ah, brethren, the man of God recognizes a truth, almost as old as the creation, that man may hear the most alarming truths and be unalarmed; that he may be addressed by the most urgent motives and yet remain unmoved; that facts the most appalling and considerations the most tremendous, he has the art of overlooking; that religious truth, eternal truth has no efficacy with him. Who doubts it, doubts the experience of almost six thousand years; and rejects the clearest testimony of his own mind; for we know that we can stand upon the breaking brink of time and be unappalled; and can look over the perilous edge into eternity and turn away and smile and be all at ease within. We know that we can and do resist the most startling truths. And it is certain that you will go away to day, believing all I have said, and yet remain the thoughtless, inconsiderate, worldly creatures you have been heretofore, unless God go with you, unless God impress the lesson. Let us not forget this truth. We will pray. Join me, all ye who have an interest there; join me, ye whose voices are heard in heaven; let our hearts be united; and we will this day fill many vials with our prayers, that God may teach us



so to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. There is a sleep on man, a deep sleep and it has all the common properties of death, its insensibility, its motionlessness, its deafness, and there is but one voice that can wake it. Great and good God, speak it; and thine shall be all the glory, while ours is the happy, happy eternity.

## SERMON XXVIII.

The *sting* of death is sin.—1 CORINTHIANS xv. 56.

THERE is something connected with death, yet distinct from it; belonging to it, yet capable of being detached from it, which is infinitely worse and more to be dreaded than death itself, so that when it is detached, that which remains is hardly deserving of the name of death. That to which I refer is called sometimes the *bitterness* of death. Here, it is called its *sting*. To die, and not taste that bitterness; to die, and not feel that sting, is not to die. "He that liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." All things are his, who is Christ's. Death is his, equally as life. But it is not so where the bitterness and sting remain. It is his being armed with such a sting, that gives death his power to hurt, and renders him so formidable a foe; and the disarming of him in this respect, is considered as victory over death, even though the conqueror in achieving the conquest dies. He is victorious in death over death, even as, in a higher sense, Christ was; and the language, in which he expresses his triumph, is not, "Oh! death, where art thou?" for death remains, and he feels his cold hand on him perhaps even in the moment of his exulting exclamation; but, "Oh! death,

where is thy sting?" Where that envenomed point, by which thou hast power to hurt and destroy? It is gone; and that is victory. He who giveth his disciples this victory, could have superseded death altogether; but, in his wisdom, he prefers not to do it. He chooses, rather than to take it entirely out of their way, to put it in their power, and make it subservient to them. Death exists still; but it exists as theirs.

The triumph which this language expresses, will not, in all its fullness, be realized till the general resurrection of the last day, when that which is sown in corruption, shall be raised in incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality, these vile bodies being changed and made like to Christ's glorious body. Not until the ransomed of the Lord shall come forth from their graves, shall be fully brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Not until then will be sung in full chorus this song, "Oh! death, where is thy sting? Oh! grave, where is thy victory?" Then, on that morning, the ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of the redeemed, rising from their mortal beds, with souls all pure and bodies glorious, shall strike together these notes of exultation and triumph, "Oh! death, where is thy sting? Oh! grave, where is thy victory?" Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, unto him be glory and dominion forever. Will you be one of

that choir? Will your heart share in that joy, and your voice mingle in that melody?

But the victory, though not complete till then, commences sooner. It commences in *conversion*, when sin is pardoned, God pacified towards the sinner, and the dominion of sin in him destroyed. That moment the sting of death is taken away, though the terror of death may remain, and that fear has always torment. Then it loses not all its power to frighten the imperfect and unassured believer, but all its power materially to injure him. Then death becomes his; and ever after that it is gain for him to die. Dost thou with all thy heart believe in Jesus? Art thou through him reconciled to God? Is he, as thy Saviour, precious to thee? Art thou living to him? Then thou mayest say, yea, sing, ay shout, "Oh! death, where is thy sting?" It is not premature to strike this high note even now. On thy bed by night, and all along thy path by day, this may be thy song; no lower strain than this need be sung by thee. Even now when death puts on new terrors, and multiplies his trophies, and draws near with his unwonted weapon, inspiring terror in hearts not used to dread him, even now, at this time, when it may be said, "This is the hour and power of death," it is thy privilege to apostrophise him in this exulting language, "Oh! death, where is thy sting?"\*

But, again, this victory is realized in the death of the saints, and sometimes most illustriously. Multitudes in dying have said and *felt*, "Oh! death,

\* Preached just before the ravages of cholera in our country.

where is thy sting?" No true Christian ever feels the sting of death, though some may long and even late fear the feeling of it. "Is this dying?" said one, "how have I dreaded as an enemy, this smiling friend!" "If this be the dark valley," said another, "it is all light to me. I find no darkness in it." To such the bitterness of death is past before they die. I have seen death with the sting, and death without the sting, and the difference was greater than between death and life. The former is indeed to be dreaded, death with the sting. The latter has often been and should be an object of desire. Death, without the sting, is the soul's release from all that has annoyed its peace, and marred its beauty, and its introduction to everlasting life and glory.

But what is the sting of death? That part of this inexpressibly sublime and glorious discourse which informs us what it is, strikes me as the finest part of all, as even sublimer than the apostrophe to death, as that which crowns the climax, "the sting of death is sin;" and still he rises, "and the strength of sin is the law;" and rises higher, "but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the point of highest elevation; and thence how graceful the descent, "therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." The sting of death, that which gives poignancy and power to it, is sin. Many give a different account of the matter. If the question were asked of each of you, "What is the sting of death?" all would not answer *sin*. Some would, perhaps, say that the

pain of the conflict with the king of terrors, the agony of the dying strife, the mysterious anguish, attendant on the separation of soul and body, constitutes the sting of death; but it don't. Some have said that they cared for nothing but the pain of death. It is the part of it that is least to be regarded. Sometimes the sting of death is where the pain is not; and many a painful death is without the sting. Some may suppose that the sting of death consists in its *prematurity*; that to die in the days of one's youth, to fade as a flower of the morning, to go and leave all life's pleasures behind, is to feel the sting of death. But it is not so, for then all the young would feel the sting of death; whereas none more gloriously triumph over it than some who enter early into the combat with it. And it would follow, too, that none of the aged feel it; whereas it is notorious that many of them do feel the deepest piercings of this sting. It would follow that time has power to extract it, which we know is not the case. Nor, again, is it the *suddenness* of death that arms it with a sting. There is, indeed, something awful in being summoned suddenly and unwarned away from earth, and time, and men, to eternity and God. There is much that is terrific in the idea of being here one day in blooming health and buoyant spirits, and the next day dead. But it is awful to the living rather than to the dead. To the prepared, this circumstance of death is no aggravation of it. In being hurried to heaven, there is nothing awful. Again, it is not in the power of any particular disease, however fearful, to infix a sting into death. Precious in

the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints, whatever be the *mode* of their death. Some of the most glorious servants of God have fallen victims to pestilence. The Christian need not fear to die any kind of death. Death even by cholera is gain to the Christian.

It is not the disappointment occasioned by death that constitutes its sting. To be called away from the midst of every thing which can make earth agreeable and life desirable, from domestic happiness and worldly prosperity is not always to be stung by death. Nor is the sting of death the thought of leaving behind a family helpless and unprotected, for it is the privilege of some who have to do that, to leave all to God. To his care and providence they can confidently commit them, assured that no charge which his saints commit to him, will he fail to assume.

No ; not any one of these is the sting of death ; but *sin* is the sting of death. There would be no death but for sin. Sin is the cause of death, and no wonder it should be its sting also. To prove that sin is the sting of death, just consider what death would be without sin, if it may be supposed to exist without it. There would be no *darkness* attached to it. The light of the divine countenance makes it perpetual sunshine wherever sin is not. There would be no *unwillingness* to die ; but a ready and perfect submission in this as in every thing to the will of God. Even now to the imperfect Christian, how easy is death, when he can say with his whole heart, "Thy will be done." He is willing that God should determine the time, the manner, the circum-

stances, every thing. In his judgment it matters little, how, when, or where he dies, so he but die in the faith and hope of the Gospel and sleep in Jesus. There would be but for sin in every case of death a *divine fortitude* supporting the subject of it. The everlasting arms would be underneath, and every one coming to the entrance of the valley of the shadow of death, would be able to say, "Though I walk through it, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Who cannot go any where without fear, if the presence of God go with him? Who can fear evil with omnipotence to shield him from it? It is no matter what are our burdens and our trials, if the promise "My grace is sufficient for you," be fulfilled to us. A poor woman recently died in this city of a most painful disease, who said that her days of greatest bodily anguish were her happiest days; for that then her spiritual consolations most abounded, and she desired no alleviation of her pain, because in proportion to her pain, was her joy in God. There would be no *uncertainty* as to the result of death, but for sin. It is sin that causes doubts and fears; but for it, the dying person would have the fullest assurance of immediate and unspeakable glory as awaiting him. He would know that to die is gain. In dying he would feel all the while how much better it is to depart and be with Christ. If for a moment his thoughts should be drawn to this world, the superior attractions of heaven would immediately draw them back to it. He would forget what he is going from, in the thought of what he is going to. There would be no *disap-*



*pointment* in death but for sin ; no sense of loss, no anguish of bereavement, no wishful looking back to life. 'The soul would have *nothing to fear from God*, but for sin ; no wrath to dread, no curse to bear, and judgment would be no terror to it. There would be nothing but the mere pain of dying, but for sin. Then is not sin the sting of death ?

All that I have said of the person supposed to be without sin, is substantially true of every Christian, for though he be not perfectly free from sin in every sense, he is free from its curse, and from its dominion. He is pardoned, he is no longer a child of wrath. God is favorable to him, and sin does not reign in his mortal body. The light of the divine countenance shines on him. He is willing, ay, sometimes desirous to die. The everlasting arms are under him, and he knows that heaven is his in prospect. He knows where he is going, and even the judgment has no terrors for him, since the very judge is his retained advocate and friend. To die with the consciousness of sin forgiven, of holiness begun, of God reconciled, and of heaven in reserve is to die and feel no sting in death. Oh ! may you so die ; drink the cup, and expect no bitterness or be disappointed in the expectation ; die, saying, " Oh ! death, where is thy sting ? " The sting of death is sin, my hearers. It is, depend upon it, it is. Contemplate death attended by sin, and judge for yourself.

See there the sinner dying. He is unwilling to die, loth to leave the world ; he hangs back and has to be driven away. There is no submission, or it is a forced submission as to an inevitable necessity. It

were strange if he were willing ; willing to go from what he knows and loves, to that which he has neither knowledge of, nor love for ; to go from his portion and his treasure, and his loved resorts, and his favorite occupations, and his dear companions, and to carry nothing with him, and to find nothing where he goes, that he can call his own ; to go to a trial which he has made no preparation to meet, and to an interview with the being whose acquaintance he has never cared to cultivate ; no wonder he is unwilling. Ah, there is something piercing and poignant in this, to be forced to die and go we know not where. He cannot say "Oh death, where is thy sting?" for here it is, penetrating his very soul. Again, the sinner dying, so far from having an assurance of being a gainer by death, fears, if he is not certain that he will be a loser by it. Whither shall he go ? To heaven ? He has no title to it. His sins are unforgiven, he has no part in the justifying righteousness of Christ. He has no fitness for it, he is consciously destitute of that holiness, without which he is inadmissible to it. He has no liking for it. Its joys are not such as he relishes. Its society not such as he would select. He cannot go to heaven ; nor would he. And there is but one other place ; and there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. How is he to gain by dying ? Again, in dying the sinner has not the enlivening presence of God with him, he hears not his cheering voice, feels not his supporting arms. He is left to die alone. Again, his conscience is full of fearful forebodings, in view of that meeting to which he is going, and that judgment to whose

scrutiny he is to be subjected. There is guilt upon his conscience, which the blood of Christ has not removed. He is going into the presence of him whose law he has transgressed, whose government he has rebelled against, and whose Gospel he has not embraced. He goes unpardoned, impenitent, with this malediction upon him, "cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." He is going to give account, and he has nothing to say for himself, and he has no merit of another to plead.

The sting of death is sin. And the strength of sin is the law. Sin derives its power to pierce and destroy from the fact of its being a transgression of the law of God.

But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not achieve the victory. God gives it to us, and through Christ, of whom we have pardon for sin and peace of conscience.

Learn hence what it is of death that is most to be dreaded ; it is its sting.

Do we dread death itself, how much more should we its sting, sin.

Learn hence how the sting of death is to be removed. It is by doing away with sin ; repenting of it and obtaining pardon for it, by application to Christ.

Is this religion to be despised ?

Learn also that sin is no trifle. It is the sting of death.

They that make a mock of sin, and trifle with the law of God, play with the sting of death.

See here the preeminence of the Christian. He is the conqueror of death. He is superior to the king of terrors. We hear of the hero of Marengo, and of Waterloo; and the Christian is the hero of the grave. He can say, "Oh! death, where is thy sting? Oh! grave where is thy victory?"

Can you say it? Can you say, "Thanks to God, who has given me the victory?" Do you, instead of answering my question, ask me, "Can you?" I will not say, yes or no, but I will, if you will, this day adopt a joint resolution of this sort, "Resolved that, with the help of God, we will never rest, never cease to pray, and labor, until we are able confidently to adopt this language of triumph."

Do not despair of being able to say, "Oh! death, where is thy sting." Hearer, you may, sooner than you imagine, be engaged with death. One that but a few Sabbaths ago was here, has met with the enemy. The campaign lasted but one short week. Are you armed for this inevitable combat? Is your enemy disarmed of his sting, so that he can do no more than kill the body? Is that sting by which he reaches the soul taken away?

## SERMON XXIX.

That he might go to his own place.—Acrs i. 25.

ONE cannot help observing and admiring the uniform and apparently studied reserve which the sacred writers maintain in reference to the eternal condition of persons who may be presumed to have died in their sins. In speaking of characters and classes of persons, all reserve is laid aside. It is uniformly and explicitly said that those of mankind who answer to a certain intelligible description, shall go to the place prepared for the devil and his angels. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." Declarations to the same effect are innumerable. This is the *law*, and in regard to the matter of *fact*, I suppose it is not doubted by any one, that multitudes do forget God, and do never repent and turn to him. Certainly many die without giving the smallest evidence of having repented. The inference therefore to which we are inevitably conducted is, that many perish. Indeed so much our Saviour himself asserts, rendering it unnecessary for us to infer it. He says of the gate which opens to destruction, "Many there be which go in thereat." But neither he nor those who wrote as they were

moved by his Spirit, speak in the same unreserved and decided manner of the fate of individuals ; and not because they might not often do it, but because they have no heart to do it. They would not draw aside the veil which conceals from us the place of torment, and let us see the individuals who occupy it. It is enough that they assure us that there is such a place and who are exposed to it ; and that many are there ; and we ourselves shall be except we comply with the terms of the Gospel. There is a tenderness due even to the soul that is lost forever. Everlasting punishment is too dreadful an evil, to have any particular name connected with it in our thoughts. Men should learn from this silence of the sacred writers, the lesson never to speak with a cruel and careless positiveness of the eternal fate of individuals, whatever may be their thoughts respecting them.

There is no exception that occurs to me now to the remark I have made. The case of the rich man in the parable, is not ; for though undoubtedly that has been the fate of many an ungodly man of wealth, yea of every one, if ungodly, yet we do not suppose that our Saviour had any particular man in view, certainly no one that was known to his audience. Even with respect to that individual, in whose case one would think all reserve might have been laid aside, the same rule seems to be observed. Christ does indeed say of him, "It had been better for that man if he had not been born," and when we view this in connection with his character and his end, it justifies the gloomiest forebodings concerning him,

But it may be said that that was but a *proverbial* form of speech, applicable to any great transgressor, and not intended to preclude the possibility of future repentance. And again, the passage which I make my text to-day may be adduced as designating unequivocally whither Judas went when he died; and so it has been generally understood. It does indeed declare whither he went; and I suppose there cannot be much doubt by what name that place should be called, which received him who robbed and betrayed his Lord and master; nay, who having done that, felt no other repentance for it but that which brought forth self-murder; but the writer does not give it a name. There is an ambiguity in the manner of speaking which is very instructive and very impressive too; "to his own place;" it is not said to what place, to heaven or to hell, but to *his own place*, the place suitable to him, congenial to his character and kindred to his spirit; the place for which he was fitted and where it was right and proper he should go, if it was heaven, he went to heaven; if to hell, he went to hell; he went to his own place, says the sacred penman, and there leaves it.

He says no more of Judas than might have been said of John or any other; no more than may be said of all, of every character. All who have died, have gone to their own place; and we who live, shall die and go to our own place; if it be heaven, we shall go to heaven; if it be hell, we shall go to that place. God will assort us with an unerring regard to propriety. He will make no mistake. He will locate no one unsuitably; but each shall be determined to his proper

place. One great object of the public judgment of the last day will be to assign to each of the innumerable souls assembled, his proper place for eternity, and to justify to all intelligent spectators of the transaction, the propriety of each particular assignment. It is done in substance as each one dies. The rich man went to his own place and Lazarus to his immediately on their decease. The day of judgment is appointed for the public doing of the same thing with reference to body and soul both, and for the public manifestation of the rectitude of the doing.

This is a mixed state. Here we are all together, however dissimilar our character, however unlike our spirits. Earth is adapted to us all, as affording supplies and gratifications for the animal nature we all have in common ; and as constituting also a fit field for the exercise of our common powers, and the formation and display of character. The same trials are suitable to prove men of the most opposite character.

And yet, though here we live together not only in the same world, but in the same house it may be, albeit so unlike in character and destination, even here the separation begins. Kindred spirits are attracted to each other. They that fear the Lord meet together and speak often one to another ; and so do they who fear not the Lord. We have our separate objects of desire and delight, and our separate places of resort, and separate topics of thought and conversation. Our souls are drawn in different directions. And we often feel how uncongenial we are to each other. We are near to each other in body,



but a wide interval separates our souls. Now this separation here begun, will hereafter be made perfect and abiding. Here we are, as it were, feeling, looking for our places. There we shall all find our places ; and we shall be fixed in them immoveably, unalterably, forever.

This subject is important, as every one must see on the bare statement of it ; and it is appropriate to all. I preach to-day for the benefit of my own soul, as well as that of each of you. And the view we are led to take to-day of the future state of the soul, must, I think commend itself as singularly reasonable to every mind. I remind you that you are in a progress ; you need only to be reminded of it ; you know, you see, by other objects, and you feel that you are going, and you know whence, from earth. And can you be indifferent whither ? Whither tendeth the immortal Spirit within you, and whither it shall go, when this, which is made of clay shall no longer confine and clog that which was breathed from God. Whither ? You care whither. I am sure you do. Now I tell you ; and I do not say you are going to heaven or to hell, though to one or the other, I know, I do say you are going, for there are to us but three places in the universe : earth, heaven, and hell ; and earth you are going from. But I say not to which you are going. I leave that for you to say when you shall have heard what I have to say, and have reflected upon yourself. I say you are going to *your own* place. You are going where your soul now tendeth ; to the world that hath new attractions for you. You are going just where you ought to

go; to the place which is kindred and congenial to your present feelings and affections; to the state and society for which your soul is now in the progress of being prepared. Is it not so? and ought it not to be so? If it be so, ah! then, we are not all going to the same place. And there is a place yonder, above, to which we are sure some are not going, for it is not their place. Their thoughts are not upon it, their desires are not towards it, their efforts are not to reach it; heaven, heaven, ah! are there not those here who think not of that as home? Earth is their home; but they must seek another.

We see that each soul is going to its own place. And now the business is for every one to inquire and ascertain what is his own, his proper place. And, methinks, it should interest every one; for the inquiry is, where you are to be forever, in what circumstances and in what condition, your conscious and sensitive spirit is to be during eternity? There are but two places, heaven, hell. One of them is yours. I say not, *will be* yours, but *is* already yours; suited to you, congenial, for which you are fitting. Which is it? Perhaps, when you contemplate hell, you say, "Surely that is not my place; there is nothing congenial to me there; I cannot be going thither." Why not? Whose place is that but the place of those who do not love, do not worship and obey, do not desire and delight in the great and glorious God? And is not the place of such your place? It is a matter of little moment in what way you may have manifested your want of love and of regard to the authority of God. The fallen angels show their en-

mity in one manner ; some sinners of the human family in one way, and some in a less odious and offensive form. 'That place is for all who show it in *any* way. It is for all who do not choose the service and do the will of God and aim at the glory of God. It is for all unregenerate persons ; all impenitent sinners. It is *their* place. Is it not *yours* then? But what if, when you look into the unfathomable abyss of ruin and woe, you think that surely cannot be your place. Take another view. Contemplate heaven ; consider what description the Bible has given of it ; and consider what a place it must be, since God is there and Jesus Christ, and holy angels and human saints. Think what a place they must make it ; what a character such society must give to heaven. And can you say that that is *your place*? Can you think that you are going thither? Is your soul attracted thitherward? Do you now love and delight in communion with God ; in prayer and praise alternate? And, if you are not going thither, whither must you be going, when there is only one other place?

Do you stand in doubt as to whether heaven is your place or not? You can easily come at the truth, if you have the courage to face it. 'There is heaven, and what sort of a place it is, the Bible tells you. And there is your heart, your spirit, which you may know so far as to ascertain whether the one is suited to the other. See, and then honestly say, if you think it is in heaven to make your heart happy. Would your soul find rest there? Not unless it is now in motion thither. Nothing can natu-

rally rest in any place to which it was not before naturally inclined to move. I wish you would think of this, my hearers, that nothing can satisfy a soul, for which that soul has not previously some desire. Do not think that heaven will satisfy you, ye who desire not heaven. You can never repose contented and complacently in God, unless first you long after him.

Observe I do not ask you of whom you were born, whether of parents godly or ungodly, and whether ye were baptised, and to what church you belong, though you should belong to some, or whether you profess faith in Christ, though certainly you should not only *be* for him, but should *declare* for him, nor do I ask you any questions about external things and the ceremonial of religion, though as God's commands extend to those things, our obedience should, and nothing is unimportant which he has commanded ; but these are not the turning points, the decisive questions. The great matter is to ascertain whether there is now in part, and whether there is getting to be in perfection a moral adaptedness of your soul to heaven ; for if there is not, there would be no use in your going to heaven, even were liberty of entrance allowed you ; even in that rest, your soul would be restless, and hungry in the midst of all that plenty, and dark in that excess of brightness, and lonely and sad even in that abundance of most cheerful society. God in the plenitude of his power and resources cannot make you happy, but by first adapting your soul to be made happy by him. And now I ask, is it receiving that adaptation? Oh ! do be honest with

yourselves in this matter. Do yourselves justice. What does he gain who cheats himself? Is heaven your place? Can those who are *without* God in the world, be going to be *with* him forever? Can you who now indulge yourselves in the pleasures of sin, be going to the delights of holiness? If there be any here to whom the Sabbath is a weariness, a tedious uninteresting day, which they know not how to get along with without desecrating it, is the place of the eternal Sabbath theirs? is it not to be feared that they are going to the place where there is no distinction of days and no day of rest? If there be any who stand aloof from the table of the Lord, and cannot even bear the sight of the sacramental preparation, does it look as if they were going to the place where Jesus will forever sit and sup with his disciples? Do those who say it is *so long* and so dull, never reflect on the duration of forever? of the proportion of two hours to eternity? Do they never think how long that will be to be in hell, or even to be in heaven, if one is not fitted for heaven. I wonder how they who can hardly get through a day, will be able to dispose of immortality. Let no one suppose from the remarks I am now making, that heaven is a place of dullness, and tedium and gloom. It is the very opposite of that. There all is interest and cheerfulness, smile, and song, and joy, brightness around and buoyancy within; never a tear or a sigh; nor weariness, nor satiety. Do you sometimes wonder what there should be in heaven to make men happy? I can tell you. There is the Maker of all you see here, and of yourself too; the author and archetype

of all that is beautiful and grand in nature. There are the infinite perfections and the inexhaustible resources of the great and blessed God, known, seen and felt to be our God. He has the will and he has the power to make his children happy; and he has said that he will do it. Why, it is he who is now making thee as happy as thou art, in this world which he made for thee. And cannot he make his children, happy with himself? Ah, some of you feel as if you would at once lose all your happiness, if you should betake yourselves to God. What, when it is he who is affording you now that very happiness which you are afraid of losing, by the medium of one of the smallest portions of his works? Can you think that you would be a loser by relinquishing the world, for God and the universe? Ah, I sometimes reflect with myself, what must not God have prepared in heaven for them that love him; when he has prepared so much on earth for those who do not love him; scattered so much good over it, that you are loth to leave it even for heaven, and communicated so many attractions and charms to it, that it has quite weaned your hearts from himself. I would ask you, cannot God make heaven a most desirable and happy place? And will he not?

But I digress; the question is, is it your place? Are you heavenly minded? Are you disposed to the kind of employment which occupies heavenly beings? Are you fond of that sort of society? Are those the things in which your heart delights itself? Your business lies within a narrow compass. It is nigh thee, even in thy heart. Look there, and see where thy heart points, if to heaven, that is thy place.

Thou art going thither, whither already thy thoughts and affections are tending ; where even now as much of thy soul is, as can be, while it is in connection with the body. But *is* that the bearing of thy heart ? that the direction of the index within thee ? If it be not, then let not any thing which I say, or any thing thou readest, alarm thee, but let what thou seest upon the face of thy heart alarm thee. I desire not that any soul should even be alarmed, unless that soul find causes of alarm within himself. If all is well there, all is well every where. If conscience is satisfied (I say not *seared*,) God is satisfied. There is nothing threatens thee from without, unless something threatens thee from within. Oh ! there are things that appall you, which need not, the horrid front of the advancing king of terrors, the prospect of the dark and dreary valley into which life goes down, the thought of the grave and the final separation, and the meeting with God, and the last trial, and the terrific pomp of the great day of God, no ; none of these natural terrors. But if thou find in thy heart no love to God, no longing after him, no delight in him, no care for connection with him, no tender affection for Jesus Christ, no fond remembrance of him, no heavenliness, let that appall thee ; for thy danger is thence. Hearer, I would ask thee, are there no causes of alarm within thee ? Search and see ; what findest thou ? If no worse spirit, yet dost thou not find there, a prevailing worldiness ? If thou dost, it is settled. If the love of the world is there, the love of the Father is not. Paul says that the end of those who mind earthly things is destruction. Art thou a

man of discord, a mischief maker, a stirrer up of strife, and dost think thou art going to the world of harmony. Canst thou not love thy brother or thy sister, and canst thou be going where all love each other; to that grand concert of hearts, whence as from one living instrument goeth forth the music of the soul to God? Canst thou not forgive, and how should that be thy place where each of the immense assembly acknowledges the remission of ten thousand talents? I ask you but another question. Is Jesus Christ so high and so dear in thy esteem, and dost thou feel so beholden to him, and so thankful, that thou couldst to-day, wert thou taken to-day, join thy voice to that of the many angels round about the throne, and the multitude of the redeemed there, in saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing;" or this, "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory and dominion forever." Is that your place?

There are those who, by the considerations presented, would be alarmed but for the hope of a future change of heart, which shall adapt them to heaven. They acknowledge that heaven is not now their place, but they trust it will be; that God, by his grace, will make it theirs, if not sooner, yet in death. This relieves them. Many have a vague expectation of something wonderful that death is going to do for them in the way of preparing them for heaven. But what is there in death to sanctify and fit a soul



for heaven? What in the simple separation of the soul from the body, to affect its spiritual wickedness, and to destroy in it the dominion of such things as pride, anger, malice, revenge and the like? There is nothing alterative in death. But the person perhaps does not expect the change to be wrought by death, but by God *at* death. Why *then*, I ask, and who can answer it? Why *then*? Why should he effect that change then, rather than at any given point in the progress of life? Life is the period for this change; and others are changed in life. What should render it more probable that God will interpose in the hour of death, than in any other hour? There is much in a dying scene to move our compassions; but nothing to affect God's peculiarly. He will never pity any one of you more than now he does; never can be better disposed to your salvation than now. He sees the case now in all its dimensions. It will develop hereafter nothing new to him. At this very moment his eye is on you, looking not observation merely, but interest and affection; and his arms, which embrace the universe, are extended towards you, and his voice in reason's ear is heard saying, "Why will ye die?" Parents, when they bend over their dying children, whose souls they have neglected, will feel more than they do now; and pastors will feel more; but God will never feel more for you than he does now. Even now does he not open his heart and offer every sinner a place and perpetual home there? And this moment there is but one obstacle in the way of any man's salvation, and that is his own will. Make no

calculation on any impression which you may hereafter be able to make on God.

By the light which this subject sheds, we see,

1. Why regeneration is necessary. It is necessary to adapt the soul to heaven ; to make heaven our place.

2. We see also from the nature of the necessity, that it is a change which cannot be dispensed with. "Ye must be born again."

3. We see what it is which ought to alarm an unconverted man. It is *himself*. The state of his heart towards God.

4. We see, also, by the same light the insufficiency of morality. It is very well and quite necessary ; but every thing which is necessary is not sufficient. It does not answer the purpose of fitting the soul for heaven. That is done only by holiness.

5. We see how little ground of complaint there will be against the final allotments of men, since each will go to his appropriate place. God will banish from his presence only those who never really loved his presence. Therein is comfort for some poor, pious soul. Those to whom he will say, "Depart from me," always said to him, "Depart from us." They fled from God, and now they are driven from him. They desired to be without him, and now they are, in every sense, without him. Are they happy ? What ! a soul happy in eternity without God ? Don't ask such a question.

6. We see what we have to do. It is to cultivate spiritual-mindedness, heavenliness of temper. Have we made a beginning ? Let us go on. But, if not,

begin now. Though it be late with some of you to begin life's work, yet it is not too late. It is only too late to defer any longer ; and don't be discouraged. Read Isaiah lv. Remember the oath of God, (Ezekiel xxxiii.11,) where you see God is ready. He will treat with you. If the work is great, yet greater is the being who is to do it. Nothing is too hard for him. If great is thy unworthiness, Christ's merit is greater. What if the stain is deep, his blood can take it out. Fly thee to his pierced heart ; there is healing. Hide thee in that cleft of the rock of ages. There is safety there. Be that thy place, and then heaven shall surely be.

## SERMON XXX.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.—  
2 PETER iii. 11.

ALTHOUGH the fate of one immortal inhabitant of this vast world, is more interesting and more important than the destiny that awaits the world itself, which has been the birth and burial place of so many millions of such beings, yet we cannot help feeling some degree of interest in the fate that is reserved even for the material fabric. It is not strange that we should feel some kind of attachment, so far as attachment can be felt towards objects destitute of life, to a world that successively affords us our cradle, our arena, and our grave ; and that we should take a melancholy interest in the future history of this great globe, that has been the theatre of so many mighty transactions, and the temporary home of so many illustrious beings, and is now the receptacle of so much sacred dust ; and that has been signalized above all other worlds, by being selected to receive the visit of the Son of God, and to exhibit the wonders of redemption. It is natural that, when we look abroad on this earth, every spot of which is, in a sense, consecrated ground, that we should experience

a higher degree of the same emotions, that the scholar feels when he visits classic countries, and the Christian pilgrim when first he plants his foot on the sacred soil of Palestine. That principle of association which causes their blood to thrill, and their bosoms to throb with indescribable feelings, and which makes another linger with a melancholy interest on the field where some memorable battle was fought and some renowned victory gained, though its external appearance be like any other plain, makes this whole world an object of peculiar interest to the Christian and the man ; and we feel something more than a mere idle curiosity to know what changes it is to undergo, and what catastrophe is to befall this first home of men, after it shall have delivered up, at the command of the Son of God, their reorganized bodies. And we are not left in uncertainty as to its fate. He that made it and that preserves it, has in the plainest language, and by various writers, informed us what it is reserved unto. No one of all who spake by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, has spoken more explicitly on the subject than Peter in the chapter before us. He declares, after answering some anticipated objections, in the verse preceding the text, that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up." And, again, in much the same language, in the verse succeeding our selection, "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire

shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." This world, then, is destined, at some future period, to undergo a destruction by fire. The infallible word of God makes it certain, and to the humble believer this is sufficient. No natural improbability, nay, no apparent impossibility, could have any weight against the word of God; for he knows that God is never at a loss to accomplish whatever he designs. "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" or, "Hath he said and shall he not do it?" But though the divine prediction affords a solid foundation for our faith on this article, and ought to hush every objection; yet it is not improper on subjects of this kind, to call in the aid of argument from other quarters, to confirm the faith of the believing, and to remove, if possible, the doubts of the sceptical. This very thing the Apostle, under inspiration, does, and we shall but imitate him and expound his language in attempting it.

That there are those who doubt or deny the futurity of this destruction, is only a fulfillment of his prophetic declaration. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts. And saying, where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation." Although scoffers at religion, are not much in the habit of reasoning, yet here they are represented as bringing forward an argument, in justification of their unbelief, which with them seems to have been all-powerful. "Where is the promise of his coming? How improbable such an event is!

What is there in the aspect of things that looks like it? What preparatory step has been taken? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as from the beginning of the creation." This is their mode of reasoning; and, it must be confessed, it is not altogether destitute of plausibility. Nevertheless, it never leads to absolute certainty, and, in opposition to the word of God, is worth nothing. It is a reasoning from the analogy, the similitude of relations in the past to those in the future, than which none makes a stronger, and, at the same time, a more undue impression on the mind. There is no argument that requires to be used with greater caution, for there is none that has led mankind into more errors than an inconsiderate and unauthorized use of the argument from analogy. And the reason is that its basis is the permanency of certain laws, and the continuance of a certain state of things, which are maintained at the good pleasure of God, and upon which therefore men can build no accurate calculations. One of the most common applications of this argument is that by which we infer that the sun which rose to-day, will rise to-morrow; but, in this case, the argument does not produce absolute certainty. The sun's rising to-day carries with it no certain promise, that it will rise to-morrow; and the time is coming when those who make their calculations, and build their confidence on this mode of reasoning, will be woefully disappointed; for the star of the morning will herald in the king of day for the last time, the sun will rise to rise no more. For our assurance that to-morrow will be as this day, we are more indebted

to the Bible than to any thing else. The promise of God to Noah pledges his veracity, that while the earth remaineth, the alternation of day and night, and consequently the apparent diurnal revolution of the sun, which is necessary to it, shall not cease. And that the earth is destined to remain undisturbed for centuries yet to come, prophecy, if it be rightly understood, gives the highest assurance we have. Here then is the ground of our assurance that the sun will rise to-morrow, that the event is altogether probable for the other reason we do not deny.

If, therefore, all things were as they had been from the beginning of the creation, yet that involved no certainty that they would continue so in all time to come. Such a conclusion could not stand, except on the supposition of the eternity of the world, and the self-existence and independence of the solar system. The future eternity of the world could only be inferred from its past eternity. But the fact was, and no one could be involuntarily ignorant of it, that the heavens and earth had been, but a few thousand years before, created out of nothing by the word of God and by the same word were upheld. The world was dependant for its beginning and its continuance on God, and he could at any time he should please, with the same facility with which he created, destroy it. There was no such thing as nature independent of God. The laws of nature, on the immutability of which they grounded their confidence, were but the enactments of the Divine Being; and the great Law-giver could at any time modify or repeal them at his pleasure; and all those celestial revolutions which



for so many centuries had been performed with a uniformity that seemed to them inviolable, could at any instant be arrested by the same power that at first gave them that regularity of motion. The fact of the recent creation of the world was therefore destructive of their argument. If no longer ago than a few thousand years, a few days of God, the world was, by his word, called into being, was it in any way improbable that the power of the same efficient word should effect a change or a dissolution of that upon which he had impressed no particular mark, and concerning which he had given no positive assurance of permanency? Why should he who admits the world was created, think it a thing incredible that God should destroy it? The world is by no means old enough, to have made the experience of the past, a solid foundation for an inference respecting the future.

But the Apostle denies that there was any foundation for this kind of argument. Their conclusion was not good, though the truth of their premises should be admitted; but now he denies the truth of their premises. All things had not continued as they were from the beginning of the creation. The established order of nature had been interrupted. The world had been already once destroyed; where then was the improbability of its being destroyed again? One element had been let loose upon it in time past, by which, though none of its atoms had been annihilated, yet its whole form and structure had been altered, how was it incredible that another and a more potent element might in time to come be per-

mitted to exert its force and fury upon it. If it had been once destroyed by water, what was to hinder its being again destroyed by fire? The deluge was not a more probable event before it was accomplished, than the destruction of the world by fire is now. The antediluvians could have held as hard an argument with Noah when he predicted the flood of water, as any postdiluvian can with Peter, when he foretells the certainty of a flood of fire. All the objections that stand against this last, stood against the former and indeed more, for then there had been no example of destruction like that which is now the matter of authentic history with us. The apparent impossibility of the thing in the one case, was as great and as embarrassing as it is in the other. There is in the atmospheric heavens and in the earth as wide a diffusion and as large an aggregate of the element of fire, as of that of water. There are within the compass of our investigations as many preparatory steps taken for the burning of the world, as there were in the view of the antediluvians for the drowning of it. And indeed there is a striking resemblance in the disposition of the destroying agents. The Almighty prepared for the one event by putting waters within, and above and around the earth, so that when the time appointed came, it was but to break up the fountains of the deep, and to open the windows of heaven, and the streams met and mingled, and expanded into the wide waste of waters. And so in like manner with the element that is destined to destroy it, it is all above and around and beneath us; burning under our feet and flashing over our heads,

and existing in its latency in every stone and shrub and sand, and pervading every drop of water and every particle of air. There are furnaces within the earth, as the phenomena of volcanoes testify, answering to the fountains within it, and above us there is the same minute division and general diffusion of the element, as of the other. It is a remarkable fact that water the great antagonist of fire, is found to be itself composed of two aerial substances, the one the most inflammable of all known substances, and the other the grand principle and essential support of combustion, so that the decomposition of water alone might produce all that the Apostle predicts. The progress of chemical investigation has also brought to light the fact, that almost every natural substance has its base or chief ingredient inflammable, so that in short the consuming agent, and the combustible matter are both so universally diffused and so abundant that it requires but the bringing of them into immediate contact, by some powerful electrical discharge or the application of some secret match, to produce all that the Apostle Peter must be necessarily understood to mean by the heavens being on fire and the elements melting with fervent heat, and the earth being burned up.

Let me now make a remark or two on the *nature* of the destruction that awaits the world, before I engage in the more practical part of the subject. It is not *annihilation* of the world that is here predicted, but an alteration of its form and contexture, a disorganization of its parts, and perhaps a decomposition of many of its substances; such a change in

fact as will necessarily result from its being subjected to the action of an intense fire. Whether the world will ever be annihilated is a question on which we are left in perfect ignorance. If it is ever to be done, it is manifest that it will not be effected by any material agency, but the same omnipotent word that created, will uncreate, and even the destroying elements themselves will have no more existence. The destruction foretold by the Apostle, is such a destruction as fire is capable of effecting. The nature of the effect will answer to the potency of the cause; and we know that however energetic its action is and however essentially it may alter the form, and change the constitution of things, there is never the loss of a single particle of matter from any substance on which its energy is exerted. Besides, it is reasonable to conclude that Peter intends the same kind of destruction, both when he speaks of the world as having been destroyed by water, and when he speaks of it as to be destroyed by fire; and as in the one case we know it was a destruction without annihilation, it is fair to infer that so it will be in the other case; as the world lost nothing by its submersion, neither will it lose an atom of its substance by the general conflagration in which it will be wrapped. The heavens shall indeed pass away with a great noise, and the earth and all therein shall be burned up, but out of them shall come purified and refined, a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be? The

subject my hearers is a practical one ; the Apostle gives it a practical turn ; he makes it the foundation of a solemn appeal to his readers, and urges it as one grand consideration, why they should cultivate that holiness and exemplify that godliness, which it was the end of his preaching and writing, and the labor of his life to promote. And we have not been pursuing the foregoing speculation, if it must be so called, for its own sake, but for the sake of preparing your minds for the question which the Apostle educes out of it, "what manner of persons ought ye to be?" Some suppose that the question ends here, and that what follows should be read in connection with the succeeding verse, as the answer to the question, "in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for." But the criticism is of little importance, the meaning is substantially the same, however we read it. The Apostle's language implies that the certainty of this awful catastrophe which is to befall the world, ought in his opinion to exert a powerful moral influence over all who expected it. It was not a subject to invite speculation merely, or to exercise curiosity, but a subject that should deeply affect the heart, and exert a controlling power over their conduct. It was manifestly unfit and indeed it argued infatuation for them to live in the expectation of such an event, as they would live, were there no ground for expecting it. There was a certain mode of life, a certain deportment and behaviour which seemed to him to be peculiarly suitable to being placed in such circumstances ; but before he tells them what it was, he appeals to their own judgment and feeling on the

subject, "what manner of persons ought ye to be?" Seeing that this world, which you now inhabit and from the things of which you derive so large a portion of your enjoyments, this world which many of you so idolatrously love, is with all that it contains to be burned up, and you know not how soon, and how suddenly, and you are to be spectators and not uninterested spectators of the awful conflagration, what manner of persons ought ye to be? How absurd in this view is the love of pleasure, the avarice of wealth, the ambition of worldly power and glory to be cherished in an immortal breast; how unsuitable is levity and trifling, and gaiety to such scenes as are before us! Ought you not at least to be thinking something about another home, when the flames shall dislodge you from this; and where you shall stand, and how you will fare on that day, when all these predictions shall be accomplished? What sort of life do you imagine will best bear the revelations and trials of that day? What sort of persons do you suppose will be least appalled by the fearful spectacle of a world on fire? Who are they that will wish they had lived a different life from what they did? These questions answer themselves. But the force of this consideration is very much impaired, if not entirely destroyed in many minds by the reflection that long before this catastrophe of the world, death will have forever separated them from all connection with it, and other scenes and other society will have weaned them from all attachment to it. "Death, say they, is a far more decisive and dreadful event to us, than the destructions of the last

day. It is our last day ; draw your motives the rather from this ; long ere the last sun rises on this devoted earth, shall we have been inhabitants of eternity, and all uncertainty as to what our condition is to be will have been removed, we shall have been before God, we shall have bloomed beneath his smile or withered under his frown ; we shall have felt the beginnings of heaven or of hell ; we shall have been spectators of scenes more awfully sublime, than that of the last day will be ; tell us not of the trump of God then to sound, it will not alarm such as we shall be ; tell us not of a dissolving world, what concern shall we have in it then ; the fire will not be kindled upon it, until it has given us up our bodies." It is thus that the power of this tremendous consideration, which the Apostles employed with so much frequency and effect, (far more frequently, and apparently with greater success than they did the consideration derived from the death of the body,) is well nigh, if not quite lost upon the minds of men. Is this as it should be? **May there not be some defect in that process of reasoning, by which we arrive at the conclusion that the dying day of the world is so far distant? I confess there is a high degree of probability that we shall all have descended into the grave long before the archangel shall announce the morning of the final day ; but it is not, in my opinion, absolutely certain. It cannot be certain, unless we can be sure that we interpret prophecy aright. We think that we find many predictions in the word of God, that have never yet been fulfilled ; but more may have been fulfilled than we suppose, and God may**

have some good reasons for permitting us to mislead ourselves in our interpretations. It is certain that the grand apostacy from pure and primitive Christianity, which Paul says to the Thessalonians will precede the second coming, has taken place centuries ago. The man of sin and son of perdition has been revealed already. How do we know then that we shall not be alive at the coming of the Son of man? That his advent is not at all expected by the present generation, does not destroy the possibility; for the day of the Lord shall come unexpected, as a thief in the night. When they shall say, peace and safety, as mankind are now saying, then sudden destruction cometh upon them. As it was in the days of Noah and Lot, so shall it be when the Son of man is revealed. As when the one entered the ark, and the other went out of Sodom, so when the Son of man shall be revealed, the morning shall dawn in undiminished beauty, portending nothing, and the sun shall rise in its usual glory, and the lark shall sing as merrily as ever, and there shall be eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building and no presentiment of evil in any mind, until suddenly the sign of the Son of man shall become visible in the heavens. "Of that day knoweth no man." You will not understand me as arguing against the probability of the received opinion on this subject, but only against its absolute certainty. I believe, though I do not think myself justified in saying I am perfectly certain, that we all shall die, as have our fathers before us, long ere the predictions of this chapter will be fulfilled; but, I believe, notwithstanding



this, that there is every thing in the anticipation of the events here foretold, to fill the mind of the man that is most distant from them with the deepest solemnity and awe ; and that it is a false and delusive train of reasoning, by which we endeavor to persuade ourselves that all the terror that is before us, is in death and in the immediate consequences of death ; and that there will be nothing so very alarming in the exhibitions and events of the last day. Powerful as is the appeal that death makes to our fears, that of the day of judgment ought to be felt to be far more powerful. Nothing that can befall us in the interval, will at all prepare us for the tremendous display that will then be made. Even the devils tremble in expectation of the judgment of the great day, and they deprecate its coming because they know it will bring with it an accession of terror and suffering. "Art thou come to torment us before the time ?" said some of them to our Saviour in the days of his flesh. You may tremble in view of death as much as you please, but this is no reason why you should not tremble still more in the prospect of that which is beyond it.

It is true that the conflagration of the material world cannot much affect the happiness of an immortal spirit. But Peter knew, and those with whom he reasoned knew, that that was not the only event by which that day is to be distinguished ; he speaks in this very chapter of the coming of the Son of man as coincident with it. It was this glorious second advent that the scoffers are represented as denying when they say, " Where is the promise of his coming ?" to which the Apostle replies by proving

the dissolution of the world ; so inseparably connected were the two events. Now this was a consideration that appealed to men of every character ; to the godly and ungodly ; and he converts it into a motive when he would exhort the former to Christian diligence ; “ Wherefore beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace without spot, and blameless.” What manner of persons ought ye to be, who are expecting by the sight of this great conflagration, to behold the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, coming to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired of all them that believe ? Is not this an unanswerable reason why you should diligently cultivate holiness ? Does it, in your estimation, add no interest to the final day, that the Lord Jesus Christ shall then be revealed in flaming fire ? What human heart can be indifferent to it ?

But the Apostle informs us, in another verse, that the same will be the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. The sufferings which they shall have endured before that will not merit the name of perdition, when compared with what shall follow that day. There and in the light of that conflagration the great white throne will be erected, and the books shall be opened, and the dead, small and great, shall stand before God to be judged out of them. Will there be nothing appalling in that preparation and that arraignment. Wilt thou not tremble, sinner, when thy own case comes on, and the scrutinizing eye of the judge falls upon thee, when thy

life is scanned and thy heart is laid open? and should not the anticipation now affect you? "What manner of man ought *you* to be?"

A holy conversation and a life of godliness will alone prepare you for the tremendous events of the last great day.

We must have our robes washed, and made white in the blood of the Lamb, and, as the evidence of it, personal holiness, else that day will fill us with surprise, despair, and anguish insupportable, inconceivable, and eternal.

THE END.