

Sermons on Various Important Subjects eBook

Sermons on Various Important Subjects

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Page 1

SERMON I.

The Wisdom of God in the means used to propagate the Gospel.

1 Corinthians i. 27, 28.

“But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and god hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are.” *

* The two discourses on this text were originally one, and preached before Windham Association, at Thompson, October Session, 1798. Probably some of the ideas which they contain, may have been suggested by reading Paley’s Evidences of Christianity; but as the author had not that book in his possession when he wrote on this subject, he is not able particularly to give credit to that excellent writer, if here his due.

The mercy promised to the fathers was Christ, the Savior. That “the desire of all nations should come,” was a prediction of his incarnation; and his entrance here was announced by a heavenly messenger, with, “Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy—to all people.”

Yet “when he came to his own, his own received him not!” To many he hath been “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense!”

The design and tendency of Christianity are most benevolent; but being opposed to men’s lusts, which rule in their members, all the malevolence of depravity hath been excited against it. Jews and Gentile united in the opposition. “The kings of the earth stood up and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ—both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel.” The Christian religion did not creep into the world in the dark. It first appeared at an enlightened period, and among the most enlightened of the nations. The sciences derived from conquered Greece, had been improved at Rome, and communicated to its dependencies. Syria was then a province of the Empire. Every movement in Judea was observed and reported at the metropolis. The crucifixion of our Savior was sanctioned by a Roman deputy; and the persecuted Christians were allowed an appeal to Caesar. Soon therefore, did the religion of Jesus make its way to Rome. The power of Rome had also reached its acme; and as the spirit of Christianity was diverse from that of the world, the learning and power of the Empire soon combined against it. That this religion would be crushed and vanish away as a dream of the night, was generally expected.

Every circumstance seemed to indicate such an event. Those reputed wise, considered the gospel scheme as foolishness; and the instrument which were chosen to propagate

it were thought to be weak and contemptible. It was also observed to spread chiefly among the lower order of men, who had not the advantages of literature, nor been initiated in the mysteries of Judaism, all which served to inspire its enemies with confidence, that it would soon come to nought.

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The apostle takes notice, in the context, of the contempt then so generally poured on Christianity, and declares the wisdom of God in the permission of it. He also predicts the triumph of the cross; especially over the powers then combined against it—predictions which afterwards fulfilled: For those powers were all subdued and humbled, and Christ and the gospel exalted. The Christian religion was openly professed, and became the most reputable religion in many countries; particularly in Syria and at Rome and its numerous provinces; and by the means then ordered of God. This is the spirit of the text—*God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, &c.*

In discussing the subject, we shall *consider the means used to propagate the gospel—the opposition made against it—and the wisdom of God in the choice of the means*; which will bring up to view some of the objections which have been made against the truth of the gospel.

In treating of the means used to propagate the gospel, we pass over the preaching and miracles of Christ, and the wonders which took place at his inexcusable neglecting so great salvation; but they preceded sending the gospel to the gentiles, and the means used to spread it among them. The apostle had no reference to Christ, or any thing done or suffered by him, when he spake of *the foolish and weak, and base things, used of God, to confound those which are wise and mighty*. He spake only with reference to the instruments which were chosen to carry the gospel abroad and persuade the nations of the earth to receive it.

God hath all creatures at his command; he hath power to press the most reluctant into his service, and to compel them to bear his messages and execute his orders; as we see in the case of Balaam and Jonah. God can make use of man to this end, either by reconciling them to himself, and attaching them to his interest or by overruling their corrupt and vicious designs to effect his holy purposes, without their consent or knowledge. Most of the prophets were brought into his view, and made desirous to honor him. Many pagan princes, and others, who knew him not were yet made instrumental in doing his pleasure and executing his designs. The divine sovereign never wants for agents to accomplish his purposes. He sitteth on the circle of the heavens, and orders the affairs of the universe in such a manner as to do his pleasure. “None can stay his hand.” Whether the agents which he employs are willing or unwilling, mean so, or not, is of no importance relative to the event. “His purposes stand, and the thoughts of His heart to all generations.” The attempts of creatures to reverse his orders, and defeat his decree only help to their accomplishment. This was particularly the case respecting the measures adopted by the enemies of Christianity to prevent its spreading in the world.

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The persons chosen of God and sent forth to propagate the religion of Christ, were such as human wisdom would have judged very unsuitable. Twelve poor, despised, illiterate men, were called to be apostles; —most of them were fishermen. One was a publican; a collector of the Roman tribute, which had been imposed on the Jews as a conquered people. An employment so odious, that vile persons, regardless of character, would only accept it. Such men we should judge exceedingly unfit for ministers of religion, and not likely to succeed in making converts to it. Yet such were those who were appointed of God, to be prime ministers in the Christian church! Such the men who were sent forth to change the form and administration of Judaism, and overthrew the systems of Paganism, rendered venerable by a general establishment, and the religious reverence of ages. The Jews' religion was from God, who had given abundant evidence of its divine origin. This Christ came not to destroy. But its external administration was to be changed; and in apprehension of most of those who professed it, it was less opposed to the gospel scheme, than Paganism. No others had greater enmity to Christianity than the Jews, or entered into the opposition position with warmer zeal. They commonly stood foremost, and stirred up the Gentiles against it, and often with success.

In treating of the means used to propagate the gospel. We may observe the powers imparted to those who were employed in the work. These Were not such as human wisdom would have chosen. “Their weapons were not carnal, though mighty through God.” They had none at their command, prepared to punish those who would not receive them, or the doctrines which they inculcated—none to retaliate injuries done them. To abuse they had nothing to oppose, except a patient exhibition of his temper, who “when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered threatened not, committing himself to him who judgeth righteously,” and praying for his murderers on the cross.

False religions have often been propagated with the sword —particularly that of Mahomet, and the Romish corruptions of Christianity. These, especially the latter, were urged with every species of cruelty—a mode of attempting to proselyte, evincive of human folly. Arguments totally diverse are requisite to enlighten the mind and produce conviction of a divine mission. With these came the apostles of the Lamb. They were “endowed with power from on high;” and forbidden of their Lord to enter on their ministry until it was conferred upon them. This was accomplished on the day of Pentecost.

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They had been previously convinced of Christ's truth. They seemed indeed to waver when he suffered, but his resurrection, the opportunities which they had with him after that event, and his ascension, which they had witnessed, must have removed every doubt. But this did not qualify them for their work. It did not furnish them with means to convince others, who had not witnessed those things. But when the Holy Ghost came upon them, on that memorable occasion, they were furnished. The gift of miracles was then, more abundantly than before, imparted to them. In some respects, new and very necessary communications were then made to them—particularly that of speaking in tongues, which at once carried evidence of their divine mission, and enabled them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. This was the order of their Lord, but devoid of this gift they could not have obeyed it.

This gift, as imparted to them, seems to have carried greater evidence of their truth, than their barely speaking all languages. Men out of every nation heard them speak on the day of Pentecost, *every man in his own tongue!* Therefore were they amazed, and convinced that the apostles were sent of God and that the gospel was of heavenly derivation.

Those heralds of gospel grace were also inspired with courage to speak boldly in the name and cause of Christ, nothing terrified by their enemies; and “when brought before kings and rulers for his sake, a mouth and wisdom were given them, which all their adversaries were unable to gainsay or resist.”

Such were the means used of God to propagate the gospel? such the agents whom he employed and such their qualifications.

We are next to consider the opposition which was made to its propagation.

Various circumstances combined the worlds against it. So far as Christianity prevailed, every other religion must fall. No other could stand in connexion with it. The Jewish was not to be overthrown; but such changes were to take place in its outward form, that those who did not know it to be typical of a better dispensation, considered it as included in the general proscription; as doomed to destruction if Christianity prevailed. Against Stephen that was a principal charge —“We have heard him say, that this Jesus, shall change the customs which Moses hath delivered us.”

The different systems of Paganism were not opposed to one another, as they were to that of the gospel. They admitted a plurality of God —some superior? others subordinate. They considered them not only as holding different ranks, but as reigning over different countries and nations. If one of their systems was true another might be so. But Christianity admitted only “one God and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.” It declared that all others who had been called Gods and worshiped as such, were not Gods—that those who sacrificed to them, sacrificed to demons—and

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it denounced utter, eternal ruin against those who did not forsake them and acknowledge Jehovah. Those peculiarities, apart from the nature of this religion, which is opposed to the lusts of men which rule in their members, would, of course, unite the world against it. Those of every other religion would make a common interest in opposing this, which had fellow-ship with none of them, but tended to their entire subversion and utter ruin. And it is a fact, that the world did unite against the religion of Jesus, and against those whom he had appointed to inculcate it. Christianity then appeared devoid of support—the opposition to have everything on its side. Christ's followers were a little flock, destitute of power or learning, and in the world's view utterly contemptible. Rome, the mistress of the world, had reached the summit of her greatness; and she soon turned all her power against the feeble band, who were laboring to diffuse the knowledge of Christ. and calling men from dumb idols, to serve the living God.

To the eye of man how unequal the conflict? Had not those followers of the Lamb been assured that their redeemer lived—that he was divine—that he was with them, and would be with them, they would have declined a contest with those before whom the world trembled. But they entered, un-dismayed on the work assigned them, went through With and completed it! They prospered in that to which they were sent. This had never been done had not God been with them; for none of the advantages possessed by their enemies were neglected. The first effects of enmity to Christianity were directed against Christ's person. He had been some time teaching and doing miracles in Judea, and numbers had attached themselves to him. They considered him as a prophet mighty in "word and deed." Some who witnessed his mighty works, exclaimed, "When Christ cometh will he do more miracles than this man hath done?" Others, "Is this not the Christ?"

These movements among the Jews drew the attention of their rulers, and raised them to opposition. A humble, suffering Savior, did not suit their pride and lust of power. They looked for a temporal deliverer, who would lead them to victory, and subdue under them, the powers which held them in subjection. No other would they receive as the Messiah. As soon, therefore, as the fame of Jesus began to spread abroad, and numbers treated him with respect, they resolved to destroy him. At the feast of the passover, which called all the males of Israel to Jerusalem, they caused him to be apprehended—tried him their great council—condemned him to death, and importuned the Roman governor to sentence him to the cross, as a rebel against Caesar. The charge was not supported—Christ did not aspire to temporal dominion—"his kingdom was not of this world." The governor declared him not guilty. Had Christ, like the Arabian deceiver, which afterwards arose, assumed the sword, marked his way with blood and carnage, the Jews would have bid him welcome, and flocked to his standard. Then he might have been denominated a rebel against Caesar. But nothing of this

nature was found upon him. Therefore were the Jews his enemies; but the imperial magistrate “found no fault in him;” though persuaded to consent to his death.

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But though such were the temper and views of the Romans respecting Christ, at the time of his sufferings, they were different when his ministers went forth to set up his religion. When the nature of Christianity was discovered, and it appeared opposed to Paganism, and tending to its destruction, the Roman chieftains, who had been taught to venerate their Gods, and claimed to be high priests of the national religion, entered with zeal into the views of Christ's enemies, and reared the standard against his followers. All their powers were exerted to crush, the cause of the divine Immanuel. Ten general persecutions are said to have been raised against the Christians; and myriads of the faithful to have been sacrificed to heathen malice and bigotry.

Neither were these the only enemies of Christ. The learning of the age was applied to confound his followers. The sophistry of Grecian metaphysics directed against his unlettered disciples. Who could have expected Christ's little flock, devoid of every worldly advantage, to have maintained their ground against such formidable enemies? Who, judging by the rules of man's judgment, have entertained a suspicion that they would not soon be driven from the field? But their cause was that of God. Heaven was on their side, "In vain did the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things. He who sitteth in the heavens, laughed; the Lord had them in derision."

* * * * *

SERMON II.

The Wisdom of God in the means used to propagating the Gospel.

1 Corinthians i, 27, 28.

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are."

In the preceding discourse we took a summary view of the means used of God to propagate the gospel, and of the opposition made to its propagation.

We are now to consider the wisdom of God in the choice of means to this end; which will bring up to our view some of the objections which have been made against the truth of the gospel.

That the gospel is from God, and the means used to propagate it of his appointment, are from sundry considerations, apparent—particularly from the miracles wrought by Christ and by his disciples, who went forth in his name. Conclusive was the reasoning of Nicodemus—"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." God, who is perfect in

wisdom, would choose no improper or unsuitable means. Their wisdom might not at first appear to men. It did not at first appear. The world cried folly and weakness. But "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

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In God's hand any means are sufficient to effect his designs. The rod of Moses, when stretched out by divine order, availed to bring all those plagues on Egypt, by which God made himself known and feared. When Israel left that land, it availed to open them a passage through the sea; and afterwards to bring back its waters to the destruction of their enemies.

Could we see no fitness in divine appointments, we should remember that “we are of yesterday and know nothing,” and not dare to arraign divine wisdom, or charge folly on God. But in the case before us, his wisdom is in many respects discernable, as will appear from a consideration of some of the objections which are made against the gospel, and against the means appointed of God to propagate it.

One of the objections is taken from the supposed unsuitableness of the means. Considered in itself this made an objection. It is said the all-wise God would not have appointed them—that to appoint a company of poor, despised, ignorant fishermen, as prime ministers of a religion, is sufficient to prove that it is not from God, who always useth the best means and most suitable instruments.

It is not strange that this should have been objected at the beginning of the gospel story, before any effects of the apostles labors appeared. It is a natural objection for the, proud, who thought themselves the best judges of wisdom and propriety, to have made at that day. But it comes with an ill grace from modern infidels, who cannot deny that Christianity triumphed over the power and learning of the world combined against it, though such means only were used to propagate it—such weak instruments employed in it. Naaman, the Syrian, reasoned at first like one of these objectors, but the success which attended the prophets directions convinced him of his error. Why has not the same the like effect on these? Surely, “had this counsel been of men, it would have come to nought.” Under the circumstances in which Christianity made its appearance, it would have been easily overthrown; but the power of the world could not overthrow it, or prevent it from spreading far and wide. It continued—it prospered—and every opposing system fell before it. Means and instruments which human wisdom would have judged most suitable, could have done no more. The success of measures in a contest like this, proves their fitness.

Under this head it is further objected that the first ministers of the gospel were ignorant of the arts and sciences cultivated by the polished nations of the age—that therefore, they were despised, especially by the Greeks. Despised they might be by those who “professed themselves wise had become fools.” Yet they had all the knowledge which their work required imparted to them from above. The language of the schools would have been ill adapted to the simplicity of the gospel. It would have been unintelligible to many of those to whom the gospel was sent. The gospel offers salvation to the unlearned, equally as to the learned—should be expressed, therefore, in language easy to be understood. Had the apostles and evangelists used the abstruse language of the schoolmen, to many they would have spoken in an unknown tongue. Had the scriptures

been written in such language, they would have been much more obscure than they now are.

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Though the gospel is plainly written, it may be rendered dark and mysterious, by a metaphysic dress, It is a peculiar excellency of the scriptures that they are mostly written in the plain language of common sense—so plainly, that “he may run who readeth them.”

Two of the New Testament writers were men of letters, Paul and Luke; and we find more obscurity in their writings, especially those of the former occasioned by allusions to the sciences and usages of the age, than in the other writers of that holy book. The Apocalypse is indeed abstruse, but this is not occasioned by the language, which is plain, but by the subject. That book is chiefly prophetic; and therefore expressed in the metaphors of prophetic style. Prophecy is not generally designed to be fully understood, till explained by the accomplishment.

To take occasion from those who might object to the illiterate character of primitive gospel ministers, a Paul, and a Luke were found among them; but neither of them was among those first called to the Christian ministry. Those first sent forth to preach the gospel were unlearned men. The great truths of the gospel had been taught, and many had received them before these (especially St. Paul) had become believers—that the faith of the first followers of Christ, might appear, “not to stand in the wisdom of men, but in power of God.”

Had the primitive ministry been learned philosophers, or renowned rhetoricians, suspicions might have arisen that mankind had been deceived, that they had been bewildered by the subtlety of science, or charmed by the fascinating power of eloquence, into the belief of a scheme which they did not understand. This cannot be suspected when the character of the first Christian ministers is considered, and the progress which Had been made in propagating the gospel, before any of the learned were joined as their assistants in the work.

The propriety of the gospel method, may be farther argued from the nature of the gospel. Wisdom of words is not necessary to communicate gospel truths, or deep penetration, sufficiently to understand them. It was a remark of the apostle “that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called.” The same observation may yet be made. People of plain common sense more often receive the gospel, and favor the things of true religion, than those who affect superior powers, and to understand all mysteries. Those who are wise in their own imaginations, often reject the counsel of God against themselves, and put from them offered salvation. The manner in which the apostles and their fellow laborers preached the gospel, hath also been objected to as unwise. Their preaching was chiefly a plain unaffected exhibition of truth, laid before those who heard them, and left with them. To produce faith in Christ, they declared the time, place and circumstances of his birth, referring to the prophecies which foretold them—declared

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the concurring testimonies of angels and inspired persons, who gave witness for him—exhibited sketches of his life—his teaching—his miracles—declared his prediction of his own death, with the manner, time, and place—also of his resurrection on the third day, and the fulfillment of those predictions. They referred to his foretelling Peter's fall and recovery; Judas' treachery and end, with the events which followed—they referred also to Christ's teaching and miracles—to those which attended his sufferings and resurrection—they adduced the evidence which they had of his death and resurrection—declared the opportunities which they had with him after his passion—the instructions they received from him—the orders which he gave them, and his ascension from the mount of Olives, of which they were witnesses, "confirming their words with signs following."

To persuade men to receive and obey the gospel, they declared the consequences to those who received, and to those who rejected it—that the same Jesus who had died on the cross, was appointed by the Father, "to be the Judge of quick and dead—that he would come again in like manner as he had gone away—that all mankind must appear before his judgment seat to give an account of themselves, and receive the deeds done in the body," that those who flee for refuge to the hope of the gospel, will find mercy, and be made forever happy with God, but those who neglect the gospel will be sent away into everlasting punishment.

Such interesting truths, those ministers of Christ laid before mankind, and left with them for their consideration. But they used no rhetoric to impress them. Neither did they appeal to the passions of their hearers; in which they followed the pattern set them by their Lord, who "did not strive, nor cry, nor cause any man to hear his voice in the streets." With only a fair statement of those truths, accompanied with the offer of "mercy and grace to help in time of need," they left mankind to choose for themselves and abide the consequences.

This some have thought an improper manner of calling men into the kingdom of Christ; that had been more pathetic in their addresses, and more argumentative in their applications, they would have labored with more effect; that this plain and simple method is unworthy of God, and, not likely to be from him.

If we consider the nature and design of Christianity, such objections will have little weight. It is not the design of heaven to compel men to obey the gospel, or to drive them to an unwilling submission to Christ. If an exhibition of gospel truth and beauty, and the consequences of receiving or rejecting its overtures, are discarded; if men refuse, by these means to be persuaded, they are left, and the consequences follow. To People of sober sense, this method appears rational. It is not probable that those who are not thus prevailed with to embrace the gospel, would in any other way be made Christians indeed.

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People who are frightened into religion seldom persevere. Neither do those whose passions are so inflamed that they appear, for a time, in ecstasies. When their passions subside, they grow cool, and their religion dies. If the great truths of religion, laid before men, as was done by Christ and his apostles, do not avail to render them rationally and sincerely religious, little value is to be put on those heats of imagination, which produce temporary raptures, and set some on fire in religion. Such ardent love doth not abide; it soon cools, and commonly leaves those who had been the subjects of it no better than it found them, and but too often much worse.

But while some object to the simplicity of the gospel, and to the plain language and address of the primitive ministry, others are offended at the mysteries in the Christian system. Who can understand some things contained in what is called a revelation? And what valuable ends can be answered by a revelation which is unintelligible? say these objectors.

But, those points in the Christian scheme which are too deep for human comprehension, do not relate to practice. All required, in relation to them, is an assent to their truth, on the credit of God's word. This is neither difficult nor unreasonable.

Perhaps with only human powers, it may be impossible to comprehend those subjects which are left mysterious in divine revelation; but are they incredible if God hath declared them? Few would be the articles of our creed, did we admit the belief of nothing which we do not understand. We carry mysteries in ourselves. We are compounded of soul and body, but who explain the connexion; tell us the essence of either the one or the other, or define the principles on which the soul commands the body? We are lost in ourselves, and in all the objects which surround us.

Whatever God hath declared, we are bound to believe because he hath declared it; and whatever he hath enjoined, we are bound to do because he hath enjoined it, though the reasons of his injunctions may not be revealed. God is under no obligations to explain matters to us. "God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive with him? He giveth not account of his matters."

Others object because the Gospel is not sent to all nations. That God should be supposed to communicate to some, and not to others they allege to be unreasonable and sufficient to destroy its credit; especially, as the book which claims to be a revelation teacheth that "there is no respect of persons with God."

That God makes his creatures to differ respecting talents and advantages, is a truth not to be denied. Those who on this account, object to the truth of the gospel, will not deny it. If God makes differences respecting every thing else, why not respecting religion? Where is the injustice or impropriety of trying some with gospel advantages; others only

with the light of nature? If requirements vary with betrustments, none have reason to complain; and that this is the case is plainly the language of revelation.*

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With equal reason might the hand of God in creation be denied, because different grades are found among creatures, and some have greatly the advantage over others; and in providence because its distributions are unequal. That these inequalities are observable, and that they are the work of God, will be acknowledged by all who believe the being of a God, and his providential government. If any are disposed to call these in question, we turn from them. To reason with them would be in vain. "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

* Vid. Discourse on Romans, ii. 11.

A scoffing age may cry out against Christianity. To some it may be a "stumbling block; to others foolishness." Men may exclaim against the gospel, and against the doctrines and duties of it, and the means which have been used of God to propagate it. Still "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." So it hath been in times past; so it will be in times to come. *The foolish, the weak and base things of the world, have confounded and brought to nought, all the world termed wise, and great, and mighty.*

Imperial Rome at the summit of her greatness, could not crush the cause of him who died on Calvary! "Had this counsel or work been of men, it would have come to nought." Probably the name of Jesus, would long ere now have perished from the earth. But all his enemies could do nothing effectually against him. They could only do what God's counsel had determined to be done.

Christianity hath still its enemies; of the same character with those of old. They have overthrown the faith of some. Others they may seduce. That "scoffers should arise, in the last days walking after their own lusts; that some should deny the Lord that bought them, and that many should follow their pernicious ways," were foretold by an inspired apostle, and "they turned to us for a testimony."

We are called a Christian people. "If we believe the gospel, happy are we if we obey it." The generality profess to believe it. But how is it received? Do not many neglect it? Do not some who assent to its truth, "go their way to their farms, or their merchandize," regardless of it, neither confessing Christ before men, nor seeking an interest in him?

If the gospel is from God, to such neglecters Of the grace it offers, it must be "a favor of death unto death!" And is not their number great? Doth it not increase from year to year, from age to age? To these who are taken up with sensual pleasures, and with minding only earthly things, St. Paul would say "even weeping you are enemies to the cross of Christ, and your end will be destruction."

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Let us be persuaded to bring home these considerations to ourselves. We are deeply interested in them. "The secrets of our hearts will ere long be judged by the gospel of Christ." To those who will not receive and obey the gospel, we have only to say, "Notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you."

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SERMON III.

The Declensions of Christianity, an Argument of its Truth..

Luke xviii. 8.

When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." So certified the risen Savior. Faith is made a condition of salvation. But God requires only a reasonable service. He must then have given evidence of the truth to which He requires assent. He hath given it abundantly; Christians "are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses."

The proofs of Christianity are of two kinds; external and internal. Both are strong. United they leave infidelity without excuse.

Of external, the chief are miracles and prophecy. Miracles carried conviction to beholders; and were designed to give credibility to special messengers. Prophecy is a standing evidence, by which testimony is borne to the truth of revelation; yea, it is a growing evidence, which gains strength by every fulfillment.

Some may envy those who lived in this age of miracles supposing them sufficient to banish every doubt. But the proof arising from the fulfillment of prophecy, which we enjoy above them, is equal if not superior to theirs.

The prophecies contain sketches of the history of man, and of the plan of providence, from their respective dates to the end of the world. Those which relate *to the declensions of religion, which were to take place under the gospel dispensation*, will now only be considered.

From those declensions, arguments are drawn against the truth of Christianity. Was Christianity from God, he would verify the declaration made by him who claimed to be his Son. *The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.* But they do prevail. What was once said of its author, *Behold the world is gone after him*, will now apply to its enemy. This religion is not therefore from God, but of man's device. Propt up as it is, by human

laws, and supported by “the powers that be,” it totters towards ruin. Left to itself, it would soon fall and come to nought.

Such are the proud vauntings of infidelity, when “iniquity abounds and the love of many waxeth cold.” So when Christ hung on the cross, and when he slept in the tomb, ignorant of consequences, his disciples “wept and lamented, and the world rejoiced;” but the time was short. Soon the world was confounded and the “sorrow of his disciples was turned into joy.” *If* the declensions which we witness, are foretold in scripture, they are no occasion of surprize.

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Yea, instead of weakening our faith, they may reasonably increase it. And when we consider the assurances given us, that these declensions were to antecede the universal prevalence of true religion; they may also serve to increase our hope.

To shew that these declensions are foretold, and that we may expect yet greater abominations, than have hitherto appeared, is attempted in the following discourse.

When the son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?

That Christ is here intended by the Son of man; and that faith will be rare among men at the coming of his, referred to, are not doubtful matters. But what coming of Christ is here referred to? This is first to be ascertained.

The coming of Christ refers in the scripture, to several events. Sometimes to his incarnation; sometimes to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Jewish polity; sometimes to his coming to judgment; and sometimes to the beginning of that universal dominion which he is to exercise on earth in the latter days. Each of these is the subject of several prophecies.

Christ's incarnation, or his coming to dwell with men, and to obey and suffer for their redemption, was a principal subject of the old testament prophecies. "To him gave all the prophets witness."

The divine justice executed on the Jews, in the destruction of their chief city, and polity, is also termed Christ's coming. This was the subject of several prophecies of old. It was foretold by Moses, and sundry others who lived before the gospel day; but more particularly by Christ, in person just before his sufferings. To this event the desolations foretold in the twenty fourth of Matthew, and its parallels in the other gospels, had a primary reference. The metaphors used to describe it are strong. They have been supposed to refer to the general judgment; and they have, no doubt an ultimate reference to it. But they refer, more immediately to another coming of Christ; his coming to render to the Jews according to their demerits as a people, soon after they should have filled up the measure of their iniquity by his crucifixion; which by the circumstances attending it, became a national act.

That this coming of Christ was particularly intended in those predictions, is, from several considerations apparent. That the Christians of that age, who were conversant with the apostles, and instructed by them, received this to be the meaning of those prophecies, and that they fled at the approach of the Roman armies, and escaped the destruction which came on the Jews, are matters of notoriety. And that this was the primary meaning of those prophecies, is further evident from an express declaration which they contain; "*Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled.*" This closeth the prophecy. The whole must therefore have received a

primary accomplishment, “before that generation did pass away.” This was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus.

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Christ's coming to judgment, is often foretold in every part of the new testament, to pass over the intimations given of it in the old. But none of these can be *the coming of the Son of man*, referred to in the text. That it cannot refer to his incarnation is evident, from the time in which the declaration in the text was made. His coming in the flesh had been then accomplished.

Neither can it refer to his coming to punish Jewish apostasy and ingratitude; or to his coming to judge the world in righteousness, because the moral state of the world at neither to those periods, answers to the description here given. *Shall he find faith on the earth?*

The ruin of the Jews by the Roman armies, happened about thirty six years after Christ's crucifixion. Long ere that time the spirit had been poured out, and many had embraced the gospel. The apostles and evangelists, had gone, not only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but also into the way of the Gentiles;" had called "those who were afar off, as well as those who were near; their sound had gone into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." Neither had they labored among the Gentiles in vain. St. Paul spake by the Spirit when he declared to the Jews that the salvation of God was sent unto the Gentiles, and they would hear it. His word was verified. "Many were added to the Lord, and the number of the disciples was multiplied."

Such was the state of the world, at that *coming of the Son of man*. *Faith was then to be found on the earth*, if not among Jews.

When Christ shall come to judgment, we have reason to believe, that faith will also be found on earth; and more than at that period we have now considered.

The scriptures of both testaments, abound with predictions of the universal prevalence of religion, in the latter days; of the whole worlds rejoicing under the auspicious government of the Prince of Peace; of restraints laid on the powers of darkness, that they should not deceive and seduce mankind. And though we are taught that "the old serpent will afterwards be loosed, for a little season, and go forth to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth," we have no intimation that the main body of the Church will be corrupted by his influence, or injured by his power. His adherents may "compass the camp of the saints, and the beloved city," but will make no attack upon them. "Fire will come down from God out of heaven, and destroy them." By some special, perhaps miraculous interpolation of providence, the people of God will be protected and delivered.

St. John, who gives more particulars of the latter day glory, than those who had gone before him, fixes the term Christ's reign on earth a thousand years, which he represents to be those *next preceding* the judgment. And agreeably to the statement which he hath

made, a numerous body of saints will then be found to welcome their Lord, and rejoice before him at his coming.

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To this agree the other prophets who treat of this subject. No other limits the term of Christ's reign; or mentions Satan's being enlarged and permitted any measure of deceptive influence, after the restraints laid upon him at the beginning Christ's reign. But others foretell the happy day, and several seem to dwell delightfully upon it, and represent it as continuing to the end of time; and none give the remotest hint that it is to terminate, and iniquity again to become universally prevalent.

Isaiah often mentions it, and dilates more largely upon it than any other who lived before the gospel day. From his representations we should expect it to terminate *only with time*. "I will make the an *eternal* excellency—violence shall *no more be heard* in thy land; wasting nor destruction within thy borders—the sun shall be *no more* thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee *an everlasting light*, and thy God thy glory—the days of thy mourning *shall be ended*—thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land *forever*."

By the little horn in Daniel's vision, Antichrist is doubtless intended. When at his fall Christ is to take the kingdom; or it is to be given to his people, it is to be an abiding kingdom. "And there was given unto him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him; *his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, an his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed*."

This is a prophecy of the universal prevalence of true religion in the last days, after the reign of Antichrist shall have come to an end. By the explanation in the latter part of the chapter, the saints are from that period to have the dominion. It is no more to be taken from them. "The saints of the most high shall take the kingdom, and *possess the kingdom for ever, even forever and ever*—and the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most high, *whose kingdom is an ever lasting kingdom*, and all dominion shall serve and obey him."

These representations agree with that made to St. John, who saw the church guarded and protected from infernal power and influence, at the close of the millennium. The only difference consists in the mention of a few particulars by the apostle, which were not communicated to the prophets; such as the term of Christ's reign on earth; and some fruitless attempts of the powers of darkness against his people, after that term shall have expired.

The coming to judgment cannot therefore be intended in the text. *There will then be faith on the earth*. But if we consider "that which is noted in the scripture of truth," respecting the moral state of the world before and at the time of Christ's coming to reign upon it, we shall find it answering to this description.

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We will therefore, first take a general view *of the prophecies respecting the moral state of the world, under the gospel dispensation? Then a more particular view of the great declensions which were to take place, with a special reference to the state of religion at the approach of the latter day glory.*

The Savior, in person, and by his Spirit, gave general intimations to the apostles, of the times which were to pass over them, and over his church. When they were ordered to preach the gospel in all the world, beginning at Jerusalem, they were forewarned that the Jews would reject their testimony, and persecute them, as they had persecuted their Lord—that soon after “there would be great distress in that land, and wrath upon that people—that they would fall by the sword; be led captive into all nations, and that Jerusalem would be trodden down of the Gentiles, till the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled.”

The comforter which was to “teach them all things,” not only explaining the nature of Christianity, and causing them to understand it, but also to unveil futurity before them, taught them, that after the Jews had rejected the gospel, the Gentiles would receive it, and the church grow and become great; that a falling away would afterwards follow, which would spread wide, and continue for a longtime, till it became nearly total; that when such was the state of the church, Christ would come, take the kingdom, and reign on earth.

Such were the outlines of futurity, relative to Christianity, as sketched out before the apostles. But if we descend to particulars, and examine the prophecies with attention, we shall find that the defections, which were to take place antecedent to the reign of the Redeemer, were to be of two kinds—that they were to arise at different times, and from different sources—that one was to be a corruption of religion, the other a rejection of it—that the former was to antecede and prepare the way for the latter.

This will be the subject: of another discourse.

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SERMON IV.

The Declensions of Christianity, an Argument of its Truth.

Luke xviii. 8.

“When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”

That the coming of the Son of man, is here intended of Christ's coming at the commencement of the latter day glory, hath been alleged in the preceding discourse, and several considerations adduced in proof. Additional evidence will arise from a view

of the prophecies *relative to the great declensions* which were to take place in the church, during the gospel day. These, we observed, are of two kinds, one, a *corruption of religion*, the other *its rejection*.

The intimations given of them in the new testament, are chiefly found in the writings of St. Paul, Peter and John. They are noticed also by Jude. The two former suffered martyrdom under Nero. When the time of their departure drew nigh, they had separately a view of the then future state of the church; “particularly of the declension which were to take place in the kingdoms of this world, shall become the kingdom of our Lord and Christ.” St. John had the same opened to his view in the isle of Patmos.

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St. Paul in his second epistle to the Thessalonians, after rectifying the mistake of those who thought the day of judgment then at hand, proceeded to inform them that there would be great declensions in the church before the end of the world. "Let no man deceive you, by any means, for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped; so that as God, he sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." The antichristian defection is here evidently intended. The apostle toucheth on the same subject in his first epistle to Timothy, and directs him "to put the brethren in remembrance of these things," to prevent surprise when they should happen. This was the first great declension which was to be permitted in the church.

In his second epistle to the same Christian bishop, written not long before his death, he resumes the subject of the defections which were to happen in the church, but with a more particular reference to defections of a different kind, and of a latter date. Having exhorted Timothy to faithfulness in the discharge of official duty, he adds a reason; "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts, shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

This doth not answer to the Romish defection. It was never the character of that church to "heap to themselves teachers." They never ran after those of other persuasions, who brought new doctrines. Their errors were of the contrary kind. They rejected and persecuted every teacher who did not derive from their *infallible head*, and teach as he directed. But "itching ears" have misled many of those, who "are moved away from the hope of the gospel. By turning to fables they have made shipwreck of faith, and fallen a prey to those who lie in wait to deceive."

St. Peter wrote with equal plainness of the general defections; but those of infidelity are the subject of his prophecies—"There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heretics, *even denying the Lord that bought them*, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the truth shall be evil spoken of." The heresies here intended are depicted too minutely to be mistaken. The heresiarchs are described as immoral, vain and proud, pretending to superior knowledge and penetration, despising law and government, and trampling them under their feet.

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Toward the close of his second epistle, the apostle remarks, that he “wrote to stir up pure minds by way of remembrance; that they might be mindful of the words spoken before, by the holy prophets”—that is, of the predictions of inspired men, who had forewarned them of those deceivers—“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?” And he refers them to St. Paul, who had predicted their rise in the church—“Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you: As also in all his epistles, speaking in them *of these things*”—He adds—“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware, lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.”

The short epistle of St. Jude is little other than a prophetic description of the same apostasy and its leaders, whom he terms “ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and *denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ*—These are murderers, complainers, walking after their own lusts, and their mouths speaking great swelling words—But beloved, remember ye the words which were *spoken before* of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own lusts.”

The errors of Rome are not here intended. They are manifestly errors of a later date, which were to appear after those of Rome should subside, having lost their influence. It is repeatedly noted that they were to arise in *the last days*. They are errors of which this age is witness—errors which have spread, and are yet spreading? those of infidelity and atheism, with their usual attendants, immorality in every hideous form. We should therefore “remember the words which were spoken before”—the warnings which have been given us of those defections, which were to intervene those of Antichrist, and *the coming of the Son of man*.

The Apocalypse, though of more difficult interpretation, contains some particulars sufficiently intelligible and to our purpose. The writer enlarges on the Romish apostasy, which he describes more minutely than any who had preceded him, both in its rise and progress, and also in the circumstances which should attend its overthrow. He foretells the spirit, pride, riches, glare of ornaments, strange abominations, and unprecedented cruelties; the power, signs and lying wonders, which were to render Rome the wonder and dread of the whole earth. The portrait is in every part so exact and circumstantial, that none who are acquainted with the history of that church, can mistake it; unless blinded by interest or prejudice.

The apostle predicts also the other great defection which was to follow the antichristian, though in language more obscure and figurative, “And I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet for they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth, and the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty.” *

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* Vid. a discourse on this subject by Timothy Dwight, D.D. President of Yale College, printed at Newhaven, A.D. 1798.

It deserves particular notice that all these strange declensions, which were foretold, as to take place in the church, and world, are represented as *antecedent* to Christ's reign on earth, and terminating *before* the commencement of that blessed era.

It is farther to be observed that during the whole antichristian defection, God's "two witnesses were to prophecy clothed in sackcloth." God would have a small, but sufficient number of faithful servants, who, in low and humble circumstances, would maintain the truth and be witnesses for him during the reign of man of sin. But about the end of his reign, they will have finished their testimony. Their enemies will then prevail against them and destroy them, and for a short term there will be none to stand up for God +—none to warn the wicked, or to disturb them in their chosen ways. And they are represented as exulting in their deliverance from the society of those who amidst their departures from the living God, had tormented them,++ by warnings of future wrath, and an eternity according to their works. For this is the way in which God's witnesses torment the wicked.

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+ Comparatively None. The number will be exceedingly small—the times resemble those just before the flood, when Noah was said to stand alone. The pageantry of Romish worship may be kept up in that church, till mystical Babylon shall be destroyed, in the awful manner foretold in the Revelation; but infidelity hath long since, tipped the foundation of catholic religion, being grafted on the ruins of superstition. The absurd doctrines, and legendary tales of popery, may have been credited in the dark ages, when many of the clergy were unable to write their names, or so much as read their alphabet; but the belief of them is utterly inconsistent with the light everywhere diffused since the revival of literature.

++ Tormented them. This language is remarkable. It intimates that the pains occasioned in the wicked, by the warnings of the faithful are the same, in kind, as those of the damned, and that they are often severe. This accounts for the mad joy of infidelity—for the frantic triumphs of those who have persuaded themselves that religion is a fable. It accounts for the representation here given of the conduct of an unbelieving world, when infidelity shall have become universal, and the dead body of religion lie exposed to public scorn. Such is the time here foretold—a time when the age of atheism may be vauntingly termed "the age of reason."

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God's witnesses testify not only against antichristian errors, but also against infidelity and the immorality it occasions. When he ceases to have witnesses there will be none to testify against either the one or the other. The world must *then* be deluged in infidelity and atheism. This agrees with the representation given by the apostle; who describes the enemies of God as refusing graves to his slaughtered witnesses, and causing their dead bodies to lie exposed to public view, that they may rejoice over them, and congratulate one another on their deliverance from the company of those who had disturbed them in their sinful indulgences; and such as continuing to be the state of "the people, and kindreds, and tongues, and nations," till the witnesses are raised from the dead and ascend to heaven in the presence of their enemies; when Christianity will revive, and Christ's reign on earth begin.

These representations may be designed to intimate that the term in which infidelity will appear to be universal, will be so short that the warnings of the faithful will not be forgotten—that they will be kept in mind by the exultations occasioned by deliverance from the fears of religion, and from the presence of those who had excited those fears, by exhibiting proofs of religion which they could not refute. And how natural and common are such exultations, with those devoid of religious fear? But agreeably to the view given by the apostle, when such shall have become the state of the world, and the nations shall be thus felicitating themselves in full persuasion that all religion is a dream, and death an eternal sleep, the signals of Christ's coming to take the kingdom, will be given, and witnesses of the truth of Christianity, which cannot be disputed, suddenly arise, to the surprize and confusion of scoffing sinners; multitudes of whom will be swept off by desolating judgments to prepare the way for "the people of the saints of the most high, *whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.*" For that desolations are to close the sad scene of apostasy, and prepare Christ's way is clearly foretold; particularly by St. John, who beheld, in vision, "the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, gathered to the battle of the great day of God Almighty;" and saw such an effusion of their blood, that "the harvest of the earth might be considered as reaped, the vine of the earth as cut and cast into the great wine press of the wrath of God, whence flowed blood to the horses bridles." *

Thus from the general tenor of prophecy it appears that infidelity will have overspread the world *when the Son of man shall come* to reign upon it: And as this agrees to no other coming of his foretold by the prophets, there can be no reasonable doubt what *coming* is intended in the text. If we keep these things in mind, we will not wonder at the declensions of religion and prevalence of infidelity. They will remind us of the remark made by our Savior to his sorrowing disciples just before his sufferings, "these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them."

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Before, or about the time of this *coming of the Son of man*, Antichrist will fall—Mahomedan delusion terminate—"The Jews look to him whom they pierced, and mourn—be gathered the second time" from their dispersions, and returned to their own land, and the fullness of the Gentiles be brought in. Perhaps these may be the signs of Christ's coming, intended by the resurrection of the witnesses, When these events shall take place "the Lord will be king over all the earth. In that day there will be one Lord and his name one."

* Revelation xiv. 15, 20.

REFLEXIONS

If we do not mistake the coming of the Son of man, here referred to, gloomy is the prospect now immediately before us. Hitherto God hath had his witnesses; but ere long they will cease from their labors, and leave infidelity undisturbed.

That the cause of the redeemer was to be depressed, before its universal prevalence in the latter days, is plainly revealed. The only difficulty is to ascertain the manner. Bishop Newton expects another confederacy of the catholic powers to destroy the followers of the Lamb, which will so nearly succeed, that for a short term none will dare to appear as his followers. But if infidelity was to intervene the antichristian defection, and prevalence of religion in the latter days, is this hypothesis probable? Is it not more reasonable to expect that destruction of the witnesses in another way, and by other enemies—by the mockers and scoffers of the last times, who should be generated by papal error and superstition? And doth not the present state of the world confirm these expectations? The catholic religion hath been declining for several ages. It received a deadly wound from Luther and his associates, which hath not yet been healed. From that period it hath dwindled, and is now little more than a name. But infidelity hath been, for almost an equal term progressing, and already stalks out to public view: Yea, it vaunts with shameless pride, as though sure of victory. And we are constrained to acknowledge, that "of a truth, it hath laid waste nations and their countries!"

Our expectation is farther confirmed by observing the change which is made in the weapons of internal warfare. These are no longer bonds, imprisonments, tortures and death, but the shafts of ridicule, and sneers of contempt. "Trials of cruel mocking," now exercise the faith and patience of the saints. Religion, the dignity and hope of man, hath become the sport of stupid infidels! The jest of sorry witlings! These hissings of the serpent are every where to be heard!

Internal malice, never before made so general attack in this way. Perhaps, with all his sagacity the adversary did not suspect that creatures made for eternity could be driven from the way of peace by the derision of fools, till taught it by experience. But this hath

been found his most successful weapon! It hath done greater mischief to Christianity, than all the rage of persecution!

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Many account it honorable, to suffer, pain or loss, with patience, and to face danger and death with fortitude; but few think themselves honored by scorn and reproach. Human nature is here attacked on its weakest side.

Some European scoffers, of high rank, during the last age took the lead in this mode of attack on Christianity; and have been followed by a countless throng of noble and ignoble, learned and unlearned, down to this day. Few infidels are so modest as not to affect wit on the subject of religion; few witticisms so contemptible as not to meet the approbation and receive the applause of brother infidels.

That strong combinations have been formed against Christianity, and also against civil government, in the kingdoms of Europe, and that they have too successfully undermined both, is an acknowledged fact.

In the leaders of those conspiracies we discover all the traits of character, attributed in prophecy to the scoffers who should arise in the last days. When every circumstance, in events so remarkable agree with the predictions, can doubt remain whether the predictions are fulfilled?

There hath been faith in this land. It is not yet extinct. But we are importing the principles, and practices of Europe. "The Mockers of the last times" are now to be seen on this side the Atlantic. "Many follow their pernicious ways." We have reason to expect the evils to increase till "The godly cease and the faithful fail" from among us. *For when the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?* This land will also be overspread with infidelity! "The whole world lie in wickedness!"

There may be partial revivals of religion, but no general reformation is to be expected; and after every refreshing, the declensions will probably be greater than before. Fanatic emotions, here and there, may flatter some who are friends to religion, but they only serve to accelerate the spread of infidelity.

It is a gloomy thought! The serious soul saddens; sorrow fills the good man's heart, if, when he sees little regard paid to religion, he expects yet greater defections! If when he sees but few of those who are rising into life, paying attention to the best things, he expects still fewer of their descendants to be wise and good! Yea that the declensions will continue and increase, "till all flesh shall become corrupt, and the earth be filled with violence!" Would to God these expectations might not be realized; for they are exceedingly distressing. But they appear to us to be dictated by the spirit of truth, and confirmed by the history of the world, and by the progress of events opening to view.

One consideration, however, ministers consolation, shining through the gloom; namely, the long, holy, happy period, which may be expected to follow the dark term now approaching.



By *dark* we mean only in a moral view. Respecting arts and sciences, mankind may never have been more enlightened than at present. But this is foreign to religion. When Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were the seats of the muses, they remained as devoid of religious knowledge, as the most ignorant barbarians. Arts and sciences may still flourish, and yet deeper researches be made into the *arcana* of nature, while religion is dying and atheism succeeding in its place.

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Some intervening links are necessary to connect present age with the happy times now distant. Who shall fill them, the divine sovereign will determine. An hour of temptation must try all who dwell upon the earth. These are the times in which we are tried.

Do we envy those who may live during the Peaceful reign of the Redeemer? Let us not forget that we are favored above many who have gone before us—above some of our contemporaries and probably above those who will succeed us, before the commencement of that happy era. Nothing necessary to salvation is denied us. If straitened it is in our own bowels. If faithful to improve the talents put into our hands, “our labor will not be in vain in the Lord”—God will keep us to his kingdom. There we shall see Christ’s glory, though we may never see it here as some others who come after us.

Be it also remembered, that the rewards of the coming world, will be proportioned to the difficulties we may have to encounter here in this. Those who make their way to heaven through darkness and temptations, and force their way through hostile bands, will rise to greater honors there, than though they had ascended by an easier and a smoother road. Nothing done or suffered in the way of duty will loose its reward. God hath not said “seek ye my face in vain.”

“Wherefore, brethren give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory, both now and forever. Amen.”

* * * * *

SERMON V.

Abram’s Horror of great Darkness.

Genesis xv. 12.

“And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.”

If we consider the sketch, given us in scripture, of the life of this patriarch, we shall find that few have had equal manifestations of the divine favor. But the light did not at all times shine on him. He had his dark hours while dwelling in this strange land. Here we find *an horror of great darkness to have fallen upon him*. The language used to describe his state, on this occasion, is strong. It expresses more than the want of God’s sensible presence. It describes a state similar to that of the psalmist, “While I suffer thy terrors I am distracted.” His sufferings probably bore an affinity to those of the Savior when the father hid his face from him; at which period there was more than the

withdrawing of his sensible presence, the powers of darkness were suffered to terrify and afflict him—"It was their hour"—God had left him in their hands. So Abram on this occasion.

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Just before God had smiled upon him—"Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Then all was light and love. "The candle of the Lord shone on his head." When he complained that he had no child to comfort him, or inherit his possessions, God promised him an heir, and countless progeny—"Look now toward heaven and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them—So shall thy seed be. And he believed the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." What an occasion of joy? What strange manifestation of divine favor? They are scarcely paralleled in the history of man. But how sudden the reverse? The same day—*when the sun was going down*; lo! the brightness disappears, and *an horror of great darkness fell upon him*.

A deep sleep fell upon Abram. This was not a natural sleep. There is no probability that he would have given way to weakness, and fallen into a common sleep, while engaged in covenanting with God; binding himself with solemn engagements, and receiving tokens of the divine favor, and the promise of blessings for a great while to come. If he could have slept while receiving such manifestations of the divine friendship, it is not probable that his dreams would have been terrifying: His situation would rather have inspired joyful sensations, and exciting pleasing expectations. THAT which for want of language more pertinent and expressive, is here termed sleep, seems to have been divine ecstasy—such influence of the holy spirit operating in the soul, as locked it up from everything earthly, and shut out worldly things, as effectually as a deep sleep, which shuts up the soul and closeth all its avenues, so that nothing terrestrial can find admittance.

This was often experienced by the prophets, when God revealed himself to them, and made known his will. Thus Daniel, when the angel Gabriel was sent to solve his doubts, and let him into futurity—"Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground." The holy prophet, filled with fear at the approach of the celestial messenger, could not have fallen asleep, like some careless attendant in the house of God. Yet such is the language used to express his situation at that time, and afterwards on a similar occasion.* The three disciples, who witnessed the transfiguration, experienced similar sensations—sensations which absorbed the soul, and shut out terrestrial objects, which the evangelist compares to sleep.

* Daniel viii. 18, x. 9.

But why was Abram's joy, occasioned by the communications of the morning, so soon turned to horror.

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The reasons are with him “Whose judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out.” We may observe, however, that such is the way of God with man, while here on trial. If at any time a person seems peculiarly favored of heaven, something of a different nature is commonly set over against it. Perhaps to remind him that this is not his rest. We seldom enjoy prosperity without a sensible mixture of adversity; or without somewhat adverse following in quick succession. “Even in laughter, the heart is sorrowful, and the end of mirth is heaviness.” Neither are special trials or sorrows sent alone; comforts and consolations are usually joined with the, or soon succeed them. If we consider the matter, we shall observe this in ourselves; and may often discover it in others. We see it in the history of this patriarch, and that of many of his descendants.

The pilgrimage of Jacob, how remarkably diversified with good and evil, with joy and sorrow? That also of Joseph—of Moses—of Daniel? At times each of these were raised high and brought low—sometimes found themselves at the summit of earthly honor and felicity; at other times, were cast down, and hope seemed ready to forsake them.

In the history of Job the same things are exemplified in still stronger colors. That holy man experienced the extremes of honor and infamy, joy and grief, hope and terror. The prophets and apostles, passed through scenes in many respects similar; their joys and sorrows were contrasted to each other. Daniel’s mournings and fastings were followed with remarkable discoveries and cheering revelations; but the divine communications were almost too strong for frail humanity; they filled him with dismay, and had well nigh destroyed his mortal body. “He fainted and was sick certain days.”

St. Paul was “caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it was not possible for a man to utter”—had a view of the ineffable glory of the upper world; but trials no less remarkable, and very severe, were contrasted to those strange distinctions, and more than earthly joys! “Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.” *

* 2 Corinthians xii. 4-7.

St. John suffered sore persecutions—was banished from the society of his fellow Christians, if not from the society of men. But divine discoveries repaid all his sufferings—heaven’s ineffable glories were opened to his view! What he witnessed could be but very partially communicated. Language is weak; only faint hints and general intimations could be given of the “glory which is to be revealed.” But the suffering apostle enjoyed it, and was supported, yea, enraptured by it.

This life is filled with changes. Good and evil, hope and fear, light and darkness, are set over against each other. The saints, while they dwell in the dust, sometimes walk in darkness, and have their hours of gloom and horror—“The whole creation groaneth and

travailleth together in pain until now—Even those who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan within themselves, waiting for—the redemption of the body. Those of whom the world is not worthy, are often in heaviness, through manifold temptations.”

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We may wonder at these things: but when we consider them as ordered of God, the consideration, should calm our minds, and bring us to say with the astonished Shunamite of old, "It is well." *

* 2 Kings iv. 26.

God doth not order sorrows to his creatures here, because he delights in their sufferings. "He grieves not willingly, neither afflicts the children of men. He doth it for their profit, that they may be partakers of his holiness." And which of the saints hath not received benefit from it? Who among them hath not sometimes been ready to adopt the language of the psalmist, "It is good for me, that I have been afflicted."

"Born of the earth, we are earthly"—our afflictions naturally descend. We are prone to set our affections on temporal things, and set up our rest where there is no abiding. Therefore do we need afflictions to keep us mindful of our situation. Such remains of depravity are left in the renewed, that prosperity often corrupts them. But for the sorrows and sufferings ordered out to them, they would forget God and lose themselves among the deceitful cares, and infatuating allurements of this strange land.

Intervals of comfort are also needful for them. Were these denied them, "the spirits would fail before God, and the souls which he hath made." And intervals of light and joy are given to refresh and cheer, and animate them to the duties required in this land of darkness and doubt. But they are not intended to satisfy. They answer like ends to the Christian during his earthly pilgrimage, as the fruits of Canaan, carried by the spies into the wilderness did to Israel while journeying toward the land of promise—serve to give them a glance of the good things prepared for them, to increase their longings after them, and animate them to press forward and make their way to the possession.

Such may be some of the reasons of those varied scenes through which the people of God are doomed to make their way to glory.

Often the saints find themselves unable to penetrate the design of heaven in the trials through which lies their way—especially in the hidings of God's face, so that they cannot discover him. This made no small part of Job's trial—"Behold I go forward but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him." Could he have known the reasons of his trials it would have been a great consolation, but it was denied him, and the reasons of God's hiding his face from him, no less than those of his other trials.

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So it is also with others. The darkness which involves them makes part of their trials. It is a common trial of the saints. God will have his people “live by faith and walk by faith.” To live by faith, implies want of light, and ignorance of the designs of providence. A great part of the good man’s trial here, consists in trusting God without knowing why such things are required, or such trials ordered out to him. In this way the saints had great trials under the former dispensations. A veil was then spread over the method of grace, or way in which God would bring salvation to men. Even the religious rites enjoined by the law, were not understood, though they made part of the duties of every day; they remained mysterious, till Christ removed the covering cast over them; made known the hidden mystery, and opened “the way into the holiest by his blood.”

Under every dispensation religion greatly consists in referring every thing to God, and trusting in him, without being let into his designs, or knowing reasons of his orders. “Blessed is he who hath not seen and yet hath believed”—Blessed is he who without penetrating the designs of heaven trusts in God, and conforms to his requirements, not doubting but all will turn out right—that God will lead him in right ways, though they may be ways which he knows not.

Abram discovered much of this temper—in obedience to divine order he left his father’s house, and “went forth, not knowing whither he went.” And afterwards, when commanded of God, he took a three days journey, to offer his son, Isaac, at the place which should be shewn him.

The trial of this patriarch, recorded in the text, might be, at that time particularly necessary. God had then admitted him to special nearness; and special trials might be requisite to keep him humble, and prevent high thoughts of himself. For such is fallen human nature, that particular distinctions, even divine communications, though of grace, are apt to be abused; to foster pride! Though man is poor and dependant, pride is a sin which very easily besets him. If Paul needed something to keep him humble when favored with revelations, why not Abram? Abram was then in the body—compassed with infirmity—liable to temptation, and prone to seduction. God knew his state—corrected him therefore, to give him a sense of demerit, when he received him into covenant and engaged to be his God.

Another design of his darkness and horror at that time, might be to fill him with awe and reverence of the divine majesty. Had he experienced nothing of this kind, the strange familiarity to which he had been admitted of the most high, might have diminished his fear of God, and caused him to think lightly of the great supreme.

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The horror and distress he now experienced might also serve to prepare him for holy joy, when God should lift on him the light of his countenance. Light and joy are most refreshing when they follow darkness and terror. Therefore the joy of those who have been pricked in their hearts for sin and made to know its exceeding sinfulness, when they are brought to hope in divine mercy, and believe themselves forgiven of God. There is reason to believe that the sorrows of this state will give a zest to the joys of heaven—the darkness of this state, to the light of that in which darkness is done away—the fear and concern here.

Some think that what Abram experienced on this occasion was intended to intimate God's future dealings with his family. They were honored by being taken into covenant with God, but were to pass through the horror and darkness of Egyptian bondage—the distress of a wilderness state, and a war with the Amorites, before they should enjoy the promised land. Some conceive Abram's sufferings at this time, designed to prefigure the legal dispensation, under which his seed were to continue long and suffer many things. However this might be, we know that Abram did not find rest in this weary land, unallayed with sorrow. He was doomed to make his way through darkness, doubts and difficulties.

Such was the portion of this father of the faithful, while he remained in the body and continued on trail. The same is the portion of all the saints. "This is not their rest, because it is polluted." Rest is not to be found on earth. When the remains of sin shall be purged away, there will be no more darkness, fear or horror. "The former thing will pass away"

These considerations teach us what we have to expect while we tabernacle in clay—namely, trials and difficulties, doubts and darkness—these must be here our portion. Though we may be children of God, we are not to expect exemption from them till the earthly house of our tabernacle is dissolved and we are clothed on with our house which is from heaven.

Those who are strangers to religion may flatter themselves that should they attain renewing grace and get evidence of it, they should no more suffer from fear or horror, or the hidings of God's face, but that God would smile incessantly upon them and cause them to go on their way rejoicing. But this is far from being the case. Though when persons first attain a hope towards God, they are glad, their joy is soon interrupted—doubts and fears arise—their way is dark—"God hideth his face that they cannot behold him. O that I were as in months past—when God preserved me—when his candle shined upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness—when the Almighty was yet with me."

This hath been the complaint of many others beside benighted Job. It is often the language of the saints while in this dark world. "God often hides his face from those whom his soul loves, so that they walk on and are sad." This makes them long for

heaven, because there “will be no night there, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more death.”

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In this life sanctification is imperfect. The saints carry about in them a “body of death.” While this continues, they cannot have uninterrupted peace, but must have intervals of darkness and doubt. Those who have gone before us have often been troubled and distressed, and gone on their way sorrowing.

This is the fruit of sin. Man was doomed to it at the apostasy. It hath been from that time the portion of humanity. None hath been exempted. Those whom St. John saw walking in white robes and rejoicing in glory, had “come out of great tribulation.”

We can hope for nothing better than to “be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” We must travel the same road and can promise ourselves no better accommodations on our journey. If Abram, the friend, of God, felt *horror of great darkness*, after he had been called of God, we have no reason to expect trials less severe.

Let us not be discouraged, or faint in our minds. The way to glory lies through this dreary land—to us there is no other way. But the end will be light. If we keep heaven in our eye, and press on unmoved by the difficulties, and unawed by the dangers which lie in our way, “our labor will not be in vain in the Lord.” God will be with us. He will not leave us comfortless; but will support us under difficulties and guard us to his kingdom. After we shall have suffered awhile, he will call us from our labors, and reward us with eternal rewards. “Then shall we obtain joy gladness, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.” And the time is short.

“He which testifieth these things, saith, surely I come quickly. Amen.” May we have such evidence of an interest in him, as may dispose us to answer, “Even so come Lord Jesus.”

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SERMON VI.

Divine Impartiality Considered.

Romans ii. 11.

“For there is no respect of persons with God.”

The divine impartiality is often asserted in the holy scriptures; and the assertion coincides with our natural ideas of deity. The pagans indeed attributed to their Gods, the vices, follies and weaknesses of men! But the beings whom they adored were mostly taken from among men, and might be considered as retaining human imperfections,—Had unbiased reason been consulted to find out a supreme being, a different object would have been exhibited to view. But it is natural to mankind to fancy



the deity such an one as themselves. The origin of many erroneous conceptions of the divinity may be found in the persons who entertain them. To the jaundiced eye, objects appear discolored. To a mind thoroughly depraved, the source of truth may seem distorted. Therefore the hope of the Epicure—therefore the portrait which some have drawn of the divine sovereign, rather resembling an earthly despot, than the Jehovah of the bible! YET God is visible in his works and ways. “They are fools and without excuse, who say, there is no God.” And as far as God appears in the works of creation and providence, he appears as he is. Passion, prejudice, or depravity may disfigure or hide him; but as far as the discoveries which God hath made of himself are received, his true character is discerned.

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Of this character impartiality constitutes an essential part. "God is a rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he."

This representation agrees with reason. According to his sense of it, every man will subscribe it. Yet different apprehensions are entertained respecting the divine impartiality, as respecting every thing else. The ideas which some receive others reject as unreasonable. This is not strange. Minds differ, no less than bodies.

We propose, with deference, now to *exhibit our views of this interesting subject, the divine impartiality*, especially as it respects man.

This is the branch of divine impartiality referred to in the text, and commonly in the scriptures—*There is no respect of PERSONS with God*.

It is important that we form just apprehensions on this subject. Mistakes might inspire groundless expectations, and occasion practical errors, dishonorable to God, and mischievous to man. But those which are just, have a tendency to produce sentiments of rational respect and reverence for the supreme Governor and to point to the way of peace and blessedness.

Impartiality doth not require an equality of powers or advantages—that creatures should in this view be treated alike, or made equal. Infinite wisdom and power are not restricted to a sameness in their plastic operations, or providential apportionments. Neither is this sameness the order of heaven.

The number of creatures is great. We cannot reckon them up in order; nor the different species. Among the myriads of the same species, are discriminations, sufficient to distinguish them from one another. We observe this in our race. And in the creatures beneath us. Among mankind these differences are most noticeable and most interesting. They relate to every thing which belongs to man—to the mind, and to the body, and to the powers of each—to the temper—appetites—passions—talents—trials—opportunities, and means of information. There is in every respect an almost infinite variety—differences which run into innumerable particulars. Variety may be considered as a distinguishing trait in the works, and ways of God. And all is right. When we consider the hand of God and his providential influence in them, we seem constrained to adopt the language of the psalmist, "O Lord how many are thy works? In wisdom hast thou made them all: The earth is full of thy riches."

These are displays of divine sovereignty. They are beyond our comprehension. "We see, but we understand not." Of many things brought into being by divine efficiency, we know neither the design nor use—can only say, "Thou Lord hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

The same observation is applicable to the different situations in which God hath placed creatures of the same class, and the different talents committed to them—God hath doubtless his reasons for these discriminations, but hath not revealed them.

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By nothing of this kind is the divine impartiality affected; with none of them is it concerned. God is pleased to try some with ten talents, others with five, others with only one. That “so it seems good in his sight,” is all we know about it; and all we need to know. Should we attempt to pry into it, the answer given by our Lord to an officious enquirer respecting another, might be applied—“What is that to thee?”

The divine impartiality is only concerned to apportion the rule of duty to the powers and advantages imparted, and to give to each one according to the manner in which he shall have conformed to the rule given to direct him, making no difference, other than they may have affected differently the parts assigned them, or had more or fewer talents.

If this definition of impartiality is just, we may infer that God requires of man only “according to that which he hath;” and that in the final adjustment nothing will be done by partiality, or preferring one before another.

Could not these be predicated of the supreme governor, we would not attempt to vindicate his character as an impartial being. The latter we conceive chiefly respected in the text. Shall treat of each briefly.

That God requires of man only “according to that which he hath,” is equally the language of reason and revelation. Our Savior teacheth, that the divine rule will be the same, in this respect, as that which governs good men—“Unto whom much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more.”

The apostle had a particular reference in the text to the decisions at the great day, when “everyone must give account to God, and receive the deeds done in the body”—and insists that the situation in which each person had been placed, and the rule given for his direction will then be brought into the reckoning, and that each one will be judged, and his state determined by the law, under which he had lived and acted during his probation. This is the spirit of the context from verse six to the sixteenth, inclusive. “Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by a patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honor and immortality, eternal life: But to 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; of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile: But glory, and honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good; to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. *For there is no respect of persons with God.* For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law. For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. (For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the works of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the

mean while accusing, or else excusing one another.) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”

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This whole paragraph is an illustration of divine justice and impartiality as exercised toward mankind. It shows that they are here for trial—that those who act uprightly will meet the divine approbation, and be rewarded with eternal rewards; but that a contentious disregard of duty, and willful continuance in known wickedness will be the object of divine indignation, which will occasion tribulation and anguish that in the decisions at the great day, family and national distinctions will be disregarded—that it will be required of every one according to the talents committed to him, and no more, whether he be Jew or Gentile.

Some have doubted whether those left to the light of nature could possibly meet the divine approbation and find mercy with God; or were not doomed without remedy to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. This we apprehend to be here determined. “Those who have not the law, may do by nature, the things contained in the law; and the doers of the law shall be justified.”

By “doing the law,” no more is intended than acting sincerely, according to the light imparted. Perfect obedience is not attainable by imperfect creatures—cannot therefore be here intended by the apostle. His evident meaning is, that sincerity is accepted of God, and rewarded with the rewards of grace, and equally of the Gentile, as of the Jew; *for there is no respect of persons with God.*

Adults, privileged with gospel light, must believe and obey the gospel. To them is that declaration addressed—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” This hath no relation to those who have not the means of faith. “What the law saith, it saith to those who are under it.” The same is true of the gospel.

The equal justice of God in giving to every one according to his works, or to his improvement of talents, is the spirit of the text and context, and of many other scriptures. Yea, this one of those great truths which are borne on the face of revelation—“If ye call on the Father, who, *without respect of persons*, judgeth every man according to his works, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.”

Some objections to the preceding definition of divine impartiality are subjoined, with very brief replies.

It is said “We must be born again or we cannot see the kingdom of God,” and regeneration is the work of God, or effect of divine influence.

That necessary change, is indeed the work of God, but not to the exclusion of human cooperation. The holy spirit strives with all who have the means of grace. None are wholly destitute of supernal influences—of awakenings and convictions, or devoid of power to cherish or to resist them. This is intimated in the warnings to beware of grieving or quenching the spirit. Could men only oppose divine influence in renovation,

they would never be exhorted of God “to make themselves new hearts, and turn themselves that they may live.” *

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* Ezekiel xviii. 31.

But natural men are said to be “dead in sin”—and can the dead do aught which tends to their own resurrection?

The renewed are said to be “dead to sin”—Can they do nothing which tends to wickedness?+ Metaphors must be understood with latitude. We should involve ourselves in many absurdities, by always adhering to the literal sense of those used in scripture. Were we to adhere in all cases to the literal sense, we should believe Christ to be a rock, a door, a vine, and receive the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation.

+Romans vi. 2. 11.

But is not “every imagination of the thoughts of sinners hearts,” said in scripture to “be only evil continually?”

Such is said to have been the state of antediluvian sinners, when the spirit had ceased to strive with them, agreeably to the threatening.*

* Genesis vi. 3.

It is a representation of the last grade of human depravity; but not applicable to every natural man. Those who are unrenewed are not all equally depraved. Some “are not far from the kingdom of God.”—In some are things lovely in the Savior’s eyes. “Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him.” +

+ Mark xii. 24. x. 21.

It is further asked, Whether every motion toward a return to God, is not the effect of divine influence? And whether divine influence doth not necessarily produce effect?—We answer,

To suppose man not capable of acting, but only of being acted on, or acted with, is to exculpate his enmity against God, and opposition to his law and gospel. To suppose his enmity and opposition to be the effect of divine influence, is to excuse them. Blame rests with the efficient. The creature cannot be culpable, because he is what God made him; or while he remains what he was made of God. To denominate either temper or conduct morally good or evil, consent is necessary, to suppose consent, in the creature, to be the effect of almighty power operating upon it, nullifies it to the creature, in a moral view. The work of God cannot be the sin, or holiness, of the creature.

But depravity and wickedness are wrong, and criminal, apart from all consideration of their source—they are so in themselves.

They cannot therefore be from God, but must have some other source. The creature which vitiates another, is viewed as culpable, though it only tempts to wickedness, which is all a creature can do to vitiate another, and leaves the tempted ability to retain integrity; what must then be our views of a being whom we conceive to produce the same effect *by an exertion of Almighty power?*—"God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man," Is it then supposeable that he can produce it by direct efficiency?

But suppose him to produce it, Suppose it to derive immediately from him. Is its nature altered? Is it less criminal or odious?

God forbid that we should make the supposition! It is a compound of absurdity and blasphemy! As well may we suppose the sun to diffuse darkness! They "trusted in lying words, who said of old, We are delivered to do abominations." We fear the Lord; "and will ascribe righteousness to our Maker."

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But doth not God choose some to eternal life, and to this end bring them into his kingdom, and leave others to perish in their sins?

God chooseth those who hear his voice, and cherish the divine influences, and leaves those who refuse his grace and grieve his spirit. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; *if any man hear my voice, and open the door*, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me. Every one that asketh receiveth; hath that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocked it is opened,” Asking is antecedent to receiving; seeking, to finding; and knocking is the work of those yet without. When trembling, astonished Saul, of Tarsus enquired, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” he was directed by one sent of Christ—“The Lord said to Annanias, Arise—go—enquire—for one called Saul of Tarsus: *For, behold, he prayeth.*”

It is further asked, Whether God doth not act as a sovereign, in his choice of those whom he sanctifies and saves?

God acts as a wise and impartial sovereign. God is not a sovereign in the sense in which most earthly monarchs are so. Whim, caprice, passion, prejudice often influence their preferences of some to others. Not so the divine sovereign. There are reasons for all his discriminations. They may be veiled at present from our view; but will one day appear—“The day will declare them,” and justify God in them.*

1 Corinthians iii. 13.

But the elect, it is said, “are chosen from the foundations of the world; before they have done either good or evil.”

Election is indeed, “according to foreknowledge.” “Whom God did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.”

But God could not foreknow, say some, how a free moral agent would act, unless he had first determined how he should act!

A free moral agent, all whose volitions and actions, are fixed by an immutable decree! We are ignorant how God knows, or how he foreknows. Perhaps past and future relate only to creatures, Every thing may be present to the divine mind—with God there may be *an eternal Now*. “Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Much which is known to us, is locked up from creatures below us—they can form no ideas about it. Still less do we know of God, or the manner of the divine perceptions. The distance between God and us, is infinitely greater than between us and creatures of the lowest grade. It is therefore impossible for us to make deductions from the divine perceptions, or determine any thing about them. When tempted to it we should remember the caution given by Zophar,—“Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the

Almighty to perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" *

* Job xi. 7, 8.

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But as the whole human race are sinners, deserving only of punishment, is not God at liberty to choose from among them, whom he pleaseth to sanctify and save, and pass by, and leave whom he pleaseth, to punish in their sins?

We have no claim on divine justice. All mankind might have been left to perish. But they are not thus left of God, He hath found a ransom; and offers salvation to all. No differences will be eventually made among men without reasons. And the reasons will be in them—*For there is no respect of persons with God.*

But suppose two persons to be equally guilty and deserving of condemnation, may not God make one of them a vessel of mercy, and the other a vessel of wrath? Would the latter have occasion to complain? Or could injustice be charged on God?

We should not dare to charge him with injustice, did we know such a case to happen—neither do we presume to determine what God hath aright to do. But we are sure that no such case ever will happen—that God will not make an eventual difference in those who are alike, for *there is no respect of persons with God.*

Some may find mercy who may appear to us less guilty than some others who may perish in their sins. But it belongs not to us to estimate comparative guilt. It requires omniscience. “The judge of all the earth will do right.”

INFERENCES

Mankind are here on trial. Different talents are committed to them. God acts as a sovereign in apportioning bequests, and will observe exact impartiality in adjusting retributions.

The idea of talents implies ability to improve them. Gospel applications speak such to be our state—they are adopted to no other state.

The fatalist, and those who conceive every human volition and action to be the effect of divine agency, have no rational motive, to do, or suffer for religion. “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

However we may amuse ourselves with idle speculations, this life is probation season.—Our use or abuse of the talents we possess will determine us to happiness, or misery, honor or infamy.

“All have sinned, and are guilty before God—In his sight shall no man living be justified”—our sole desert is punishment. But God hath had mercy on us—provided a Savior, and offers us salvation. The offer is universal—“Whosoever will let him come.”

That *there is no respect of persons with God*, is alike the dictate of reason and revelation, We have only to act with integrity before God, relying, on his grace in Christ, and his grace will be sufficient for us.

The man who had the one talent, neglected it, under pretence that he served a hard master, who required things unreasonable and impossible—he was condemned; but *only* for neglecting the talent which he possessed.

It is required of a man according to that which he hath—this he can render—the neglect will be fatal. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that we may receive the deeds done in the body, according to that which we have done, whether good or bad. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil.

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An unseen hand is constantly writing down our volitions and actions, to be reserved to judgment. Ere long the books will be opened, which will open every heart, and life. Not a circumstance which goes to constitute a state of trial, will be omitted—all will be brought into the reckoning, and serve to determine our eternal state.

That state will be determined by the use which we shall have made of life, and the advantages which we enjoyed in it. The divine impartiality will then appear—"The ungodly will be convinced of their ungodly deeds—and of their hard speeches, which they have spoken against God." None will complain of injustice—none of the condemned pretend that they receive aught, which others circumstanced as they were, and acting as they acted, would not have received from the hand that made them. "Every mouth will be stopped."

This, fellow mortals is our seed time for eternity. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also of the Lord, whether he be bond or free—every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labor."

Not only the state into which we are to enter at death, but the rank we are to hold in it depend on present improvement. All the sanctified will be saved; all who die unrenewed will be damned. But there will be different grades, both in the upper and lower worlds. Of the saints, some "will be scarcely saved." To others "will be ministered an abundant entrance into the kingdom of Christ." There are also greatest and least in the kingdom of heaven. And among those exiled the world of light, differences will be made, suited to the different degrees of criminality. Capernaum will receive a more intolerable doom than Sodom.*

* Matthew xi. 23, 24.

All these discriminations will be built on the present life, and rise out of it. This will be so abundantly manifested, "when God shall judge the world in righteousness," that an assembled universe will confess, That *there is no respect of persons with God*.

* * * * *

SERMON VII.

Moses' Prayer to be blotted out of God's Book.

Exodus xxxii. 31, 32.

"And Moses returned unto the Lord and said, 'Oh! this people have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.'"

This is one of the most difficult passages in the holy scriptures. Many haven attempted to explain it, and in our apprehension, failed in the attempt. Some will entertain like opinion of the following. Perhaps justly. We are no less fallible than others.

In matters which have engaged the attention of the learned, and in which they have differed, assurance is not perhaps to be expected. But as we are forbidden to call any man master, we have ventured to judge for ourselves respecting the meaning of the text, and now lay before the reader the result of our attention to it; not wishing to obtrude our opinion upon him; but leaving him to form his own as he may find occasion.

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Some suppose that a person must be willing to be damned for the glory of God, or he cannot be saved; and this scripture hath been alleged in proof. After a few observations, *to shew that the supposition is erroneous and absurd; we shall exhibit the various constructions which have been put on the text, by several expositors; then give our own sense of it; and close with a few reflections.*

The supposition that man must be willing to be damned, in order to be saved, is in our apprehension, erroneous and absurd. It supposes a desire of God's favor to be an unpardonable offence; and a contempt of it a recommendation to his regard! It supposes that God will banish those from his presence who long for it; and bring those to dwell in it who do not desire it! A supposition, which, in our view, carries its own confutation in it. For the all important inquiry is, confessedly, how to obtain salvation? The solution which the supposition exhibits, is this, *by being willing not to obtain it!*

God cannot issue an order, making it the duty of man to be willing to be damned. To be willing to be damned, implies a willingness to disobey God, refuse his grace, and continue in unbelief and impenitence! Should we suppose it possible for God to issue the order, obedience would be impossible, and equally to those of every character. The hardened sinner, cannot be thought capable of love to God, which will dispose him to suffer eternally for God's glory. He may do that which will occasion eternal sufferings, but not out of obedience to God—not with design to glorify him.

Neither can the awakened sinner be considered as the subject of such love of God. They see indeed the evil. Awakened Sinners are not lovers of God. They see indeed the evil of sin, and are sensible of its demerit? that they deserve destruction. But this doth not reconcile them to destruction, and make them willing to receive it. They tremble at the thoughts of it, strive against sin, and cry after deliverance. Were they willing to be damned, they would not be afraid of being damned, or seek in anyway to avoid it.

It is equally impossible for the saint to be reconciled to damnation as will appear, by considering what it implies. It implies the total loss of the divine image, and banishment from the divine presence and favor! It implies being given up to the power of apostate spirits, and consigned to the same dreary dungeon of despair and horror, which is prepared for them! It implies being doomed to welter in woe unutterable, blaspheming God, and execrating the creatures of God, "world without end!"

When people pretend that they are willing to be damned for the glory of God, they "know—not what they say nor whereof they affirm." They leave out the principal ingredients of that dreadful state. Bid they take them into the account, they would perceive the impossibility of the thing. To suppose it required is to blaspheme God—to pretend that man can submit to it, is to belie human nature—to conceive that a child of God can reconcile himself to it, is to subvert every just idea of true religion. To require

it, God must deny himself! To consent to it, man must consent to become an infernal!
The statement of the case is a refutation of the scheme.

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But if God's glory requires it, will not this reconcile the good and gain their consent?

God's glory doth not—cannot require it. “The spirit of the Lord is not straightened.” Human guilt and misery are not necessary to God's honor.

It is necessary that divine justice should be exercised on those who refuse divine grace; but not necessary that men should refuse divine grace. “As I live, saith the Lord God. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”

Such is the language of revelation; and the measures which God hath adopted relative to our guilty race speak the same language. He hath provided a city of refuge, and urges the guilty to “turn to the strong hold.”—He weeps over obstinate sinners who refuse his grace? “How shall I give thee up? How shall I deliver thee?” But rejoiceth over the penitent, as the father rejoiced over the returning prodigal.

God would not have provided a Savior, and made indiscriminate offers of pardon and peace had he chosen the destruction of sinners, and had their ruin been necessary to his honor. But God hath done these things, and manifested his merciful disposition toward mankind.

We have no need to “do evil that good may come. Our unrighteousness is not necessary to commend the righteousness of God.”

How then, are we to understand the prayer of Moses, placed at the head of this discourse—*blot me, I pray that, out of thy book which thou hast written?*

As this is one of the principal passages of scripture which are adduced to support the sentiment we have exploded, a few things may be premised, before we attempt to explain it.

I. Should it be admitted that Moses here imprecated utter destruction on himself, it could not be alleged as a precept given to direct others, but only as a solitary incident, in the history of a saint, who was then compassed with infirmity. And where is the human character without a shade? This same Moses neglected to circumcise his children—broke the tables of God's law—spake unadvisedly with his lips—yea, committed such offences against God, that he was doomed to die short of Canaan, in common with rebellious Israel.

II. The time—in which it hath been particularly insisted that a person must be willing to be damned for God's glory, is at his entrance on a slate of grace; but Moses had been consecrated to the service of God long before he made this prayer. Nothing, therefore respecting the temper of those under the preparatory influences of the spirit can be argued from it.



III. Should we grant that Moses here imprecated on himself the greatest evil, a sense of other people's sins, and not a sense of his own sins, was the occasion. But,

IV. No sufferings of his could have been advantageous to others, had he submitted to them for their sake. Had he consented to have been a castaway—to have become an infernal, as we have seen implied in damnation, this would not have brought salvation to Israel. Moses' hatred of God, and his sufferings and blasphemies, would not have atoned for the sins of his people, or tended in any degree to turn away the wrath of God from them.

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It seems surprising that the whole train of expositors should consider this good man as imprecating evil on himself for the good of others, when it is obvious that others could not have been benefited by it. For though expositors differ respecting the magnitude of the evil, they seem to agree that he did wish evil to himself, and pray that he might suffer for his people! We have seen no expositor who is an exception.

But let us attend to the prayer. *Oh! this people have sinned a great sin; yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book.*

We know the occasion. Israel had fallen into idolatry while Moses was on the mount—had made an idol, and bowed in adoration before it. God told Moses what they had done—threatened to destroy them—excused Moses from praying for them, which had before been his duty, and promised to reward his faithfulness among so perverse a people, if he would now “hold his peace, and let God alone to destroy them.” But Moses preferred the good of Israel to the aggrandisement of his own family, earnestly commended them to the divine mercy, and obtained the forgiveness of their sin—“The Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto them.” But he gave at that time no intimation of his merciful purpose toward them.

When Moses came down and found the congregation holding a feast to their idol, he was filled with grief and indignation; and took measures immediately to punish their sin and bring them to repentance. He first destroyed their idol and then about three thousands of the idolaters, by the sword of Levi, who at his call, ranged themselves on the Lord's side. The next day, fearing that God would exterminate the nation, agreeably to his threatening, Moses gathered the tribes, set their sin before them, and told them that he would return to the divine presence and plead for them, though he knew not that God would hear him. “Ye have sinned a great sin; and now I will go up unto the Lord; *peradventure* I shall make an atonement for your sin. *And Moses returned unto the Lord and said, Oh! this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet, now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin; and if not blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.*”

Moses meaning, while praying for Israel, is obvious; but the petition offered up for himself is not equally so—*blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book.*

Four different constructions have been put on the is prayer—Some consider Moses as imprecating damnation on himself, for the good of his people—Some as praying for annihilation, that they might find mercy—Some as asking God that he might die with them, if they should die in the wilderness—Others, that his name might be blotted out of the page of history, and his memory perish, should Israel be destroyed and not reach the promised land.

“Blot me” (saith Mr. Cruden) “out of thy book of life—out of the catalogue, or number of those that shall be saved—wherein Moses does not express what he thought might be

done, but rather wisheth, if it were possible, that God would accept of him as a sacrifice in their stead, and by his destruction and annihilation, prevent so great a mischief to them.” *

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* Vid. Concordance, under BLOT.

Docr. S. Clark expresseth his sense of the passage to nearly the same effect.

Did Moses then ask to be made an expiatory sacrifice for the sin of Israel! Or did he solemnly ask of God what he knew to be so unreasonable that it could not be granted!

There is no hint in the account given of this affair, that Moses entertained a thought of being accepted in Israel's stead. He did not ask to suffer *that they might escape*—he prayed *to be blotted out of God's book*, if his people could not be forgiven—*If thou wilt, forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.*

Mr. Pool considers Moses as praying to be annihilated that Israel might be pardoned! “Blot me out of the book of life—out of the catalogue, or number of those that shall be saved. I suppose Moses doth not wish his eternal damnation, because that state would imply both wickedness in himself and dishonor to God; but his annihilation, or utter lose of this life, and that to come, and all the happiness of both of them. Nor doth Moses simply desire this, but only comparatively expresseth his singular zeal for God's glory, and charity to his people; suggesting that the very thoughts of the destruction of God's people, and the reproach and blasphemy which would be cast upon God by means thereof, were so intolerable to him, that he rather wished, if it were possible, that God would accept him as a sacrifice in their stead, and by his utter destruction prevent so great a mischief.” *

* Vid. Pool in locum.

Could the learned and judicious Mr. Pool seriously believe that inspired Moses prayed for annihilation! Or consider him as entertaining a suspicion that a soul could cease to exist! Or could he conceive him as deliberately asking of God to make him an expiatory sacrifice! Or harboring a thought that the sin of his people might be atoned by his being blotted out from among God's works!—Strange!

Mr. Henry considers Moses as praying to die with Israel, if they must die in the wilderness.—“If they must be cut off, let me be cut off with them—let not the land of promise be mine by survivorship. God had told Moses, that if he would not interpose, he would make him a great nation—No said Moses, I am so far from desiring to see my name and family, built on the ruins of Israel, that I choose rather to die with them.” *

* Vid. Henry in loc.

If such is the spirit of this prayer, Moses does not appear resigned to the divine order, but rather peevish and fretful at the disappointment of his hope, which he had till then entertained. He had expected to lead Israel to the land of promise; if not indulged, seems not to have cared what became of himself or his family; and is thought here to

address his maker, offering distinguishing favors to him, as Daniel did Belthazzar—"thy gifts be to thyself,

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and give thy rewards to another—I desire none of them for myself or mine—If Israel die in the wilderness, let me die with them”—From angry Jonah such a reply to the kind offers of a gracious God might not surprize us; but it was not to have been expected from the meekest of mankind. DOCT. HUNTER, in his biographical lectures, explodes this idea of Moses’ asking to be damned for the salvation of Israel, and shews the absurdity of that construction of the text, but understands him as praying to die himself, before sentence should be executed on his people, if they were not pardoned. And in the declaration, *whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book*, he discovers an intimation, that that offending people should die short of the promised land! A discovery without a clew. This sin of Israel was pardoned. Sentence of death in the wilderness was occasioned by a subsequent act of rebellion, as will be shewn in the sequel.*

* Vid. Hunter’s Lect. Vol. iv. Lect. iv

Mr. Fismin considers Moses as here praying to be blotted out of the page of history, if Israel were not pardoned; so that no record of his name, or the part which he had acted in the station assigned him, should be handed down to posterity. An exposition differing from the plain language of sacred history—*Blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book, which thou hast written*. The page of history is written by man.

Such are the constructions which have been put on this scripture. The considerations which have been suggested, oblige us to reject them all, as founded in mistake. Our sense of the passage, and the reasons, which in our apprehension, support it, will be the subject of another discourse.

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SERMON VIII.

Moses’ Prayer to be blotted out of God’s Book.

Exodus xxxii. 31, 32.

“And Moses returned unto the Lord and said. Oh! this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou—wilt, forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray they, out of thy book which thou hast written.”

In the preceding discourse we endeavored to show that the idea of being willing to be damned for the glory of God is not found in the text—that the sentiment is erroneous and absurd—then adduced the constructions which have been put on the text by sundry expositors, and offered reasons which oblige us to reject them as misconstructions.

It remains, *to give our sense of the passage—the grounds on which it rests—and some reflections by way of improvement.*

*As to our sense of the passage—*We conceive these puzzling words of Moses to be no other than a prayer for himself—that his sins which might stand charged against him in the book of God, might *be blotted out*, however God might deal with Israel. “SINS are compared to debts, which are written in the creditor’s book, and crossed, or blotted out, when paid.* Man’s sins are written in the book of God’s remembrance, or accounts; out of which all men shall be judged hereafter.+ And when sin is pardoned it is laid to be blotted out.++ And not to be found any more, though sought for.” +++

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* Matthew vi. 32. + Revelations xix. 12. ++ Isaiah xlv. 22. +++ Jeremiah I. 20.—Vid. Cruden's Concord. under BLOT.

When a debtor hath paid a debt, we are at no loss for his meaning, if he requests to be crossed, or blotted out of the creditor's book; nor would doubt arise should one to whom a debt was forgiven prefer like petition. "You will please to blot me out of your book."

Though Moses had taken no part in this sin of Israel. he knew himself a sinner; and when praying for others: it is not likely he would forget himself. The occasion would naturally suggest the value, yea the necessity of forgiveness, and dispose him to ask it of God. When others are punished, or but just escape punishment, we commonly look at home, and consider our own state; and if we see ourselves in danger, take measures to avoid it. To a sinner the only way of safety is, repairing to divine mercy, and obtaining a pardon. That Moses would be excited to this by a view of Israel, at this time, is a reasonable expectation.

That such was the purpose of Moses' prayer for himself is clearly indicated by the answer which was given to it—For the *blotting out of God's book*, is doubtless to be understood in the same sense in the prayer, and in the answer; and the latter explains the former.

Oh! this people have sinned a great sin—Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin; and if not—if thou wilt not forgive their sin —blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book, which thou hast written. And the Lord said unto Moses, WHOSOEVER hath sinned against me, HIM will I blot out of my book: THEREFORE now go lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee.

The passage thus presented to our view, seems scarcely to need a comment; but such sad work hath been made of this text, and such strange conclusions been drawn from it that it may be proper to subjoin a few remarks.

That God had threatened to "destroy that people and blot out their name from under heaven"—that Moses had prayed for them—and that "the Lord had repented of the evil which he thought to do unto them" we have seen above. And here Moses is ordered to resume his march, and carry up the tribes to the promised land, and the reason is assigned— "*whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book, therefore, now go lead the people to the place of which I have spoken unto thee.*"

When we thus view the subject can a doubt remain respecting the sense of this text? (But keeping in view the reason here assigned for the renewed order given to Moses to conduct the tribes to Canaan, namely, God's determination *to blot of his book—whosoever had sinned against him*, in this affair) let us try it in the different senses which have been put upon it.



I. We will suppose *blotting out of God's book*, to mean destroying soul and body in hell. The divine determination to shew no mercy to Israel, is then the reason assigned for the order here given to Moses. The prayer and answer stand thus—*Now if thou wilt, forgive this people—Answer—I will not hear thy prayer for them—no mercy shall be shewn them, but utter, eternal destruction be their portion—* THEREFORE now go lead them to the promised land!

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II. Suppose *blotting out of God's book* to mean annihilation, and his answer to the prayer stands thus—*I will destroy this people, and blot them from among my works—*THEREFORE *go lead them to the place of which I have spoken unto thee!*

III. Suppose with Mr. Henry, and Doct. Hunter, that it is to be understood of destruction in the wilderness, and the answer stands thus—*My wrath shall wax hot against Israel and consume them—they shall all die in the wilderness, THEREFORE, now go lead them to Canaan!*

The whole people, save Moses and Joshua, seem to have participated in the revolt. We have no account of another exception; *and whosoever had sinned, God would blot out of his book.* Surely had either of these been the meaning of *blotting out of God's book*, it would not have been given as the reason for Moses' resuming his march and carrying up the tribes to the land of promise. Common sense revolts at the idea.

But if we understand *blotting out of God's book* in the sense we have put upon it, we see at once the propriety of the order given to Moses, founded on this act of grace. God's having "repented of the evil which he thought to do unto them." If this is the meaning of the words, the answer to Moses' prayer amounts to this—"I have heard and hearkened to your prayer, and pardoned the sin of this people, proceed *therefore* in your march, and lead them to the place of which I have spoken unto thee." The *therefore go now*, doth not surprize us. We see the order rise out of the divine purpose; but on any of the other constructions of the text, thwarts and contradicts it; or cannot surely be assigned as the reason of it. SEVERAL other considerations illustrate the subject, and confirm our construction of it.

When Moses returned to intercede for Israel, he certainly asked of God to pardon their sin. *Oh! this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold—Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin —*That he was heard and obtained his request appears not only from the history contained in our context, but from Moses' rehearsal of it just before his death. He recounted the dealings of God with Israel, when taking his leave of them on the plains of Moab—In that valedictory discourse he reminded them of their sin on this occasion—of God's anger against them—his threatening to destroy them, and how he pleaded with God in their behalf, and the success which attended his intercessions for them—"I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure wherewith the Lord was wroth with you, to destroy you, but *the Lord hearkened unto me at that time also.*" *

* Deuteronomy ix. 19.

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Sentence of death in the wilderness was afterwards denounced against those sinners, and executed upon them, but not to punish this sin; but the rebellion which was occasioned by the report made by the spies who were sent to search out the land. On that occasion Moses prayed fervently for his people, and not wholly without effect—God had threatened to “smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them,” but receded from his threatening through the prevalence of that intercessor in their behalf—“the Lord said I have pardoned according to thy word;” but at the same time, denounced an irrevokable sentence of death in the wilderness against those rebels. Then Moses was not ordered to “lead the people to the place of which God had spoken,” but commanded to go back into the wilderness which they had parted—“turn you, and get ye into the wilderness by the way of the red sea.” +

+ Numbers xiv.

At that time, the exception from the general sentence, was not in favor of Moses and Joshua, who had been on the mount, and taken no part in Israel's sin in making the golden calf, but in favor of Caleb and Joshua, who dissented from the report made by the other spies; though no intimation is given that Caleb was not with the people, and did not sin with them in the matter of the golden calf. There is therefore no doubt respecting the sin which shut that generation out of Canaan. Nor do we apprehend more occasion for doubt relative to the prayer of Moses, *to be blotted out of God's book*.

But though the sin of Israel on this occasion was pardoned, and Moses ordered to lead them to Canaan, some temporal chastisements were inflicted to teach the evil of sin, and serve as a warning to others to keep themselves in the fear of God; of which Moses was notified when ordered to advance with the pardoned tribes? “Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. And the Lord plagued the people because they had made the calf which Aaron made.” The manner in which this is mentioned, shows that their sin in that affair was forgiven, and only some lighter corrections ordered in consequence of it; which is common after sin is pardoned.

REFLEXIONS.

I. When we consider Moses pouring out his soul before God in behalf of an offending people, it should excite us, as there may be occasion, to go and do likewise.

Some pretend that prayer offered up for others, must be unavailing. God, it is alleged, is immutable, not therefore to be moved to change his measures by a creature's cries. And prayer for others can have no tendency, it is said, to operate a change in them, so as to bring them into the way of mercy, and render them fit objects of it.

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We would only observe in reply, that God hath made it our duty to “pray one for another,” * And scripture abounds with records of the prevalence of such intercessions. We have a striking influence in our subject—Moses prayed for Israel and was heard—“The Lord hearkened unto me at that time also.” It doth not appear that Israel joined with Moses in his pleadings at the throne of grace on this occasion. Moses went up into the mount, leaving Israel on the plain below—“I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. And Moses returned unto the Lord,” and pleaded in their behalf. By his individual power, he seems to have prevailed. This is only one instance out of many which might be adduced from the history of the saints—of this saint in particular. Yea, there seems to have been such power in the pleadings of this man of God, *while praying for others*, that when God would enter into judgment with them, Moses must be prevailed with to hold his peace, and not pray for them! “The Lord spake unto me saying, I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiff necked people. *Let me alone* that I may destroy them—and *I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they.*” Let me alone! As though God could not destroy them without Moses’ consent!—And I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they! As though Moses must be bribed to silence, ere judgment could proceed against them!

* James v. 16.

This representation is not to be received without restriction; but we may safely infer that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”—that it often draws down blessings from above on those who deserve no good.

This should encourage us to wrestle with God in prayer, for the effusions of his grace on those who deserve judgment without mercy, and who might receive it from the righteous sovereign, did the righteous hold their peace, and “let him alone.”

II. When we witness this holy many [sic] *praying to be blotted out of God’s book which he had written*, it should remind us of our state as sinners whose only hope is mercy. “Moses’ was faithful in all God’s house.” His attainments in the divine life were scarcely equaled; yet must have perished forever had forgiving grace been denied him. He knew his state; and a view of Israel’s danger called home his thoughts and led him to implore divine mercy for himself, though he should fail to obtain it for an ungrateful people. “Oh! forgive the sin of this people, but if not, forgive my sin—pardoning grace is all my dependence—hope would fail should it be denied me.”

If Moses was thus conscious of guilt, who can say “I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?—O Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified—there is not a just man upon earth, who doeth good and sinneth not.” While praying for others, it ill becomes us to forget ourselves.

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Are we by office appointed to ask mercy for others and bear them on our hearts before God? We must not therefore conclude that mercy is not necessary for us. Like the high priests of old, "We must offer, first for own sins, and then for the people's." There is only one intercessor to whom this is needless.

Witnessing the sin and danger of others, should stir us up to the duty, as it did this leader of Israel. While crying to God for others, we must beware wrapping up ourselves in fancied purity. To this we are tempted by a view of greater sins in others, which serve as a foil to act off our fancied goodness; and especially by the knowledge of certain great sins in others, of which we know ourselves to be clear.

Some in Moses' situation, would doubtless have adopted that language —"God I thank thee that I am not as other men are—not as this people." Very different was the effect it had on him—it reminded him of his sins, and led him to cry for mercy.

It is of vast importance that we know ourselves—if we attain this knowledge, from sense of demerit, we shall add to our prayers for others, *but if not, blot me, I pray thee out of thy book which thou hast written.*

III. If we do not mistake the sense of the text, the strange doctrine exploded in the beginning of this discourse, finds no support in it. And surely the doctrine which reason rejects cannot be supported by revelation. Reason directs us to pursue that line of conduct which will be most for our advantage taking the whole term of our existence into the account. And revelation doth the same—"in keeping God's commandments there is great reward." If we look through the holy scriptures we shall find abundant rewards annexed to every requirement. The idea that despising the promises, and being willing to renounce the desire and hope of them, should be made a condition of receiving them, is pitiable weakness and absurdity.

Quite a different spirit is displayed in the history of the saints, whom we are directed to follow. All the worthies of old "died in faith not having received the promises, but seen them afar off."—The renowned leader of Israel "had respect to the recompense of reward" —yea, "the captain of our salvation," the divine son of Mary, "for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." *

* Hebrews xi. 26, xii. 2.

Here the way of duty requires self denials. The good man is often called to take up his cross; but the rewards which follow are constantly held up to view, in revelation, as infinitely surpassing the losses and sufferings of the present life. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake: Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven." Every one who forsaketh worldly advantages, out of regard to God, will "receive an hundred fold reward, and inherit eternal life."

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This was made known to the primitive Christians. Therefore their fortitude and zeal to do and suffer in the cause of God—"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.—I reckon the sufferings of the present time, not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Totally groundless and unjust, was that charge—"I knew thee that thou art an hard man." We serve a just, a kind, a good master. Even a cup of cold water, given, out of love to him, will in no wise go unrewarded—he asks no sacrifice of us for nought. Much less that we would sacrifice ourselves, and be castaways. "Those who honor him, he will honor."

The slaves of Satan are repaid with misery; but not so the servants of God. "He is not unrighteous to forget our labor of love." These things are revealed for our encouragement and support. Yea, God hath "given us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature—let us therefore be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord."

* * * * *

SERMON IX.

St. Paul's Wish to be accursed from Christ.

Romans ix. 3

"For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

Few characters more remarkable than that of St. Paul, are to be found in history. He is introduced to our acquaintance on a tragical occasion—the martyrdom of Stephen, where he appears an accomplice with murderers—"he was standing by and consenting to his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him."

The circumstances of Paul's conversion to Christianity were very remarkable, and afford strong evidence of its truth. He was not an ignorant youth, who could be easily deluded. He had all the advantages of education which that enlightened age afforded. He was born indeed at Tarsus, a city of Cilicia; but sent to Jerusalem for an education, and "brought up at the feet of Gamaliel," a famous Jewish Rabbi, who is said to have been many years president of the Sanhedrin; and renowned for wisdom and erudition.

Paul's mind was not only early imbued with general science, but he was particularly instructed in the Jews' religion, and became a zealous member of the pharisaic sect—



verily believed the truth to be with them—thought it to be his duty to inculcate their sentiments, both scriptural and traditionary, and oppose all who did not fall in with their views, and help to increase their influence, and spread their principles. Therefore his hatred of Christianity, and determination to destroy it from its foundation—Therefore his implacable aversion to Christians, and unwearied endeavors to reduce them from the faith, or compel them to blaspheme, or where he failed in those attempts, to destroy them from the earth.

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But lo! the triumphs of divine grace! This arch enemy, while pursuing the followers of the Lamb, even to strange cities, is met by the glorified redeemer, while on his way to Damascus, whither he was going, “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples!” Arrested in his course! Convinced of his madness! Brought to believe on that Jesus whom he had reviled and blasphemed! And even changed into a preacher of that gospel which he had been so eager to destroy!

We know the strange process by which these events were effected—how this proud adversary was subdued and melted into a humble, penitent believer! We know the zeal with which he entered on the gospel ministry—what he did—what he suffered, to build up the cause he had destroyed!

How he persevered to the end, and sealed his testimony with his blood!—What a trophy of divine power and mercy! “These were the Lord’s doings, and marvelous in our eyes.”

But why marvelous? Why should we wonder when we consider the agent? God is wont to subvert the purposes of his enemies; and often uses those means and instruments which were prepared and intended against him, to accomplish his purposes.

Egypt is said, at a particular period, to have dreaded a deliverer, then expected to arise in Israel—therefore the edict for thy destruction of the male children which should be born to the Hebrews, thinking to destroy the deliverer among them. But while that edict was in operation, as though in contempt of infernal malice, and Egyptian policy, Moses, the savior of his people, was born. And mark what followed. Lo! The daughter of Pharaoh becomes his mother. The house of Pharaoh his asylum! The learned Magi of that hostile empire, his instructors! And all to fit him for the work for which heaven designed him. *

* Hunter Vol. ii. Lect. xviii.

So here; this Moses of the New Testament—this destined chieftain among Christians, is educated among Pharisees; the great enemies of Christ—instructed by their greatest teacher—inspired with a double portion of their zeal and rancor against the cause of the Redeemer, and sent forth to destroy. But lo! This mighty Abaddon of diabolical and Jewish malice, is arrested in his course—changed into another man, and all his zeal and learning from that hour directed to buildup the cause of God! The energy instructed and furnished, but heaven directed the use and application!

God’s purposes stand and will stand. None can stay his hand, or reverse his decrees. The means chosen to subvert, are used to build his cause and kingdom. “He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the purposes of the froward are carried headlong.”

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While Paul remained a Pharisee he was the idol of his nation; but no sooner did he become a Christian, than their love was turned to hatred. No other was so abhorred as he. Against no other did they unite with such determined rancor. Numbers soon leagued together, and even “bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink till they had slain him.” But all their machinations were vain. “Obtaining help from God, of whom he was a chosen vessel, to bear his name to the Gentiles, and kings, and the people of Israel,” he continued many years, and did, perhaps, more than any other perform in the cause of Christ. Jewish rancor towards him never abated, but he caught no share of their bitter spirit? the temper of Christ governed in him? he loved his enemies, and did them good. Like another Moses he bore Israel on his heart before God, and made daily intercession for them, weeping at a view of their sad state, and the evils coming upon them.

Such is the spirit of the context. “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.—*for I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh*”.

The depressing occasion of his grief, was the infidelity and obduracy of his nation—that they refused to hearken to reason and evidence —were resolved to reject the only Savior; and the evils temporal and eternal, which he foresaw their temper and conduct would bring upon them—therefore his “great heaviness and continual sorrow.”

In the text—*I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh*, the apostle hath been thought to imprecate evil on himself for the benefit of his people! All the expositors we have seen on this passage, conceive him to have wished some sore calamity to himself for the advantage of his nation! Though they have differed respecting the magnitude of the evil which he wished to suffer for their sake.

Doct. Doddridge considers him, as “wishing to be made a curse for them, as Christ hath been made a curse for us, that so they might be delivered from the guilt which they had brought on themselves, and be entitled to the blessings of the rejected gospel.”

Doct. S. Clark views him, as “desirous of suffering the calamities to which his people were doomed for rejecting and crucifying the Savior, so that, could they all centre in one person, he wished to be the person, that he might thereby procure salvation for them!”

Grotius and Pool understand him, as “wishing to be separated from the church of Christ for the sake of the Jews!” Which differs little from Doct. Hunter’s sense of the passage—to which Doct. Guyse adds, “a desire of every indignity of man, and to be cut off from communion with Christ, for the sake of Israel;” whom he strangely considers as prejudiced against Christianity in consequence of their prejudices against Paul!

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But why should the apostle wish evil to himself for their sakes? What possible advantage could his sufferings have been to his nation? Is it possible that those learned expositors should conceive that pains and penalties inflicted on him could have made atonement for their sins, and expiated their guilt! They must never have read Paul's epistles or never have entered into the spirit of them, who could entertain such views as these; or even suspect that aught, save the blood of Christ, can atone for human guilt. It is strange, therefore, that they could have imagined that he wished to suffer with this view. And it is no less so, that it should be thought that prejudices against Paul could have occasioned Jewish prejudices against Christianity, when it is so evident that their prejudices against Paul were wholly occasioned by his attachment to Christianity—he having been high in their esteem till he became a Christian.

David once asked to suffer in Israel's stead; but the circumstances of the case were then totally different from those of the case now before us. Israel were suffering *for his sin* in numbering the people; "I have sinned and done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee be against me."—But Paul had not sinned, to bring evil on his people—the guilt was all their own.

Expositors having mistaken Moses' prayer "to be bloated out of God's book," seem generally to have had that prayer in their eye when they have attempted to explain the text; and supposing that Moses prayed to be made sacrifice for Israel, have thought that Paul had the same spirit, and here followed his example! But that neither of them ever entertained the thought of suffering to expiate the sin of their people, and that the two passages bear no kind of relation to each other, we conceive indubitably certain.

But let us consider the text and judge for ourselves the meaning.

Perhaps the difficulties which have perplexed it may have chiefly arisen from the translation. The silence of expositors on this head, while puzzled with the passage, is strange, if the difficulty might have been obviated by amending to the original. The translation is plausible solely from this consideration.

Mr. Pool is the only expositor we have ever seen, who hath noted the difference between the translation and the original; and he labors hard to bring them together, but, in our apprehension, labors it in vain.

The passage literally translated stands thus? *For I myself boasted that I was a curse from Christ, above my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.* *

* * * * *

* *Euxoman gar autos ego anathema einai apo tou xristou uper tou adelphon mou suggenon mou kata sarxa.*



Euxoman, rendered in translation by *I could wish* forms in the imperfect of the indicative mood, in the Auic dialect. Mr. Pool was too accurate a scholar not to observe the disagreement of the translation with the original. Some read it as in the indicative; but it is generally considered as in the optative, and altered by a figure which takes on *iota* from the middle, and cuts an *an* end of the word forming *Euxoman*, instead of *auxoiman an*. +

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But what warrant have we for these alterations? They only serve to darken a difficult text.

The most natural and common construction of *euxoman*, derives, is, to glory or boast. *Gloriar* is the first word used to express the meaning of it in Schrevelius' Lexicon; and the meaning *euxos*, the theme of this verb justifies the construction, in preference to that used by the translators. And the Greek preposition *uper*, which is rendered for, is often used to signify above, or more than.

+ Vid. Pool in loc.

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For the justice of the criticisms we appeal to the learned. If they are just, our sense of the text will be admitted.

If we consider the context, and the part which had been formerly acted by the apostle, it will not be difficult to ascertain his meaning, nor strange that he should express himself as in the text. He begins the chapter with strong expressions of concern for his nation, who had rejected him "whose name alone is given under heaven," for the salvation of men. If they continued to neglect the grace offered them in the gospel, he knew that they could not escape. And when he looked on them and mourned over them, the dangers which a few years before had hung over himself, rose up before him. He had been an unbeliever, a blasphemer, and a persecutor of the church of Christ; had boasted his enmity to Christ and opposition to the gospel; in which he had even exceeded the body of his nation—he had taken the lead against Christianity—been unrivalled in zeal against the cause, and rancour against the followers of the Lamb. When warned of his danger, and admonished to consider what would be his portion, should Jesus prove to be the Messiah, he seems to have derided the friendly warnings, and imprecated on himself the vengeance of the Nazerene!—to have defied him to do his worst! to pour his curse upon him!

It is not strange that witnessing the temper of his nation, should call these things to his remembrance—that the consideration should affect him—that he should shudder at the prospect of the destruction which hung over them, and at the recollection of that from which himself had been "scarcely saved"—that he should exclaim, "God and my conscience witness my great heaviness and continual sorrow, when I look on my brethren the Jews, and consider the ruin coming upon them, from which I have been saved, so as *by fire*! Lately I was even more the enemy of Christ than they, and boasted greater enmity.. against him! And should have brought on myself a more intolerable doom, had not a miracle of power and mercy arrested me in my course!" That such considerations and a recollection of the share which he had formerly taken in strengthening the prejudices of his nation against the truth, should deeply affect him, and draw such expression from him as we find in the text and context, is not strange.

They appear natural for a person circumstanced as he was at that time; and especially to one divinely forewarned of the devastation then coming on his place and nation.

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These we conceive to be the feelings and views expressed by the apostle in the beginning of this chapter—but that he should wish to be put into the place of Christ; or madly with evil to himself, from which nobody could be benefited, cannot be suspected; unless with Festus, we suppose him to have been “beside himself,” and not to have known what he wrote, when he expressed himself as in the text.

REFLECTIONS

I. In Paul's conversion how wonderfully apparent are the wisdom and power of God? When we view Saul of Tarsus making havoc of the church in Judea, and soliciting permission to pursue its scattered members even into exile, we consider him as a determined enemy of Christ. Who then would suspect that he should be made to feel the power of divine grace? That he would become a Christian? Yea, a prime minister of Immanuel! But lo! For this cause did God raise him up! For this work was he training while drinking at the fount of Science, and learning the Jews' religion in the school of Gamaliel! While unsanctified he was a destroyer; but when melted by divine influence into the temper of the gospel, all his powers and all his acquisitions were consecrated to the service of God and the Redeemer.

To affect this change in Paul, however unexpected, was not beyond the power of God; and it was done of God! Neither was it delayed till Paul had spent his best days in the service of Satan. At setting out to destroy, he was met of the ascended Savior, transformed by the renewing of his mind, and from that time devoted to the service of God; and continued faithful unto death. Many were his trials—severe his sufferings for the gospel which he preached; but “none of these things moved him; neither did he count his life dear to himself, that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”

II. The temper manifested by St. Paul when contemplating the state of his nation, how worthy of imitation? Like his divine Lord, “when he beheld them he wept over them.” Neither was the view unprofitable. It served to remind him of his own past guilt and danger, and the mercy which had been exercised toward him. His guilt and danger had been great. In high handed opposition to heaven, he had even exceeded “his kinsmen according to the flesh.” Witnessing their state brought these again to his remembrance, and the grace of God which had stopt him in his course, and saved him from destruction, causing him at once, to rejoice and tremble!

Many of the children of God when they witness the security of sinners; how they neglect the great salvation, and harden themselves in sin, may remember when they did the same themselves and some of them, in a higher degree than most of those who appear to be walking the downward road.

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Those who have found mercy cannot refrain from mourning over those whom they see hardening themselves in sin; nor should they cease to warn them from their way, and to cry to God in their behalf. But their attention is not wholly taken up from home; it often reverts thither, and stirs them up to grateful acknowledgments of divine goodness to themselves. WHO is he that maketh me to differ from the thoughtless sinner? is a consideration which often rises in the good man's mind, while looking on the careless and secure. It is a proper and a profitable consideration—tends to keep him humble and mindful of his dependence.

Sense of past dangers serve to enhance the value of present safety. The greater dangers we have escaped, and the more wonderful our deliverances have been, the greater should be our love to our deliverer, and the greater our care to make him suitable returns. If we entertain just views of these things, such will be the effect. Those to whom most is forgiven love the most.

By reflecting on the riches of divine mercy, we should stir up our souls to love the Lord. If witnessing the unconcern of others, while in the broad road, serves to excite us to gratitude for divine goodness shown to us, “the wrath of man is thereby made to praise the Lord.” Such was the effect which a view of Israel's hardness had on Paul—May all Christ's disciples cultivate the same temper.

III. In Paul's conversion we see God distinguishing among his enemies, and calling one into his kingdom who was, from principle, a destroyer of his saints. Paul was a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee. No sect among the Jews was more bitter against Christ—no other so eager and active in their endeavors to crush his cause and subvert his kingdom. Yet numbers of that sect obtained mercy. The same did not happen respecting the Saducees. No instance of a Saducee brought to repentance, can be adduced. Why this discrimination?

There may be reasons not revealed; but some are discernible.

The Pharisees “had a zeal for God, though not according to knowledge.” Saul, the Pharisee, “verily thought, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus”—he did not sin against the light of his own mind. The same was doubtless the case with many others of that sect. The Saducees were devoid of principle—had rejected first principles—those taught by the light of nature. While first principles are retained, such was the belief of a divine existence—a difference between good and evil—a future state, in which men will receive the deeds done in the body, and the like, there remains a foundation on which religion may rest; but where these are rejected, the foundation is destroyed. Of the former who have erred in lesser matters of faith, and been thereby seduced into practical errors, many have been reclaimed, and brought to repentance: Not so the latter. “One among a thousand have we not found.” And those whose sentiments border on atheism, or infidelity, are seldom called of God.

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There is a certain point of error in opinion, from which a return is rare. Those who reach it are commonly given up to strong delusions, which lead to destruction.

And practical errors, especially those which are opposed to conviction, are highly criminal, and exceedingly dangerous—they fear the conscience, and provoke God to leave sinners to themselves—“My spirit shall not always strive with man—the times of ignorance God winked at, but now commands all men every where to repent.”

Saul of Tarsus speaks of himself as a chief of sinners “because he persecuted the church of God;” yet he obtained mercy! But those who sin against the light of their own minds, can draw little encouragement from thence. He hath declared the reason of the distinguishing mercy shown to him—“because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” * No sooner was he convinced of his mistake, than he returned with, “Lord what will thou have me to do?”—So do not those “who know their master’s will and do it not.” WOULD we share the blessedness of believing Saul, we must share his repentance; so shall we find mercy with God. “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all, is rich unto all that call upon him.” +

* 1 Timothy i. 13. + Romans x. 12.

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SERMON X.

David’s Sin in the Matter of Uriah.

2 Samuel xii, 13.

“And David said unto Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ And Nathan said unto David, ‘The lord also hath put away thy sin; then shalt not die.’”

The sin here referred to is that of David in the matter of Uriah. A strange and sad event—taken in all its circumstances and connections, it is without a parallel. But the circumstance most to be lamented, is that mentioned by the prophet, in the close of his message—“By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.”

The justness of this remark, doubtless appeared at that day, in the triumph of sinners and exultations of scoffers; and the story brought down to us, “on whom the ends of the world are come” is still abused to keep vice in countenance.

“Look to David, your man of religion! Your man after God’s own heart! and witness his complicated crimes! and his long continued security and unconcern under guilt, which cannot be charged on us, who view religion as a dream!”—So the infidel.

While people of another description, wound God's cause yet more deeply, by the argument which they draw from this fall of David; namely, those who are allowedly vicious, yet call themselves "of the household of faith—who are pure in their own eyes, though not cleansed from their filthiness." These, when reproved, especially if their piety is called in question, often recur to David for support —tell us, that "though eminent for piety, he was guilty of greater sins than theirs, and long continued in them—that he remained impenitent till visited by Nathan, after the birth of his child by Bathsheba. If, say they, he could continue so long secure and unconcerned, why not longer? And why may not others fall into sins and continue in them months and years after having received the grace of God, and after they are numbered among the saints?"

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This, we conceive, to be the most baleful conclusion which is drawn from this history. And could it be made to appear that such was David's state, for so long a term, we see no way to avoid the conclusion—see not but the idea which the scriptures give of religion as a holy principle, productive of a holy life, must be relinquished.

Such is the idea which the scriptures do give of religion—they teach, that it changeth the heart, and forms the new creature—that “in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil; that whomever doeth not righteousness is not of God; that by their fruits we are to know men.”

Thus speaks that holy book which we believe to be from God, and to shew us the way of salvation. But if the children of God are not made to differ from others, if they may live in allowed disregard of the law of God, like others, these distinctions are idle and unworthy our regard. This matter demands our attention.

From the subject before us, the errors now mentioned draw their chief support.

We do not flatter ourselves that we can stop mouths of scoffers, or so clearly elucidate this dark part of the book of God, that it will no more be abused to the purposes of depravity; but believe that it may be made apparent that it hath been mistaken and perverted; and thereby rendered the more mischievous. This will now be attempted.

That David remained unconcerned and devoid of repentance for the sins which he committed in the matter of Uriah, till awakened to consideration by the ministry of Nathan, seems to have been taken for granted, and to have been the ground of these abuses. This may have been the common opinion. Whether it is founded in reality, we will now inquire.

Or those who argue from a supposition that this was the case, we ask evidence that it was so. That we have no express declaration that Nathan found him a penitent, we conceive to be all that can be alleged as evidence that he remained till that time impenitent. To which may be rejoined, that we have no express declaration that Nathan found him impenitent. The fact is, both scripture and profane history are silent respecting the state of David's mind from the commission of the sins, till he was visited by the prophet. We are left therefore to judge the matter on other grounds. And on what grounds can we form a more profitable opinion than by considering *the general character of the man—the nature and effects of renewing grace—and the temper and conduct of the delinquent when he was reprov'd by the prophet?* From a consideration of these we may derive the most probable solution of the question, or judge what was probably the state in which David was found by Nathan.

It may be proper to premise,

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I. That good men, while in this state of imperfection, should be surprized by temptation into sins, and even heinous sins, is neither new nor strange. Many instances occur in the history of the saints recorded in the scriptures. “Aaron, the saint of the Lord,” and Moses, whose general character was that of “a servant, faithful in all God’s house,” were both seduced into sins of such enormity that they were excluded the land of promise, in common with rebellious Israel. Among New Testament saints similar lapses are observable. Even the apostles forsook the Savior, and fled when Judas led forth the hostile band to apprehend him; and Peter, when under the influence of fear, with oaths and imprecations “denied the Lord that bought him!” The habitual temper of these good men could not be argued—from these sudden acts. Neither is judgment to be formed of others, except by observing the general tenor of their lives. Strong and unexpected temptations may, and often do, seduce the best of those who remain in the body and retain the weakness of fallen creatures yet on trial.

II. There is something in each one’s constitution which predisposes to certain sins. To every person there is a “sin which most easily besets him”—from which he is liable to stronger temptation than from other sins—and temptation to such sins may rise from concurring circumstances, above its natural state, and become almost invincible. Nor will any person who reads the history of David doubt to what particular sin he was naturally most disposed. Neither are we insensible how one sin prepares the way for another, and strengthens temptation to it.

David’s sins on the occasion before us were complicated and exceeding sinful. But we know how he was seduced to the first, and how the others followed of course.

Respecting the state in which he was found by Nathan we may judge,

I. From his general character. This is so well known, that the bare mention is almost sufficient. The scriptures teach us that he was pious from his youth. When Samuel was sent to anoint him, sufficient intimation was given that his heart was right with God. When Elijah, the first born of Jesse palled before the prophet, pleased with his appearance, he supposed him to be the man whom God had chosen to rule his people —“Surely the Lord’s anointed is before him!”—but God refused him with this declaration, “The Lord seeth not appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” David’s after life justified the preference then given him.

No person acquainted with his history as contained in the sacred records, will scruple his general devotedness to the service of God.

Should doubt arise, we may refer to the charter given of him by the pen of inspiration, about half a century after his death. “David did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.” *

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* 1 Kings xv. 5.

In that matter he greatly erred. There is no need however to consider him as then fallen from grace. The remains of depravity which continues after renovation, are sufficient under existing circumstances to account for his fall on that occasion. But it is inconcievable that a person of established piety should remain for a whole year stupid and unconcerned under the guilt of such transgressions; and the utter improbability of such an event will be further apparent, if we attend,

II. To the nature and effects of renewing grace. It is no less true of holy than of unholy principles, that they are operative. The governing principle, whatever it may be, will bring forth fruit according to its nature. A GOOD man may be surprized into sin, as we have seen, but he will not go deliberately into the way of it, like the wicked. Neither do the two characters, when they have been seduced into sin, reflect upon it with similar feelings and views. When the good think on their ways, they are grieved and humbled for their faults, and turn their feet to God's testimonies; but the wicked bless themselves in their hearts, as fortunate in the accomplishment of their vicious desires. The good maintain a sense of God's presence—"Thou God seeth me." The wicked forget God or doubt his attention to their temper and conduct—"How doth God know? Is there knowledge in the most high?"

It is not strange if those whose only joys are the pleasures of sense, felicitate themselves when they attain them; but those who love and fear the Lord, and prefer his favor above all earthly joys, must have other views. If sensible that they have offended God, and incurred his displeasure, it greives them at their hearts, and fills them with deep concern.

Apart from all considerations of interest, the good see a baseness and deformity in sin, which render it the object of their aversion. They consider it the disgrace of their rational nature, and are humbled and abased when conscious that temptation hath prevailed to seduce them from the paths of rectitude. IT will not be imagined that David could banish thought, and drive away reflection, for a whole year after the commission of such enormous sin; as he committed in the matter now before us.

It is presumed that no man, retaining reason was ever able soon to forget any enormity, which he knew himself guilty. The remembrance always haunts the imagination, and conscience goads the mind with a thousand stings. The delinquent hath not power to prevent it. He cannot drive away thought, and turn off his attention to other objects.

It is further presumed, that every good man is formed to the habit of reflection; that he often enters into himself by a serious attention to his state; considers his temper; review's his conduct, and brings both to the divine standard, that he may know himself, and reform whatever is amiss.

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A person of David's character, especially circumstanced as he was at that time, could not possibly have been destitute of considerations. The society of the woman who had been the occasion of the crimes which had so maimed his character, must have brought those crimes to his remembrance, and kept them on his mind. Every time she came into his presence, or cheered him by her smiles, a group of affecting thoughts must have rushed in upon him; his first offence, an offence which the law of his God would have obliged him to punish with death, in a subject, and his after, and still more enormous sins, which he had committed to hide the first, and possess the object which he was forbidden even to covet, would occur to his mind. From the lovely object in his presence, his mind would naturally revert to her late, first greatly injured, and then murdered husband; to his faithfulness and zeal for the honor of his king and country, which had torn him from the embraces of a lovely partner, and the society of a family dear to him, and would not even suffer him to visit them when liberty was given him of his prince; to his careful attention to deliver the letters, by which he had unsuspectingly borne the mandate for his own murder; to his heroism when ordered up to the walls of the besieged city, though not supported by the commander in chief; and his noble exertions to subdue the enemies of Israel, amidst which he had bravely fallen! Such reflexions must have filled his mind; nor was it possible that he should have driven them away.

Neither could he do other than condemn the part which he had acted and feel pain when he considered it. Surely such considerations must have racked his guilty soul, and made him tremble and mourn in bitterness of his spirit before God.

A graceless tyrant who neither fears God, nor regards man, may view, his subjects as made for him, and think himself entitled to deprive them at his pleasure, of every comfort, and even life. This hath been the avowed sentiment of many an eastern despot. But it is not supposeable of a good man—"the man after God's own heart," though now seduced into certain heinous sins. Surely he could not think on his ways—on his then late transgressions, but remorse must have harrowed up his soul! He must have been deeply affected, and led to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" The feelings of a good man, who had been seduced into sin and reflected upon it with deep contrition, are pathetically described by the pen of this same person, in the thirty second psalm; and description is couched in the first person, as what himself had experienced. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old by reason of my roaring all the days long. For day and night thy hand was heavy on me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." There is a strong probability that his feeling on this occasion, before he confessed his sin, and obtained a sense of pardon, are here expressed. They are the same which we should suppose he must feel while tormented with a sense of such enormous guilt.

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III. We are to consider his temper and conduct when reproved by the prophet.

These are the same which we should expect, did we know him to have been then a penitent. He was indeed taken by guile, and made to condemn himself before he perceived that he was the guilty person of whom the prophet complained. But had he till that time continued impenitent, it is not probable that he would have been instantly humbled, and immediately confessed his sin with true contrition. It is much more probable that he would have resented the application to himself, as an affront offered to royalty, and avenged himself on the Lord's messenger.

God hath power instantly to change the sinner's heart without previous awakenings; but this is not the method of grace. Convictions, ordinarily, if not invariably, antecede conversion, prepare for it, and lead to it.

Neither is this the method of grace, only with the sinner at the first great change, termed the, new birth, but with the saint who falls into heinous sins, and thereby resembles the sinner. When a good man yields to temptation and falls from his steadfastness, God commonly hides his face from him—for a term, and often for a considerable term, he sits in darkness—is ready to give up his hope—to conclude that he hath believed in vain—never loved God or hated sin—never passed from death into life. In fine, he feels similar pains, and passeth in many respects, a similar change, when renewed again by repentance, as when first made a new creature.

Do we ever see persons who have been seduced into great and heinous sins, brought back to God, and comforted with his presence without sensations of this kind? We presume the instance cannot be adduced. We should look with a jealous eye on one who pretended to be an example of it. From the methods of grace at present, we may judge of them in times past. God is the same—sin equally his aversion, and sinners alike the objects of his displeasure.

The supposition that a person is one moment a hardened sinner; the next a thorough penitent, pardoned, restored and comforted of God, is so diverse from his common manner of treating great offenders, that it should not be admitted in a given case, without clear and strong evidence; and in the case before us there is no evidence; even circumstances have a different aspect.

No sooner was this offender reproved, than he discovered a humble penitent disposition. He, freely confessed his sin, both to God and man, as one who had thought on his ways and repented of his transgressions; which could not have been expected of one who after the commission of such crimes, remained thoughtless and secure, till the moment when his guilt and danger were set before him.

But if David was a penitent before he was visited by Nathan, why had he concealed his repentance? Why spread a veil over it and neglected to glorify God by a confession of his sins? Did he think it sufficient to confess to God, and humble himself in secret?

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So some argue, and endeavor to cover the sins of which the world knows them to be guilty. But we are far from suspecting this of David.

To break the divine law is implicitly to condemn it. "What iniquity have your fathers found in me?" To conceal sorrow for sin, is in effect to justify it. Then only is God glorified by an offender, when he takes the blame and the shame of his sins on himself, acknowledging the law which he hath broken to be "holy, just and good." Of these things, this offender could not be insensible David was indeed under strong temptation to hide his sins. He was the head of a family, several members of which were abandoned characters. These he had doubtless often reproved. He was the head of a nation, numbers of which were children of Belial. These he had called to repentance, reproved, punished. He had long professed religion—perhaps often declared its power to change the heart and mend the life. But if his crimes were now made public, he must appear "a sinner above all who dwelt at Jerusalem!" To have his conduct known would cover him with shame, and "give great occasion to the enemy to blaspheme, and speak reproachfully."

Did these considerations prevent him from confessing his sins, and induce him to cover his transgressions? They were mostly arguments for his proclaiming his repentance, had his sins been public.

By his sins he had countenanced wickedness, and set the example of it in a dignified station. By his confession he would condemn it, and justify the law of God, which forbids it; and by his return to duty, do every thing then in his power, to repair the injury he had done and prevent or remove the bad effects of his example. Why then had he neglected it?

There was only one consideration which could excuse him—that, we apprehend, justified him. His sins in this affair were not public. It appears from several circumstances that they were kept out of sight till the prophet was sent to reprove and publish them, and his repentance of them. Joab knew indeed that the king wished the death of Uriah. It is not certain that he knew the cause. If he did, it is not probable that he had divulged it.

That these matters were not transacted openly, or generally known, maybe inferred from two considerations, namely, from Bathsheba's going into mourning for Uriah, and from Nathan's declaration, when he foretold the evils which would come on David and his family, to punish his sins on this occasion, notwithstanding his repentance. Mournings were very short among the Hebrews; but this adulteress would not have put on mourning, or David delayed to take her to his house, to be his wife, till her mourning was ended, had this affair been public. But, that it was not so, is put out of doubt by the language of the prophet in his address to the king—"Thou didst it secretly."

If the matter was not public, the delinquent was not to be criminated because he did not make it so. Sins committed in secret are to be confessed and mourned only before him who sees in secret. Such seems to have been David's fixation from the time of his fall, till the publication of his guilt, by the prophet; during which term he felt all the horrors of conscious guilt; "God's hand lying heavy on him."

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As it pleased God that both his fall and recovery should be made public, the prophet seems to have delivered his message before witnesses. This took away the ground of temptation longer to hide his sins, and cleared the way to a public renunciation, and return to duty. And the fallen prince waited no exhortations—needed no entreaties—“I acknowledged my sin unto thee; and mine iniquity have I not hid; I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou foregavest the iniquity of my sin.” *

* Psalm xxxii. 5.

Thus the opinion of those who suppose that David remained impenitent and secure, till awakened to consideration by the ministry of Nathan, is devoid of proof, and even of probability. David's well known character—the nature of renewing grace; and the temper and conduct of this transgressor, when reproved by the prophet, concur to prove him then already a penitent; which is confirmed by the consolations forthwith administered to him by the Lord's messenger.

If in this instance God pardoned, and gave a sense of pardon, to so heinous an offender, without a moment intervening sense of guilt, and evidence of pardon and peace, it must have been a very singular divine treatment of so vile a sinner!

And if David, after having been long eminent for piety, lived a year of stupid unconcern, under such enormous guilt, it must have been a very strange event! A phenomenon in the history of man, unequalled in the annals of the world! Whether there is evidence to justify so strange a conclusion, judge ye.

If we have not mistaken our subject, this affair gives no countenance to those who pretend religion to be a thing of nought—that it doth not change the heart and life, turning men from sin to holiness. Good people may be seduced into sin, but they are soon renewed by repentance—soon turn again to the Lord in the way of duty, confessing their sins and renewing their purposes and engagements to serve the Lord —“That which I know not teach thou me; and wherein I have done iniquity, I will do no more.”

Neither doth this affair yield comfort and hope to those, who while they call themselves saints, live like sinners. If *here*, they find no comfort and support, where will they find it? The only example thought to have been found in “the footsteps of the flock,” fails them; and we are left to conclude that sanctification is the principal evidence of justification—“that by their fruits we are to know men.”

It is a dark omen when professors palliate their errors and deviations from duty, by pleading those of saints of old. Those saints erred; but they did not long continue in sin —“When they thought on their ways they turned by repentance.” Neither did they flatter themselves in allowed wickedness.

If any allege the sins of former saints in excuse for their own, they allege not that which distinguished them as saints, but that which they retained as sinners—not that which they possessed of the image of God, but that which remained to them of the image of Satan. This they may have in full, and yet be of their father the Devil. And such is the sad state of those who allowed serve sin, under whatever pretence.

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Those who are born of God, favor the thing which are of God. Sin is odious in their view. They long for freedom from it—"Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

The saints wish for heaven, not only that they may see "their father who is in heaven," and the divine Redeemer, "who loved them and gave himself for them;" but because there "the spirits of the just are made perfect"—because there they expect to be holy as God is holy—because there, to be "satisfied with God's likeness, and rejoice always before him." May God give us this temper, and keep us to his kingdom, for his mercy's sake in Christ. Amen.

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SERMON XI.

General Character of Christians.

Galatians v. 24.

"And they that are Christ's have crucified the Flesh, with the Affections and Lusts."

St. Paul is supposed to have been the first herald of gospel grace to the Galatians; and they appear to have rejoiced at the glad tidings, and to have received the bearer with much respect. But after his departure, certain judaizing teachers went among them, and labored but too successfully, to alienate their affections from him, and turn them from the simplicity of the gospel.

The malice and errors of those deceitful workers, and the mischief which they occasioned at Galatia, caused the writing of this epistle: which, like the other writings of this apostle, reflects light on the gospel in general, while it served to correct the mistakes of those professors of Christianity, and guide their erring footsteps into the way of peace and truth.

It is not our design to enter into the controversy between this inspired teacher, and his enemies. We are only concerned to understand him, and shall receive his instructions as communicated from above. The primary design of this epistle was to refute those false teachers who urged circumcision, and the observance of sundry parts of the Levitical code, which had been abrogated by the gospel. This appears to have been a leading error of those anarchists. That the apostle did not lay the intolerable burdens of the Mosaic ritual, on the professors of Christianity, was made the ground of a charge against him. St. Paul defended himself by evincing the errors of his opponents, shewing that Christians are made free from the ceremonial law; and that their justification before God is not in virtue of any obedience of their own, to either the ceremonial, or the moral law, but of grace through faith in Christ.

In the former part of the epistle, he shows the impossibility of justification in any other than the gospel way—especially in that way, to which those false teachers directed—shews that they subverted the gospel, and rendered Christ's sufferings of no effect—"By the works of the law, shall no flesh be justified—If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." *

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* Chapter ii. 16, 21.

We conceive these to be obvious truths, and wonder that they should be matter of doubt, or dispute, among those who are favored with revelation, and receive it as given of God. Perfect obedience is evidently the demand of the divine law, and condemnation is denounced against the breakers of it. "This do, and thou shalt live, but the soul that sinneth, it shall die." * But none of our race keep the law. "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise "by faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe." Mankind are "shut up to the faith in Christ.." This is the way in which God "hath mercy on whom he will have mercy. He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Therefore the hope of the apostle, in the way of faith, while discarding hope in any other way. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ; even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the Faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law."

* Lev. xviii. 5. Ezek. xviii. 4.

From the reasoning of the apostle, the false teachers at Galatia seem not to have urged obedience to the whole law. Circumcision they taught to be indispensable. St. Paul allures them, that if they were under obligation to receive circumcision, they were equally obliged to keep the whole law; and that they bound themselves to this by submitting to be circumcised—that if they reverted to the law, and placed their dependence on their obedience to it, they renounced the grace of Christ, and would not be benefited by it.

"Behold, I Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised. Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that it is circumcised, that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. Christ is become of none effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace,"

While such was the state of those who followed the judaizing teachers, those who retained the gospel as taught by the apostle, had another hope—a hope which would not make ashamed—a hope in divine grace through faith in Christ—"We through the spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."

Such is every Christian's hope before God. He "counts all things to be loss and dung that he win Christ; but the righteousness which is of God by faith."

But while St. Paul was exhibiting and urging these important truths, on the wavering Galatians, he foresaw, that it would be objected, that the scheme which he advanced, tended to licentiousness—that if men might be saved by faith without the works of the law, they might indulge themselves in sin—that this would render Christ the minister of

sin. The same objection appears to have been made at Rome, where a faction existed similar to this at Galatia. This consequence the apostle rejected with abhorrence. "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: Yea we establish the law."

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The Levitical code included both the ceremonial and the moral law. Though St. Paul declares justification unattainable by obedience to either or to both, he did not set aside the moral law, as no longer obligatory, as he did the ceremonial. This latter had answered the ends of its appointment, and was abolished by fulfillment. It was only a shadow of good things to come, and fled away before that of which it was a shadow. Christ had therefore blotted it out and taken it away. But the moral law was not done away. Christ hath fulfilled it for those who believe on him; but it doth not therefore cease to be obligatory upon them. It is of universal and eternal obligation. The salvation of mankind, doth not, however, depend on their obedience to it. If it did, they could not be saved, because all mankind have broken it. "Salvation is of grace, through faith."

Instead of setting Christians free from obligation to keep the moral law, what Christ hath done for them strengthens their obligations to obey it. An increase of mercies is an increase of obligations to serve the Lord.

But yet more is done to secure obedience from those who are Christ's —yea enough to secure it. A change passeth on them, when they become his, which reconciles them to the law, and causes them to delight in it, and in the duties which it enjoins. This produces a pleasing conformity to it—"his commandments are not grievous." Their obedience is sincere and universal. Others may render a partial obedience, out of fear, but the obedience of the renewed flows from love, and hath respect to all God's commandments.

Remains of depravity abide in the Christian, but they do not habitually govern in him. That they are not wholly purged out of his nature, is to him the occasion of grief—causes him to go sorrowing: But he doth not gain complete deliverance till he puts off the body. He puts on, however, the gospel armor, and maintains a warfare against his own corruptions within, no less than against the powers of darkness without. Though sometimes wounded, and made to go on his way halting, he is in his general course victorious, rising superior to opposition, and living unto God. "Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God"—cannot sin: like others, allowedly and habitually. "How shall he who is dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

Such is the character of the Christian, as drawn in the bible; so that all ground of objection to the gospel scheme, as drawn by St. Paul, is removed. Those who are Christ's instead of taking liberty to sin, because "they are not under the law, but under grace," are of all men most careful to do God's commandments; and from the noblest principles. Their obedience is not servile, but filial.

This is the spirit of the text. *They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the afflictions and lusts—HAVE crucified.* The change which frees from the governing power of indwelling corruption, and disposeth to walk in newness of life, hath already passed upon them. None are Christ's till this change takes place in them.

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But while the apostle vindicates the doctrine of grace, and shews its beneficial influence on the morals of men, care is taken to guard against mistakes on the other hand—not to give occasion to consider renewing grace as wholly eradicating the principles of depravity, and putting an end, at once to the spiritual context. This subject is treated more largely in the epistle to the Romans.* But the opposition of natural and gracious principles, is here mentioned, and some of its effects described. “The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

* Chapter vii.

In every man, whatever may be his character, there are different principles, which, struggle and contend with one another. The natural man feels a bias to wickedness, and wishes to indulge his depraved inclinations. But reason forbids, and conscience remonstrates, and warns him to beware what he doth—reminds him that to yield to passion is wrong—to indulge appetite unreasonably is sinful—that for these things God will bring him into judgment. Thus the principles implanted in the mind, by the God of nature, withstand the sinner in his way, and resist him in his course; they hold him back and restrain him from gratifying his natural desires—from doing that to which he is inclined, and hath power to do. By this means he is prevented from giving full latitude to his corruptions; yea, he is sometimes influenced to do good. Herod was a vile character; but “he feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him he did many things, and heard him gladly.” * Many similar instances might be adduced. There is not a sinner who doth not feel the natural bias, and the power of reason and conscience, driving and contending within him; and sometimes the one prevails to influence his conduct, and sometimes the other.

* Mark vi. 20.

Neither is the Christian free from similar struggles. Reason and conscience have naturally the same power in him which they have in others. The corrupt bias, is also weakened in renovation; yea receives a deadly wound. But it is not immediately destroyed. Still its influence is felt, and its effects observed. Sometimes it evinceth so much power, that its deadly wound seems to be healed. Reason and conscience, strengthened by renewing grace, ordinarily prevail over indwelling depravity; but not without a struggle, as every Christian can testify—neither do the better principles always conquer. Sometimes the opposing principles, or powers, prevail, and lead to error and wickedness. Thus “the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh—so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

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Neither the regenerate, nor the unregenerate, are free to do all that to which the generally governing principle inclines. The difference between the renewed, and the unrenewed, is not that the former is free from temptation, the latter overcome by it, at every attack. Neither is the case. Both meet with temptation, and often that which is severe. Each sometimes overcomes; at other times is overcome by it. But the renewed formed to the habit of attention and watchfulness, and looking to God for help, and acting, in the main, uprightly before God, is usually a conqueror; while the unrenewed, habitually careless, and negligent of watchfulness and prayer, is more often conquered, and hurried into error and wickedness. The renewed are chiefly restrained by love to God and duty; the unrenewed by fear of punishment; Though fear hath a degree of influence on the former; and other considerations, beside fear, are not wholly, devoid of influence on the latter.

How far a Christian may be influenced by remaining corruption, and carried away by the prevalence of temptation; or how far a sinner may be restrained by the influence of those principles and considerations, which withstand him in his course, we are unable to determine. That both feel and are influenced by those opposing principles, is not matter of doubt. We experience it in ourselves, whatever our characters may be; and we observe it in others. None are so moulded into the divine image, as to become perfect—neither doth depravity attain so complete an ascendant over any who remain in the body, as to divest them of all restraints, and yield them wholly up to the vicious propensity. Restraints, yea inward restraints operate in degree, on the most depraved.

This is a mixed state. The good and the bad are here blended together. “The wheat and the tares must grow together until the harvest”—yea not only in every field, but in every heart. None are perfectly good, or completely bad, while in this world. The finishing traits of character are referred to that to come. In that world we expect, that both the righteous and the wicked, will be perfect in their kind —“the spirits of the just be made perfect”—those of the opposite character put on the full image of their infernal parent.

IMPROVEMENT.

If those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts, How stands the case with us? Are we thus made to differ from the wicked world? Do we love God—believe on his Son— do his commandments, and trust his grace? Then, “to us to live is Christ, and to die gain.” Here we must have trials—this is not our rest. But the time is short. Soon we shall be called “from our labors, and our works will follow us,” Soon we shall be with Christ—behold his glory, and rejoice in his presence. Happy state!

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But let us beware deception. Some “hold a lie in their right hands; cry peace when there is no peace to them.” Let us commune with our own hearts; attend to our temper and conduct; inquire whether we have taken up our cross, and are following Christ? Whether the spirit of Christ dwelleth in us. If we have not his spirit, we are none of his. “If we have his spirit we walk as he walked.” If this is our happy state, we shall ere long hear from our Judge, “come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world.” But if found sinners, a very different doom awaits us.

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SERMON XII.

The aggravated Guilt of him who delivered Christ to Pilate.

John xix.10, 11.

“Then saith Pilate unto him, 'Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?' Jesus answered, 'Thou couldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above: Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.'”

Judea was conquered by the Romans and reduced to a province of their empire, before Christ suffered for the sins of men. When the Jews conspired his death, Pilate was governor of that province. The power of life and death was in his hands. Though said to have been devoid of principle, he was unwilling to give sentence against Jesus. Free from Jewish prejudices, he was convinced of Christ's innocence; that he had committed no offence, either against his own nation, or against the Romans; but that for envy he had been arraigned, condemned, and delivered up as a malefactor.

A mighty prince was then expected to arise in Israel. That he would save his people from their enemies, and crush the powers which held them in subjection, was the general idea entertained of him. But the Jews had no expectations of such a deliverer in the Son of Mary; nor did the Roman Governor see aught in him to excite suspicion of a formidable enemy. He wished, therefore, to release him; repeatedly declared him not guilty; and would have set him at liberty, but the Jews opposed. They declared that “by their law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God”—or gave himself out for the expected Messias.

This was probably the first hint which Pilate received of this nature, and it seems to have alarmed him. “When he heard that saying he was more afraid.”

Pilate was not an Atheist. He appears to have had some knowledge of a divine existence and belief of a superintending providence. Living among the Jews, he was,



no doubt, acquainted with their religion, and their expectations of a deliverer; and if there was a suspicion that this was that deliverer, it concerned him to act with caution; at least to make inquiry. He therefore returned to the judgment hall, and entered on another examination of the prisoner. He began by inquiring after his origin. "He said to Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer." The test follows, in which we observe the following particulars, viz:

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I. Pilate blaming Jesus, for refusing to answer him—boasting of his power, and appealing to our Lord, that he possessed it. *Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?*

II. Christ reminding Pilate, that he possessed only delegated power; intimating that he was accountable for the use he made of it. *Thou couldest have no power against me, except it was given thee from above.*

III. Christ aggravating the guilt of those who had delivered him to Pilate, from a consideration of the power which he possessed, in which there might be an allusion to Pilate's character as an unprincipled man. *Therefore, he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.* We will treat of these in their order.

I. We observe Pilate blaming Jesus for refusing to answer him; boasting of his power, and appealing to our Lord that he possessed it. *Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?*

But why is Christ faulted? He had said enough to convince the court of his innocence. The judge had repeatedly and publicly declared it. "I find no fault in him."

Christ's silence was not sullen, or contemptuous. He had said enough. His silence was prudent—perhaps necessary. He had come into the world to suffer—"to make his soul an offering for sin." Had he said more, perhaps Pilate had not dared to give sentence against him. Had not Christ died the ends of his coming had been frustrated. Therefore was he now dumb before his oppressors, agreeably to the prophecy. "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep is dumb before his shearers, so he opened not his mouth."

It was necessary that evidence should be given of Christ's innocence, sufficient to convince the honest mind, that he was not a malefactor—that he did not die for his own sin. This had been given. It was enough—rendered his murderers inexcusable. The wisdom of providence permitted no more.

Pilate declared himself convinced. But then *he had power either to crucify Christ, or to release him.* He felt himself possessed of this power, and appealed to our Lord whether he did not possess it.

Pilate knew what was right—what he ought to do. Conscience directed him to acquit the guiltless. But this did not necessitate him to do it. He had power to do right. He had power also to do wrong.

Others possess similar power. Every moral agent hath power to obey or disobey the dictates of his conscience. It is not the method of heaven to compel men to good, or leave them to be compelled to evil. God intended man to be a free agent, who should

choose for himself the part he would act; and endowed him with a self determining power, to capacitate him to choose. Devoid of this power, he could not be accountable.

Man ought to be governed by reason and conscience. These make known his duty, and offer proper motives to induce him to discharge it. But they do not oblige him to it. It is referred to his own choice. If he prefer doing wrong, to doing right, he may do it.

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This is exemplified in the case before us. Sufficient evidence was given of Christ's innocence. The judge was convinced, and knew that it was his duty to treat him as innocent. But if to answer worldly ends, or in any respect to gratify depravity, he preferred crucifying the guiltless, he had power to do it. Though Jesus was the Son of God, God had left him in the hands of the enemy. "It was their hour and the power of darkness." They chose and conspired his death. The Jews would not receive such a Messiah. Pilate did not choose to offend the Jews. The former urged his crucifixion, for fear "all men would believe on him." The latter was prevailed with to condemn the guiltless, because he wished to gratify the chiefs of the nation which he governed. Both sinned against the light of their own minds, not of necessity, but out of choice—knowingly did wrong to gain worldly ends; or avoid temporal disadvantages.

Sinners commonly act on the same principles. They can distinguish between good and evil—can "judge of themselves what is right." They know it to be their duty to choose the good, and refuse the evil. But possessing power to counteract the dictates of conscience, often to gain worldly ends, and answer sinister views, do counteract them—choose that for which they are condemned of themselves.

It is folly to pretend that our choices are necessary. The proposition involves absurdity. Choice and necessity are often opposites.

Some bewildered in the labyrinth of metaphysics have doubted the plainest truths—the existence of matter! And even their own existence! But these doubts are a species of madness. To the person of common sense they are unnecessary. Let him only believe his senses, which the author of nature hath given to instruct him, and they will all vanish.

In the case before us, a single glance inward, carries full conviction that we are free. To offer arguments in proof is superfluous—is trifling—it is to ape the philosopher who attempted to syllogize himself into a conviction of his own existence! *

* Cogito, ergo sum. Descartes.

From the knowledge of our capacity, and liberty of choice, ariseth sense of merit and demerit. And thence our expectation of reward or punishment from an enlightened and righteous tribunal. Were we necessitated to actions, now, the most criminal, we should have no sense of guilt; neither should we fear condemnation from a just judge on their account. Did we choose such actions, if we knew our choices to be the effect of invincible, supernal influence, they would give us no concern. On our part, no criminality would be attached to them; it would rest with the efficient. Had Pilate been compelled to give sentence against Christ, he would have had no sense of guilt; nor could he have been justly criminated. But when the motives which actuated him, and his freedom of choice are considered, he must have been condemned of himself, and of all mankind.

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When Pilate appealed to our Lord, that he was possessed of power, either *to crucify or release him*, the justice of the claim is admitted; but then,

II. He is reminded by the divine prisoner, that he possessed only delegated power, intimating that he was accountable for the use he should make of it. *Thou couldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above.*

Pilate probably prided himself on his exaltation. He was set in authority. In his province, his power resembled that formerly in the hands of the Babalonish tyrant: “Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive.” It might flatter his pride to end himself the judge of Judah; others as being of divine origin—the Son of God—the expected Messiah, who was to deliver Israel. and raise them to power. Perhaps he valued himself on power to do either right or wrong—that he was necessitated to neither. *Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?*

Though Christ had given him no answer when Pilate demanded his origin, he now reminds him, boasting of his power, that it was all derived, or delegated; particularly that which he possessed over his prisoner, whom he had acknowledged to be faultless: *Thou couldst have no power against me except it were given thee from above.* As though he had said, “Remember Pilate, that with all your high feelings, and parade of power, you have no power which is properly your own; none which is not derived from above; none for the use of which you are not accountable. There is one who ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth them to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over them the basest of men,” To answer his mysterious purposes you are now in authority; but forget not whence it is derived, and the consequences of abusing it. “There may be oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, but marvel not at the matter; for he who is higher than the highest regardeth”—he will set all right in the end. For the use which you make of your powers, you must give account to him.

Such seems to have been the import of Christ’s reply to this haughty ruler, boasting of powers, on this occasion. What sentiments it raised in the breast of this Roman, we are not informed; but the reply was full of salutary counsel and instruction. Had Pilate regarded it as he ought, it would have prevented him from having been a principal actor in the vilest enormity ever committed on this globe.

Pilate seems to have felt in degree, the weight of Christ’s reply, and to have been the more concerned. For it follows: “From thenceforth Pilate sought to release him.” He had sought it before. “From henceforth,” he was yet more desirous to set Christ at liberty, and exerted himself more earnestly to persuade the Jews to consent to his discharge.

But this was not all which Christ said on the occasion; he added,

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II. Another observation, which related to those who had conspired his death, and brought him to Pilate's bar; perhaps more particularly to Judas, who had betrayed him—therefore HE that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. If only one person is here intended, as having delivered Christ to Pilate, Judas must have been the person.

That Pilate possessed such power, the power of life and death, is declared an aggravation of his guilt, who had delivered him to Pilate; in which there might be an allusion to Pilate's character as an unprincipled man. He was known to be under the government of appetite, passion, or selfishness. He had been often guilty of injustice and cruelty in his public administration. Therefore had his enemies the greater sin in delivering Jesus unto him.

Such we apprehend to be the meaning of the text; which hath been thought to be obscure and difficult. The difficulty will strike us, if we read the whole passage as it stands in the translation. Pilate saith unto him, Speak thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered,

Thou couldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above; THEREFORE he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

The last clause seems at first view, to refer to the words which immediately precede, which is to understand our Savior as aggravating the guilt of those who delivered him to Pilate, from the consideration of Pilate's power having been derived from above.

This cannot be the meaning. All power in the hands of creatures, maybe traced to the same source. It is derived from above. But the source whence power is derived is out of the question respecting the merit or demerit attending the use of it. The guilt of him who delivered Christ to Pilate, was neither increased nor diminished by it.

The consequence, THEREFORE he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin, looks back to words preceding—I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee. His sin was great, who delivered Christ to such an one; to one possessed, of his power, and of his character; much greater than though he had delivered him to one devoid of power to crucify; or to one who was a man of principle. Delivering Jesus to Pilate was like delivering Daniel to the lions; or the three children to the fiery furnace. The rage of the lions, and the power of the flames, were restrained by the greater power of God; but no thanks to the enemies of those holy men—they could be considered in no other light than that of murderers.

The Supreme ruler could have restrained Pilate and have prevented his having yielded to Christ's enemies, and given him to their will. But the determinate counsel of heaven had otherwise resolved before the incarnation. "It was necessary that Christ should

suffer, and enter into his glory.” Therefore was he given up to the rage of his enemies who thirsted for his blood.

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Christ's crucifixion was the design of his enemies in delivering him to Pilate. This was their sin. God overruled it for good, and made it the occasion of glory to himself, and salvation to sinners. This is no alleviation of their guilt. "They meant not so; neither did their heart think so. For envy did they deliver him."

What Christ said concerning the source, whence Pilate derived his power, comes in by a parenthesis. It is unconnected with the other parts of the sentence, which is complete without it. "I have power to crucify thee—The greater is their sin who delivered me to you. But you have no power against me that you have not received from above. Remember it is derived from heaven, and to the God of heaven you are accountable for the use you make of it."

This memento, which comes in by the bye, was a proper caution to the ruler not to abuse his power. Had he acted agreeable to the evident design of it—so acted, as to have been justified to himself, and able to give a good account to the source of power, for the use he made of that which was delegated to him, it would have prevented him from delivering Jesus to his enemies, add kept him clear of a crime, the perpetration of which, darkened even the natural world, and throw it into convulsions!

Pilate felt so much force in the warning, that he was perplexed. He wished to acquit the prisoner; of whose innocence he was satisfied; hut he feared the Jews. He was probably apprehensive that they might inform against him at Rome, as he knew, that much of his past administration could not be justified. He had not therefore the courage to tell the Jews, that justice forbad, and he would not condemn the guiltless. What had he to do with justice, who had often sported with it, to gratify his passions, or gain his selfish purposes? Who had done it openly, and it was matter of public notoriety? The Jews urged, "if thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." Pilate trembled; but his fear of Caesar prevailed above his fear of God. "He conferred therefore, that it should be as they required, and delivered Jesus to their will."

REFLECTIONS

I. When we contemplate these things, what a series of wonders rise to our view? The state of man—the way in which he was brought into it; and that in which only he could be delivered from it, are all mysterious! Man had ruined himself—ruined his race! Human guilt could not be expiated without blood! Without blood divine! Man had sinned, and the Son of God must suffer, or sin could not be pardoned! No other sacrifice could make atonement. Christ consented to undertake the work of our redemption—to "make his soul an offering for sin!" But how? He must take human nature! Become man! Wonder of wonders! Still difficulty remained. He must die, "the just for the unjust!" In what manner could this be accomplished? Christ's sufferings would be, of all crimes, the most sinful, in those by whom he suffered. No good man

could knowingly take part in them. They could only be the work of Christ's enemies, and of the enemies of God, and goodness.

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It is no small part of this mystery, that the good should oppose, and that it should be their duty to oppose, that which had become necessary for man's salvation! And that the wicked should be engaged to do that which was requisite for this end! And that their enmity against God and the Redeemer, should excite and influence them thereto!

But though every thing relating to this matter is too deep for us. Deity had no embarrassment. To omniscience all was easy and obvious. The great Supreme needed only to sit at helm, superintend and overrule the lulls of apostate creatures, to effect the purposes of his grace! Need only to permit man freely to follow his own inclinations! "The wrath of man would thus be made to praise God;" and the designs of mercy be accomplished! The greatest good be occasioned by the greatest evil! God glorified, and sinners saved!

The mystery of redemption was veiled, till atonement had been made for sin. That satisfaction was to be made to divine justice, by the sufferings of a divine person, remained a hidden mystery, till explained by the event. This was necessary. Had the enemy been able to penetrate the design, these things would not have been done. Satan would not have instigated, nor his adherents crucified the Lord of glory.

The powers of darkness were laboring to subvert and destroy; they vainly thought to defeat the purposes of grace; but were made instrumental in their accomplishment. "The wise were taken in their own craftiness; the purposes of the froward carried headlong; but the divine purposes stood, and God performed all his pleasure! Oh, the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

II. Another thing which our subject suggests to our consideration, is the way of God with man. God hath provided a savior, and offered salvation—he hath pointed out the way of duty, and commanded us to walk in it—allured us thereto by promises, and barred up the way to destruction by threatenings. Those who enjoy the gospel, have life and death set before them. But no constraint is laid upon them—they choose for themselves, and the consequences follow.

Though the best services of fallen man are imperfect, and mercy offered in Christ his only hope, he hath reason to expect saving mercy while seeking it in the way of duty, and only while thus seeking. When we "keep consciences void of offence, toward God and men, then are we satisfied from ourselves," and expect the approbation of our judge. When we act differently, we are condemned of ourselves, and tremble to approach the enlightened tribunal.

These views are natural—they are written on the heart or conscience, by the creator's hand, and indicate what we may reasonably expect from him who knows our hearts—from him who is moral governor of all worlds.

As we know ourselves to be free agents, and as we possess only delegated powers, we are certainly accountable for the use which we make of those powers. The duties which rise out of such a situation, and the consequences which will follow, according to the manner in which we act our parts, need not to be pointed out—they lie open to every eye.

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III. When we consider the struggle in Pilate's breast, between sense of duty, and a desire to please the world, and how it terminated, we see the danger of wanting fixed principles of rectitude—of not being determined, at all events, to do right, whatever may be the consequences.

Pilate's duty was plain. He knew his duty—felt his obligation to do it, and wished to do it, that he might feel easy, and not be concerned for consequences. But he had formerly sacrificed conscience to appetite, passion, or selfishness, and it was known. This exposed him to temptation again to do wrong. He who had violated conscience to gain worldly ends, might do it again. Pilate had exposed himself by past conduct—could not justify his past administration—his enemies might report him to Caesar—he could not answer for himself before Caesar; but if he would again violate conscience, oblige the Jews, in a matter they had much at heart, he hoped their friendship—that they would spread a veil over his past conduct, and report in his favor at Rome.

Such was the situation into which he had brought himself by willful deviations from duty—thence temptations to farther and greater deviations—temptations not easily overcome—temptations by which he was overcome, and seduced to the most horrid wickedness—crucifying the Lord of glory!

Those who would maintain their integrity, and stand in the evil day, must resolve to do right; to obey the dictates of conscience; they must beware the beginnings of sin; hold no parley with the enemy; never hesitate, whether it is not best, in any case to yield to temptation; nor make attempts to please those who wish them, and dare to importune them to counteract the light of their own minds— “trimming their way to seek love.”

To enter on such a course, is to go on forbidden ground. It is to pass the bounds, and go into the way of seduction. “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not into the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.” *

* Proverbs iv. 14.

What the poet observes, respecting one species of temptation, holds, in degree, of every other.

“In spite of all the virtue we can boast, The *person* who deliberates in lost.”—Young.

* * * * *

SERMON XIII.

The Trial of Peter's love to Christ.

John xxi. 15, 16, 17.



“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?’ He saith unto him, ‘Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.’ He saith unto him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He saith to him again a second time, ‘Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me?’ He saith unto him. ‘Yea Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.’ He saith unto him, ‘Feed my sheep.’ He saith unto him the third time, ‘Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me?’ Peter was grieved, because he said to him the third time, ‘Lovest thou me?’ And he said unto him, ‘Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.’ Jesus saith unto him, ‘Feed my sheep.’”

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“This was the third time that Jesus shewed himself to the disciples after he was risen from the dead.” But it was not the last time. “He often shewed himself alive: after his passion, being seen of them for forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Once he appeared to a Christian assembly—“was seen by above five hundred brethren” at the same time. When he had given to his disciples those infallible proofs of his resurrection, and those instructions, which their work required, “while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” This visit was made to a part of the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; whither they had retired after the crucifixion; but whether to follow their former occupation, or in expectation of meeting there the risen Savior, who had promised to manifest himself to them in Galilee, we are not informed. They were however engaged in fishing, when after the fruitless labors of a night, they saw Jesus in the morning standing on the shore.

God looks favorably on his people when he sees them employed in honest secular business; and sometimes manifests himself to them.

This was a kind instructive visit, to these disciples; especially to Peter. Peter was of a bold, forward disposition, naturally eager and confident, and so strongly attached to his Lord, that he thought nothing could separate him from him—neither allurements, nor terrors. Therefore when Christ warned his family of his approaching sufferings, and the effect which they would have on them—that “they would be offended because of him—yea be scattered from him and leave him alone:” Peter did not believe him! He had such love to Christ, and felt so determined to adhere to him, in all extremities, that he dared to declare, “Though all shall be offended, yet will not I.” And when his Lord, assured him that he would thrice deny him that very night, he was not convinced. It only served to draw from him a more vehement and positive assertion, “If I should die with thee I will not deny thee in any wise.” But he soon found his mistake. Three times, before the next morning dawned, did he deny his Savior—with oaths and imprecations did he deny him!

This sinner was soon renewed by repentance. And one design of Christ’s visit at this time, seems to have been to assure the penitent, that his sin, in “denying the Lord who bought him,” was pardoned, and that he was confirmed in the office to which he had been previously called. But the manner in which this was done carried in it a reproof, which must have called his sin to remembrance, causing his soul to be humbled in him. Let us turn our attention to the subject.

In the text we see Christ questioning Peter, and trying his love —Peter appealing to Christ for the reality of it—and Christ directing Peter how to manifest his love to him—by feeding his flock.

I. We see Christ questioning Peter and trying his love. *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?*

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Simon was the original name of this apostle. Cephas and Peter, which signify a rock, or stone, were names given him of Christ, expressive of that firmness of character, for which he was remarkable. These though commonly used, after they were given him, were omitted on this occasion; probably as a tacit reproof of his denial of his Lord, a little before; which had been occasioned by the failure of his courage—by the deficiency of his firmness.

The manner in which his divine master, here addressed this disciple, seemed to imply a doubt of his love; or of the supremacy of it. CHRIST knew the heart. Peter's love was not hidden from him. But while he dwelt with men, he treated people according to their apparent characters; thereby setting an example to his followers who can judge others only by appearances or that which is external.

Jesus did not immediately address himself to Peter, as soon as he had made himself known; but after he had been some time in the company of these friends and followers, and they had made a friendly meal together, he turned to this disciple, and in the presence of his brethren, who had witnessed his high professions of love, and determination never to forsake or deny him, and the part he had acted soon after, addressed him, as in the text; *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?*

What had happened a little before, rendered this question highly proper. One of the twelve had fallen. One, whom the others had not suspected. Nothing had appeared, which marked out Judas for the traitor, during the time of his going out and in with the other disciples. Christ, though he knew him, and gave frequent intimations that there was a traitor among them, had never designated him. When they were told that one of them should betray their Lord, their eyes were not turned upon Judas, but each one appeared jealous of himself, "Lord is it I?" But his hypocrisy had now been made manifest and he had gone to his own place. Such had he been found who was the steward in Christ's family! That with respect to him, the other disciples had been deceived, now appeared. And Peter, who had been so forward and zealous, and professed such warm love to Christ, had lately denied him! And though he had returned, professing himself a penitent, his sincerity is questioned, and he is called on, to clear up his character.

It was important that this matter should be determined, that the other disciples might know how to treat this late offender—whether he was to be received as a brother, or to be considered as deposed from his office, and to be succeeded by another. This was probably the reason of Christ's addressing him, as here in the presence of his brethren. *Lovest thou me more than these?*

If he had the love of Christ dwelling in him, and that love was supreme, Christ would forgive the past and continue to employ him as a shepherd to feed his flock. Therefore did he apply to this late offending pastor, and demand of him in the presence of his

brethren, whether he really loved him, with such a love as was necessary to constitute him a disciple.

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This had been long before settled, and determined, to be love superior to that which is borne to the world, or the riches and honors, or friendships and relations of it, or even life in it. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: He that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me: He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me: He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." *

* Matthew x. 37.

The purport of this and parallel declarations of the divine teacher, are not obscure; they plainly teach that we cannot be Christ's disciples, unless our love to him surpasseth that which we bear any thing terrestrial. Therefore the question put to Simon, agreeably to these prior definitions of that love to Christ which is necessary to constitute a person his disciple, marked particularly by the last clause of it, "more than these?"

Expositors have generally put another sense on this question, and in our apprehension, a mistaken sense. They have considered our Lord as inquiring of Simon whether his love exceeded that of his fellow disciples. "Lovest thou me more than these thy fellow disciples love me?"

This cannot be the sense of the question. This is a question which Simon could not have answered; and which it would have been wrong in him to have attempted to answer; a question therefore which Christ would not have put to put to him, or required him to answer. To have answered it, Simon must have known the heart of others; but to have pretended to the knowledge of them, would have been claiming a divine prerogative.

But Peter had declared on Christ's forewarning them that "they would all be offended because of him, although all shall be offended, yet will not I."

He had indeed made that declaration; but he had not judged others, or pretended to determine that they would or would not be offended because of him. Peter knew that he loved Christ—that the love of Christ was generally a governing principle in his heart. He felt the strength of it so sensibly at that time, that he did not conceive it possible that any dangers or sufferings could ever induce him to forsake his Lord; or in any respect, be offended because of him. Therefore his confident declaration, that he would stand by him in every extremity, though he should be left to stand alone. Leaving the future conduct of others, to determine the measure of their love to Christ, he spake only of his own. "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will not I be offended." As though he had said;

"I do not pretend to know the hearts of others; but I think I know my own; and that I have such love to thee my Lord, that nothing can separate me from thee." Jesus answered, "Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice."

Peter replied, “Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all his disciples.”

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They no doubt all spoke the language of their hearts; all expressed the determination of their souls at the time; though they were soon convinced of their mistake—that they did not sufficiently know themselves—their own weakness—the need they stood in of divine support.

Peter, in particular, expressed the genuine feelings of his own warm and honest heart; but without the smallest intimation, that he suspected his fellow disciples; or pretended to judge them.

And is there reason to think that Christ would put him upon this work? That he would require him to judge them, and compare his love with theirs? Especially when we consider Christ's former prohibition of judging others, which he had early made a law to his disciples. "Judge not that ye be not judged :." And remember that Christians are directed, "in all lowliness of mind, to esteem others better than themselves."

Some have been disposed to think highly of themselves, and meanly of others—to say to others, "Stand by thyself; come not near me; I am holier than thou"—Some, to "compare themselves with others and exalt themselves above others." But not so the humble Christian—Not so the meek follower of Jesus. Nor is there any thing favorable to such temper and conduct to be found in the sacred volume. The spirit and tenor of the divine rule is opposed to it, and speaks persons of this character, objects of divine aversion.

This temper, and its opposite, are exemplified in the pharisee and publican, who went up to the temple to pray. "God I thank thee, that I am not as other men—or even as this publican." Thus the pharisee. But "the publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as" his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." We know which of these met the divine approbation.

Now, is it supposable, that the Savior would put a question to Simon, which would countenance the pharasaic disposition? Or that he would require him to judge the hearts of others? Or compare himself with others, in a matter which required the knowledge of their hearts?

It seems strange that this should be thought by any one, to be the sense of Christ's question to Peter; much more that this should be the most common construction of it, by expositors.

II. In answer to our Lord's question to Simon, we find him in the text appealing to our Lord, for the reality of his love. "*Thou knowest that I love thee—Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I that I love thee.*"

It is observable that Peter rests the whole matter on Christ's knowledge of the heart. Peter makes no plea—adduces no evidence— mentions no circumstances, evidential of

his love to Christ, but refers the matter back directly to him, as the searcher of hearts and leaves it with him. *Thou knowest that I love thee.*

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The grieved, and distressed apostle, could have mentioned many things as proofs of his love to Jesus; yea of the strength of his affection for him. He might have pleaded his profession respecting Christ, at the time when he was honored with the name of Peter—an honorable distinction, and designed to recommend him to the acceptance of his fellow disciples. * He might have mentioned what passed, when Christ asked the twelve, whether they “would also go away?” When many offended at his doctrine forsook him, after having followed him, and professed themselves his disciples. Simon had on that occasion made a noble profession, shewing that he was a disciple indeed—“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the son of the living God?” He might have pleaded, that he had singly dared to draw his sword against the multitude, which came to apprehend his Lord—that he had resolutely attacked them, and maintained the conflict, with the whole band, till disarmed by a command from his divine Sovereign to put up his sword into its sheath—that he had followed Christ, when most of the others forsook him and fled—had ventured into the judgment hall to attend his trial and witness the event—that though there surprised and terrified into a denial of Christ, when he saw him contrary to his expectations, resign himself to death, by the wicked hands of unbelieving Jews, aided by heathen soldiers, yet that only one kind look from his captive Lord, had brought him to repent and mourn in the bitterness of his soul, that he had not agreeably to his former purpose, died with his divine master—He might have alleged, that he had not forsaken Christ’s family and friends, even when Christ hung on the cross or slept in the tomb; though his most faithful followers, had then been ready to conclude, that they had been deceived, when “they trusted that it was he who should have redeemed Israel”—that he had watched Christ’s corpse, and been with the first to examine the report of his resurrection, and among the first who believed it—and that even then, at that appearance of his Lord, he only of those present, when they saw him standing on the shore, could not wait till the boat should convey him to the land, but had thrown himself into the sea, leaving the fish which they had enclosed, to continue in their own element, and swam to the shore, not perhaps, without endangering his life, that he might not delay to receive and welcome his Lord.

* Matthew xv. 12-19.

These, and probably many other things, evidential of the reality and strength of his love to Christ, Simon might have alleged, notwithstanding his late defection—distinctions, which perhaps none of his fellow disciples could have pleaded; and which, had any share of the pharisaic spirit rested on him, might have induced him to claim that superiority to his brethren, which a certain church afterwards attributed to him.

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To have mentioned these, might have strengthened the charity of his fellow disciples towards him; but he knew that none of them were requisite, to convince Christ of his love. Though he had done, and suffered, and exposed himself for Christ, more than others, he put in no claim to a reward—he had done less than was his duty. His dependence was on grace. Therefore did he decline the mention, of what some would have boasted, and appealed directly to his Savior, as the searcher of hearts, to judge of the matter in question—of his love, and the measure of it—appealed to him who had put the question, *lovest thou me more than these?* To clear up his character and bear witness to the reality and measure of his affection toward him—*Yea Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.*

In this appeal he not only shewed his sincerity, but reflected honor on Christ, by an acknowledgement of his divinity. The knowledge of the heart is the prerogative of Deity. “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, to give to every man according to his way, and according to the fruit of his doings. The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth the imaginations of the thoughts.” The exalted Savior, afterwards made himself known as possessing this power, and appointed to exercise it, in adjusting the rewards of another life. “All the churches shall know that I am he who searcheth the hearts and reins; and I will give to every one of you according to your works.” But this had not been clearly revealed, when Christ paid the visit to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias. The Christian dispensation was then scarcely set up. Darkness still brooded on the minds, even of the apostles. It continued till the outpouring of the Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, when the promise of “the Comforter, to teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance,” was fulfilled. But Simon seems to have anticipated these public manifestations and discoveries—to have at this time been convinced, that Christ was omniscient—THOU KNOWEST ALL THINGS; *thou knowest that I love thee.*

In this appeal, Christ was farther honored, by Simon’s open, public reliance on his goodness. He had then lately dishonored Christ, by a shameful denial—a denial, when to have acknowledged him, would have done him the greatest honor. But such was his confidence in the goodness of his Lord, that he dared to trust himself with him—had no concern, that resentment of the part he had acted, would induce him, in whom he trusted, to overlook his penitence, and pass his humble confidence unnoticed—did not fear to trust himself in Christ’s hands, and leave it to him to make known his character to his fellow disciples.

In these things the faith of Simon, and the nature of his faith appeared. He not only believed Jesus to be the Christ, but he believed the divinity of Christ. His faith did not terminate in a bare assent, but convinced of his sufficiency, and of his justice, and mercy and readiness to forgive the returning penitent, he gave himself up to Christ and trusted in him to pardon his sins and save him by his grace. Though sensible of his own demerit, fear did not drive him away from the Savior, but induced him to return to him and put his whole trust in him.

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Such is the nature of justifying faith. Those who are subjects of it, deeply sensible of their sins, “look to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world,” and place all their dependence on him; and they are not disappointed—; “Whoso believeth shall not be ashamed.”

Thus Simon’s faith and love were owned of Christ; and this late offender not only pardoned, but continued in his office; a pastor of Christ’s flock. *Feed my lambs—Feed my sheep*, were the replies to the appeals made by the offender, that he loved the Savior. In this manner was he directed,

III. To manifest his love to Christ.—It might have been thought that Simon had fallen from his office when he denied his Lord; with oaths and imprecations, denied his knowledge of him. If so, he was here restored; Christ entrusted him again with the care “of his flock—which he had purchased with his blood;” and reappointed him to “give them their meat in due season.” His having had this charge here given him, argued the pardon of his offences, and his restoration to favor. He would not have been required to do the work of an apostle, had not his transgression been forgiven, and his sin been blotted out. Judas had no such trust reposed in him after his fall; no such duty required of him. “By his transgression he fell from his ministry and apostleship, that he might go to his own place, and another take his office.” Judas repented; but not with repentance unto life. His repentance led to death by his own hand. Diverse was that of Simon, both in its nature and effects. His was “Godly sorrow, which wrought repentance unto life”—which caused him to devote himself wholly to the service of the Redeemer, and at last to lay down his life for his sake.

REFLECTIONS

I. Our subject teacheth the folly of felt dependence. Who ever appeared to have stronger confidence in himself than Peter? Yet few have fallen more shamefully than he.

If we lean to ourselves, like things will probably befall us. Our strength is weakness. Our enemies are many and powerful; they are long versed in the arts of deception; well acquainted with our weakness; know how, and when, and where to attack us to advantage. Left to ourselves, we should doubtless be snared and taken by them.

Simon was naturally bold and resolute; had great love to Christ, and zeal for his honor: Yet all did not enable him “to stand in the evil day.” If Peter fell, who, left to himself, can stand? Not one. But God is able to make the weakest and most feeble stand, and will make them stand if they trust in him. “My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Blessed are they who trust in him.



II. An high opinion of a person's own strength, or love to God and the Redeemer, is most commonly the prelude to a fall. When one thinks himself strong, and feels secure, he is soon taught weakness and dependence, and the need he stands in of a divine guardian, by some advantage gained over him by the enemy: Whereas, those who are sensible of their own weakness, and trust in God, are holden up, and made to stand. "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon—me for when I am weak, then am I strong."

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III. As self knowledge is of great importance, unnecessary to our reforming that which is amiss, and to our trading in him who is able to keep us, we should often try ourselves, as in his presence—his, to whom our hearts are open. It becomes us often to retire inward, and examine whether the love of Christ dwelleth in us? *Whether we love him more than these?* Than the world and the things of it? If Christ is not uppermost in our hearts, “we are not worthy of him.” But if we can answer the question put to Simon, as he answered it, *Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee*, happy are we. We remain in a state of imperfection—may often have occasion to mourn some practical denial of Christ; still, if *he who knoweth all things, knoweth that we love him*, our love to him will not be overlooked; he will own us before his Father, and reward us with eternal rewards.

IV. Christ’s disciples, while in the body, often err; if acquainted with ourselves, we must often know this of ourselves; do we then see our faults?

If any who call themselves Christians live in neglect of self examination, and are consequently strangers to themselves, there is great reason to fear that they are strangers also to the Christian life. The Christian communes much with his own heart, and finds daily occasion to mourn before God, that his service is so defective, and that he so often denies his Lord, by heedless lapses, or by suffering temptation to have such power over him. When the Lord looked on Peter, and thereby brought to his remembrance the warnings which he had given him, his confidence in himself, and then his fall, he went out and wept bitterly.

Every Christian hath a measure of this spirit, and is grieved at his heart, when he calls to mind his shameful denials of his Lord. If any, who think themselves his disciples are blind to their faults, or little affected with them—ready to excuse or extenuate them, especially if hidden from the world; or feel reluctant to take shame to themselves, when they have fallen, it nearly concerns them to examine the grounds of their hope toward God; there is reason to fear that they “hold a lie in their right hands.” Those who are Christ’s discern their faults; confess and forsake them. Their falls are made the occasion of greater watchfulness, and care to keep themselves from every wicked thing, and perfect holiness in the fear of God. May he grant this to be our temper, for his mercy’s sake in Christ. Amen.

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SERMON XIV.

Gifts no certain Evidence of Grace.

Luke x. 20



“In this rejoice not, that the Spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your Names are written in Heaven.”

Abundant notice of Christ’s coming preceded that interesting’ event. “To him gave all the prophets witness.”

Neither was his entrance here unattended. It was announced by an angelic choir; by a miraculous star; and by a band of eastern magi. The manger which contained him, was particularly pointed out to the shepherds, and his person designated by inspired Simon and Anna. Again,

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When entering on his ministry, witness was given for him, both from heaven, and on earth; from heaven by the visible descent of the Holy Ghost, which rested on him, and by a voice testifying that he was the Son in God; on earth by John, and soon after by the seventy: For these were sent to prepare his way, and introduce him to his work.

John was sent before, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” —“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The seventy, to declare him then entering on his ministry—“The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”—John did no miracles; but the seventy witnessed Christ’s truth, and their own by wonders wrought in his name. In the orders given to them at their mission, we find them only directed to heal the sick, as an evidence of Christ’s arrival, and their being sent of him; but by the report made at their return they appeared to have been empowered to cast out devils. They probably did all the mighty works done by the twelve, and by their Lord. Thus they prepared his way.

Doing miracles in Christ’s name would raise in those who witnessed it, a desire to see him of whom they spake, and whose power they displayed: And “they were sent two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself would come.”

Had they only proclaimed his arrival, some might have listened; but few would have “believed their report.” Greater evidence than their word would have been demanded; as was afterwards of Christ—“What sign shewest thou, that we may believe thee?” Neither would the demand have been unreasonable. Special messages require special evidence; and it is always given to those who are sent of God.

Every deceiver may pretend to a divine mission; but we are forbidden to “believe every spirit, and commanded to try the spirits.” The church at Ephesus is commended for having obeyed this command—“Thou hast tried them which say that they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.”

Our Savior speaking of the Jews’ rejection of him, aggravates their guilt, by a consideration of the plenitude of the evidence which had been given them of his truth. “If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin—but now they have no cloak for their sin—they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.” *

* John xv. 22-24.

At the return of the seventy they appear to have been elated with the exercise of the miraculous powers which had been delegated to them—“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.”

They had witnessed Christ’s miracles, but seem not to have wrought miracles themselves till now; and when they found themselves able to do the mighty works which they had admired in their Lord they were filled with joy.



Having made their report, Christ enlarged their powers and promised them protection—
“Behold I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” But to prevent them from setting an undue value on these distinctions, the caution in the text is subjoined—
“Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather, rejoice because your names are written in heaven”.

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In discussing the subject, we will, first *consider the caution or prohibition—In this rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; then the command—But rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*

I. WE are to consider the caution, or prohibition—*In this rejoice not, &c.*

But why not? Was it not matter of joy that spirits, evil spirits were subject to them? That they were able to dislodge them from the bodies of men, by commanding them in Christ's name? Certainly. This enabled them to answer the ends of their mission, which had been but very partially answered without it. Wherefore then the prohibition?

It is rather the excess of their joy, than the joy itself which is here forbidden. They seem to have placed an undue value on this power; to have exalted it above its place, particularly as it concerned themselves. This was the first thing they mentioned at their return; nothing beside seems to have made so deep an impression upon them, or to have given them equal self importance.

To them there were other things more interesting and important; that they were accepted of God, and numbered among the faithful, and that their *names were written* in heaven, were to them occasions of much greater joy. The gift of miracles proved their mission, and drew the attention of those who witnessed their mighty works; but this was not a saving gift. A person might possess it, yet remain unrenewed, and perish in his sins.

Some appear to have exercised this power, who professed no relation to Christ, but were openly connected with his enemies. This is evident from his expostulation with those who attributed to infernal agency, the authority with which he extorted obedience from evil spirits—"If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore shall they be your judges." * The same appears from another incident, recorded by St. Mark—"And John answered, saying, Master, we saw one casting on devils in thy name, and he followed not us, and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. And Jesus said, Forbid him not: For there is no man who shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me." +

* Luke xi. 19. + St. Mark ix. 38, 39.

It seems that some who had seen the disciples cast out devils in Christ's name, though not themselves his disciples, attempted to do the same and succeeded; and that things of this nature were not uncommon after Christ began his ministry; though it did not always, if at all succeed, after his sufferings and exaltation. ++

++ Acts xix. 13.

The gift of miracles, like other gifts, was distinct from sanctifying grace. This grace was often joined with that gift; but not always. There was no necessary connexion between them.

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Under the former dispensation, the gift of prophecy did not certainly argue a renewed nature. It was sometimes given without it. Balaam had this gift. The deceiver who brought back the man of God who was sent from Judah to reprove Jeroboam, had it. By divine order he told the Jew what would happen to him, because he disobeyed the word of the Lord, and returned to eat bread in that place. Neither is there a trait of sanctity visible on the prophet Jonah, though he was compelled to bear God's messages to Ninevah, and used to make other special communications to men.

Under the gospel dispensation divine administration hath seen the same. Judas had doubtless the gift of miracles in common with his fellow disciples; and many will appeal to the judge in the great day, that they "have prophesied in his name, in his name cast out devils, and in his name done many wonderful works, to whom he will profess, I never knew you," and whom he will send away among the workers of iniquity.

Men are too often estimated by their gifts. Many consider those as the best men who possess the most enlarged, and especially the most showy talents; and despise those of a different description, as though their gifts and graces must be equal. But this is wrong. A person may possess the talents of an angel of light, who hath the temper of an infernal. Such is probably the state of apostate spirits. And some of the greatest of mankind have been some of the worst and most abandoned.

Though this must be evident to the considerate, there is yet a disposition in man to judge others, yea, and himself too, by gifts apart from the grace which falsifies gifts, and renders them beneficial, both to the possessor, and to the world; and at the same time keeps the possessor humble, and prevents him from thinking of himself, above that which he ought to think.

Neither are the renewed out of danger from this quarter. Sanctification being imperfect, distinguished gifts, or usefulness, or uncommon divine communications, are liable to be abused and made to foster pride and raise in the worm too high an opinion of himself. St. Paul "though not a whit behind the very chieftest apostles," needed something to keep him humble and prevent him from being elated by the revelations which were made to him. And he left these things on record as a warning to others; and particularly noted them to the church at Corinth, which abounded with miraculous gifts, and among whom they were exceedingly abused. He declared them not only inferior to charity, or holy love, but, considered in themselves, as of no estimation in a moral view; that a person might possess them in the highest degree, and yet be nothing in religion—"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I

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could remove mountains and have, not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.” * The apostle here supposeth a person possessed of the most eminent miraculous gifts, yet wholly destitute of religion. Could no such case happen, he would not have made the supposition. He did not write to amuse, but to edify and instruct.

* 1 Cor xiii. 1, &c.

Some at Corinth prided themselves in their gifts and despised others —perhaps men’s moral state was estimated by them. Therefore did he show the use of those gifts—that they were distinct from renewing grace—that the latter was more excellent than the former; and that the possession of the latter could not be argued from the exercise of the former.

Those gifts were very useful at that day, and in that city, which was filled with idolatry, and almost the headquarters of paganism; but to the possessor they were of less value than Christian graces—“Covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way”—Namely, the charity described in the following chapter, of which we have been treating above.

To prevent the seventy from indulging the spirit which the apostle afterwards thus reproveth at Corinth, was the design of the caution given them in the text. Christ observed how they valued themselves on their gifts and checked the spirit its beginning. *Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you.*

II. We are to consider the command—*But rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*

The names of the saints are represented as *written in Heaven*, This language is figurative, accommodated to human weakness. God hath promised salvation to the faithful and caused them to hope in his mercy; but memorandums are not necessary to remind him of his promises, or records in heaven to entitle the faithful to the heavenly inheritance. God’s counsels are always before him. The phraseology of the text is borrowed from the customs of men, who need memorandums and records to secure the fulfillment of engagements.

When men are made free of a city, or state, they are enrolled in the archives of the community—Thence probably the metaphorical language of the text, and similar scriptures: For we often find matters which are determined in the divine councils represented as written in celestial records—Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and *a book of remembrance was*

written before him, for them that thought on “his name.” Zion is said to be “graven on the palms of his hands”—The saints to be *written* “in the book of life—The dead to be judged out of the things *written* in the books” which will be opened at the grand assize when the world will be judged in righteousness.

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As the rewards of grace are made sure to the righteous, the address to the seventy speaks their knowledge of it—*Rejoice because your names are written in heaven*. They could not rejoice in an unknown good. But the manner in which their privileged state is mentioned supposes them acquainted with it. Christ did not here reveal it—did not say, *your names are written in heaven, therefore rejoice*, but rejoice because they are written there—because you know it to be the case.

Neither do they appear to have possessed knowledge, in this respect, which others are denied. Others are also exhorted to rejoice in the Lord. The suffering Christians of that age were often reminded of the rewards in reserve for them, as what would abundantly compensate all their sufferings here; which supposed them acquainted with their title to glory.

But how did they attain this knowledge? And how may others attain it?

By considering the conditions of the promises and seeing that they have complied with them. The promises are made to faith and repentance, to love and obedience. Where these are found on a person, that person may know that *his name is written in heaven*.

Obedience flows from faith and love. “Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit.” The fruits of grace, are the evidences of grace, and the only evidences on which there is dependence. Should an angel from heaven testify to a person that his name was written there, the evidence should be inferior to that which ariseth from the Christian temper evidenced by fruits of holiness. If these were found, that would be useless; if wanting, inefficient. “By their fruits ye shall know them. In this the children of God are manifest.” Had a person such testimony from heaven, he could know that the bearer was from above, only by attending to his own heart and life.

“Satan can transform himself into an angel of light.” Permitted of God he might have access to our minds and persuade us that *our names were written in heaven*, while we remained enemies to God and under the condemning sentence of his law, had we no rule by which to try ourselves, and judge of our state; but this is not denied us. Yet some are probably deceived, through infernal influence, and filled with vain hopes. Mistaking the sophistry of Satan, for the operation of the divine Spirit, they boast communion with God and call themselves his children while no portion of the Christian temper is found upon them. Doubtless some, who have gloried in special divine communications have been deceived, relative to the nature and source of the operations which they have experienced. Supposed visions and revelations, are often no other than illusions of fancy, freaks of imagination, or effects of diabolical influence, those affected with them often appear confident of that which sober reason rejects as groundless.

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If when we turn the eye inward, we discover faith in Christ, sorrow for sin, love to God, devotedness to his service, and reliance on his grace through a Mediator, and these are evidenced by fruits of holiness, we need no other evidence that *our names are written in heaven*: But if there are wanting, hope is vain and confidence delusive—Gifts, the most extraordinary, even those of prophecy and miracles are totally unavailing. They leave us but as “sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.”

Instances of this kind have formerly occurred: They may occur again. It concerns us therefore to look to ourselves, and see that our hopes are not built on the sand.

REFLECTIONS.

I. The subjection of evil spirits to Christ shows the universality of his dominion: For even apostate spirits have not, in every respect, broken from under his government. He sets them their bounds which they cannot pass. “Hitherto shalt thou come and no farther.” When dislodged from a man by his order they cannot not enter a swine without his permission. They are permitted indeed to indulge depravity, but no farther than infinite wisdom sees it; and oftentimes their malice is made subservient to the divine purposes. While Christ had his residence on earth, they were permitted to possess the bodies of men, and his superior power was manifested in their ejection, and thereby a few species of evidence was given to his truth of the gospel—yea they were sometimes made to confess him, when men denied him! “I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God.” *

* Luke iv. 34.

In various ways God hath made use of apostate spirits to effect his holy and merciful designs. They have been used to try the faith, and thereby fit them for glory and honor—Witness the strange trials brought on Job! And all served to restrain pride and depravity, and by the trial of his faith and exercise of his graces, to prepare him for a brighter crown. They may also be instrumental in bringing sinners to repentance. St. Paul speaks of “delivering one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus: And of delivering men to Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme.” *

* 1 Cor. v. 5, 1 Tim. i. 20.

II. Our subject teacheth us not to value ourselves on account of gifts, or powers. Gifts and grace, we have seen to be distinct—that the former are a kind of common flock, designed not so much for the benefit of the possessor, as of the public; and that a person may possess them in large measure, and yet continue a rebel against God and perish in his rebellion.



God hath wise reasons for the bestowment of gifts, and, in someway, gets glory to himself thereby. But every talent is liable to abuse. If any man abuse them God will require it. Justice may be glorified, where goodness is neglected, and grace despised.

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There is power with God to compel such use of his gifts as he requires. By overruling the degeneracy of fallen creatures, they often subserve the more mischievous. Gifts, under the influence his holy purposes. Princes who know him not, are often instrumental in executing his designs.—the Assyrian and Persian monarchs were formerly made to execute his judicial designs on other nations and on his people, though “they meant not so, neither did their hearts think so.” Other potentates do the same, and in the same way. Yea God hath power to compel unwilling obedience to his known commands, and hath sometimes done it. Balaam was made to bless Israel and foretel their greatness, while yet the enemy of Israel, and of the God of Israel; and Jonah, to bear God’s messages to Nineveh.

To be thus used of God gives no title to his favor. “When God had performed his whole work on Mount Zion,” he punished the proud Assyrian whom he had used in the execution of his justice: And Balaam perished among the enemies of Israel. Service undesignedly performed, and that which is the effect of constraint, find no encouragement in revelation. “If I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation is committed unto me; what is my reward then?”

III. Though it is lawful to covet earnestly the best gifts, there is a more “excellent way”—there is that which is more valuable, especially to the possessor—the grace which sanctifies the heart. If we have this grace the more gifts we possess the better—they are all consecrated to the service of God. If we have only gifts they may render us of grace, are beneficial, but under that of depravity, baleful in their effects.

Some pride themselves in the powers which they possess, and despise those of inferior abilities—some mistake gifts for graces, or the sure evidences of them. But the day is at hand which will correct mistakes, and exhibit every thing in its proper light. Then the humble followers of the Lamb, who pass through life unnoticed, or unknown, will be found written in heaven, and will be owned and honored, as the redeemed of the Lord. But those who neglect the grace offered in Christ, though they may possess the greatest powers—may speak with tongues of men and angels, and have all faith to the removing of mountains, will be denied of the eternal Judge, and sent away into everlasting punishment. Wherefore, *rejoice not, though the spirits may be subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*

* * * * *

SERMON XV.

Human Characters determined only by Divine decision.

1 Corinthians iv. 3, 4.



“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment; yea I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.”

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Corinth was one of the principal cities of Greece. Enjoying every advantage of situation, it became rich and populous. Most cities in similar circumstances have become vicious. This became exceedingly so.

The religion of Corinth was paganism, which naturally led to sundry vices. Bacchus and Venus had there their temples and their votaries; and luxury, the child of affluence, led to vice generally. From such a combination of circumstances, the inhabitants, like the men of Sodom, “were sinners before the Lord exceedingly.” It might be justly stiled, like Pergamos, “The place where Satan’s seat was.”

Yet God had much people in that city, which continue and labor in it, which he did for more than eighteen months. Nor did he labor in vain. He gathered there a large and flourishing church; which appears to have been enriched with a greater effusion of miraculous gifts, than any other of the primitive churches. The state of Corinth, where God had been unknown, and where superstition had reigned, might render this necessary in order to give success to the gospel. Miracles are adapted to arrest the attention of those who would be deaf to the voice of reason and regardless of proofs drawn from it. But those gifts were abused. They were made the occasion of pride, and of divisions: Which shews that there is nothing in the nature or miraculous gifts, which secures the proper use of them; that they are no evidence of renovation.

Though the apostle labored to great and happy effect in that city of the Gentiles, after his departure, deceitful workers went among them, and availed themselves of his absence to make divisions, and alienate their affections from him. This seems to have occasioned his writing the epistles addressed to them, which constitutes a valuable part of the sacred volume.

The calumnies of his enemies, and the effect which they had on the Corinthians, are alluded to in the text; which contains an expression of his feelings on the occasion.

In discussing the subject, we shall just glance at these matters, and add a brief improvement.

St. Paul’s character, both as a Minister and as a Christian, was impeached by those enemies. They represented him as an unfaithful, or unskillful laborer in the gospel, and as one who was not a subject of divine grace.

This appears from his statement in the beginning of the context, and from the text. Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful, *“But with me it is a very small thing, that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment, yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified: But he that judgeth me is the Lord.”*

The apostle here professeth himself “a minister of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God,” and directs the Corinthians to consider him in that light; or as one put in trust with the gospel to teach its mysteries, inculcate its truths, urge its duties, and tender its supports.

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The term *mystery* is used in Scripture, to express things not discoverable by the light of reason, but knowable by revelation. It is also used to express incomprehensibles; which may be objects of faith on the credit of divine truth. The former is the more common sense of the term in the gospel, particularly in the passage before us, and generally in St. Paul's epistles. "We speak the wisdom of God in a *mystery*—the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. *But God hath revealed them into us by his Spirit.*"

The gospel plan of salvation was a *mystery*, a hidden *mystery*, till the gospel day. It was hidden from the prophets who foretold it; and from the apostles, till after Christ's sufferings and resurrection. They understood very little of it; knew almost nothing about it till after the ascension, when the comforter was sent down "to teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance." To them it was then matter of wonder. They had not been made to understand that Christ was to bear the sins of men—"that he was to suffer and enter into his glory." And when he did suffer, "they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead."

Another gospel *mystery* was the calling of the Gentiles—that salvation was intended for them, and to be offered to them, in Christ, equally as to the natural seed of Jacob. "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me to you ward; how that by revelation he made known unto me *the mystery*—which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: *That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the Gospel, whereof I am made a minister.*" *

* Ephesian iii. 2-7.

These were some of the mysteries dispensed by this steward of the mysteries of God; who "shunned not to declare all the counsel of God."

He declared the deep things, which human reason could not have discovered; and those also which it cannot comprehend. These are to be found in Paul's teachings, as well as the plain things which are easy to be understood.

But the principal business of this "steward of the mysteries of God," was to open the way of salvation through a Savior, and shew that provision is made in him for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles, and offered alike to those of every nation; and to lead men to the knowledge of themselves and the Redeemer, and teach them how they might be benefited by divine grace in him.

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And while he acknowledged the obligations, of fidelity, he declared himself no way greatly affected by the judgment which might be passed upon him by his fellow mortals. *But with me it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judgment.* An intimation that he was judged and censured by some of them. This was, doubtless, matter of notoriety at Corinth; but he little regarded it. It made no change in him, or in the manner in which he discharged the duties of his office. He was chiefly concerned to obtain the approbation of an higher tribunal than of his divine matter, the-----dge of all. The judgment of fellow mortals did not move him—*He that judgeth me is the Lord.*

Not that he was wholly indifferent to the opinion entertained of him by his fellow men. Had he been so, he would not have undertaken his own defence as in these epistles, A measure of esteem was necessary to his usefulness in the ministry. Had all who heard him thought him the enemy of God, he could have done no good in it. Therefore his endeavor to rectify their mistakes. And the rather because he held the truth as it is in Jesus; so that in rejecting him, and the doctrines which he taught, they turned aside into errors which might fatally mislead them. But he did not wrong his conscience to please them, or depart from truth to gain their approbation—"Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Had Paul been chiefly concerned to please men, he would have continued a Pharisee.

The person who would please Christ, while paying such deference to the opinions of men as fairly to weigh every objection against his faith or practice, and try them by the divine rule, must be careful to conform to that rule, whatever opinions may be entertained of him. Of the meaning of the rule he must judge for himself before God—"calling no man master." The reasons of his faith and practice, and his construction of the divine rule, he may lay before his fellow men, to remove the grounds of prejudice; but he must rise so far above their frowns a-----atteries, as not to be influenced by them to disguise his sentiments, or counteract his own judgment of the law of God, of the gospel of Christ, or of the duties incumbent on him.

It is not by human judgments that we are to stand or fall. It is happy that this is the case; that the good man hath a judge more just and candid than his fellow servants; one who knows and pities his weakness, though he hath none of his own: "Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man."

But the apostle did not stop with a declaration that the judgment of others did not move him; he brought it home to himself: *Yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord.* St. Paul had a witness in himself that he was sincere and upright before God—"Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity, and Godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly toward you."

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The same is the import of his declaration in the text—“*I know nothing by myself*—am conscious of no allowed wickedness—of no willful error, either in profession or practice.” But he dared not to assert that he had made no mistakes—*yet am I not hereby justified*. He knew himself liable to error—did not “trust his own heart”. *He that judgeth me is the Lord*—“his judgment is according to truth— that will determine my character, and fix my doom.”

The apostle could remember a time in which he had conscientiously done wrong. He had persecuted the church; killed Christ’s disciples, and thought he was doing right; verily believed that he was doing God service!—Now he acted conscientiously in “preaching the faith he had once destroyed”—in the manner of his preaching it; and discharging every ministerial and Christian duty; though he was censured and calumniated by some, and suspected by others. He followed the light of his own mind, and determined to follow it; so to act as not to be condemned of himself. But he knew that the standard of rectitude did not follow his views, and vary with his judgment. “If his heart did not condemn him, he had confidence toward God; yet he knew God to be greater than his heart,” and possessed of all knowledge; dared not therefore affirm that his judge would approve of all which he approved—*Yet am I not hereby justified—he that judgeth me is the Lord*.

IMPROVEMENT.

I. We See that censure may be incurred without neglect of duty, When Paul converted to Christianity, he was made an apostle, and ordered of the Redeemer to preach the gospel. He obeyed. He was guided in his work by the spirit of God; yet he was blamed by some, and suspected by others.

That Christ’s faithful servants are slandered and reproached is not a new thing under the sun. It hath been common among men. And herein they are only made like their Lord. And shall they think it strange? “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord. If they call the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household?”

When opposition and reproaches come from those who profess friendship to Christ they wound the deeper. This however, hath often happened. It happened to the apostle at Corinth, and elsewhere. If we witness that which is similar, we need not be surprized, as though some strange thing had happened.

II. Are we unjustly censured by our fellow servants, or reproached while in the way of our duty? We have here an example worthy our imitation. St. Paul was chiefly concerned to approve himself to God. We should be so too—should study to acquaint ourselves with the divine rule, and to conform to it; not disobeying God to please men.

Great care is requisite to know our duty. Enveloped in darkness, and biassed to error, it is often difficult to find out the right way. But we are not left without instruction. A rule is given us by which we may “judge of ourselves, what is right.” Of that rule we must judge for ourselves, and by it try ourselves. “To our own master we stand or fall.” To obtain his approbation should be our chief concern. “If God be with us, who can be against us?”

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III. Knowing ourselves fallible, it becomes us to maintain a jealousy over ourselves, and be constantly on our guard. We should consider, that though we do not sin wilfully, and our own hearts do not condemn us, *yet we are not hereby justified*. We are conscious that we have often, erred, and made wrong conclusions, when we did not design to leave the right way. We are liable to do the same again. Our eye should therefore be to God for direction and guidance—"That which I know not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

This is the more necessary, because "the light which is in us may have become darkness." For there are those who "put darkness for light and light for darkness." Those with whom this is the case know it not; they flatter themselves and cry peace. "To the pure, all things are pure; but to them that are defiled, and unbelieving, is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." This often happens to those who for a time yield to temptation and go in to the ways of sin; they contract false principles, and judge by them, and probably sometimes live and die under the deceptive influence of their darkening power. None would dare to plead before the bar of Christ, that they were his disciples, "and had eat and drank in his presence," had they not been deceived into false views of duty, and mistaken apprehensions of the conditions of acceptance with him.

Judging well of ourselves doth not ensure justification at the bar of heaven. Our judgments of ourselves may be erroneous. If they are so, they will be reversed. We shall "be judged out of the books, according to our works;" not according to our false and deceitful views. *I know nothing by myself, yet, am I not hereby justified. For not he that commandeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.*

* * * * *

SERMON XVI.

Characters will be disclosed, and Justice awarded.

1 Corinthians iv. 5.

"—Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both wilt bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall everyman have praise of God."

St. Paul having professed himself a minister of Christ, and steward of the mysteries of God, acknowledged the obligations of fidelity, and disclaimed anxious concern respecting the opinion entertained of him by his fellow men, because the Lord was his judge, here adds a caution, reprehensive of the censorious spirit of the Corinthians, who

seem to have listened to his enemies, and given into their suspicions of the apostle.
Therefore judge nothing before the time—

In the text we observe a caution against rash judging the characters of men—a declaration that they will be known when the Lord comes —and that some things commendable will then be found in all—then shall every man have praise of God. We observe—

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I. A caution *against rash judging the characters of men—judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come.*

Civil judges may give judgment according to law and evidence, on those brought before them for trial—so may the church on those arraigned at her tribunal. These are necessary to the subsistence of civil and ecclesiastical communities; therefore ordered of God. It is another species of judging which is here forbidden; judging the characters of men, especially such as profess Godliness, and appear to act sincerely; pretending to determine their moral state, before the motives which actuate them are disclosed. This is judging before the time, and without evidence on which to ground a judgment; which the wise man observes to be folly and a shame to him who doth it.

This had been done at Corinth, by the enemies of the apostle; and hath been done by others in every age. There have ever been people who have dared to scatter their censorious decisions at random, according to the prevalence of humor, caprice, or prejudice; often to the wounding of the faithful; and rending of the body of Christ.

This occasions temporary mischief; but the day is coming when all those disorders will be rectified. The censorer, and the censured, will stand at the same bar, and be tried by the same Judge. Every wrong judgment will then be reversed, and every injurious suspicion be removed. For,

II. *Every man's character will be known when the Lord comes—who will bring to light the hidden sufferings of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.*

Many things necessary to determine the moral characters of men are hidden from mortal eyes. We are ignorant of *the counsels* of the hearts—do not know their purposes and views. Without this knowledge, right judgment cannot be formed.

Our knowledge of ourselves is imperfect. For self knowledge we have advantages which we have not for the knowledge of others. We can turn inward, and contemplate the motives which govern, and the views which actuate us. But pride, passion, prejudice, or the corrupt bias, operating in ways unperceived, often blinds the mental eye, and renders us strangers at home. “Whoso trusteth his own heart is a fool.—The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?” It requires great attention to form a just judgment of ourselves—yea, to attain that self knowledge which is necessary for us. With regard to the knowledge of others, the difficulty is still greater. We can neither see the heart, nor know the thoughts and designs.

We are often at a loss for the motives which occasion things which fall under our observation. Other things which might cast light upon them, are hidden from us. But when the Lord cometh, the veil spread over secret matters will be removed. “There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed, or hid that shall not be known.” *The Lord*

will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts.

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How hearts will be opened to view, we know not. Perhaps when the veil of flesh is removed, minds may possess an intuitive knowledge of each other—be able to look into one another, as while in the body, they look into themselves. Here, this is mercifully prevented; but may be no longer necessary in another state of existence. It may be requisite, to that investigation of characters which we are taught to expect at Christ's coming. For it is the language of the text, and other Scriptures, that every impediment to the complete knowledge of each other, will then be done away; that no person's character will longer remain problematical. *The hidden works of darkness will be brought to light, and the counsels of the hearts made manifest.*

Astonishing scenes of wickedness will then, no doubt, be disclosed. Probably each one will discover things in himself which he had not suspected—depravity, unfairness, disingenuity, the bare suspicion of which by others, would be resented as affrontive.

When the prophet forewarned Hazael of the cruelties which he would exercise when he should be king of Syria, his nature seemed to revolt—he could not suspect himself capable of such enormities. “But what! is thy servant a dog?” But all was verified when he had ascended the throne!

But though a world of hidden iniquity will appear when the counsels of the hearts shall be made manifest. Good things will also be opened to view which had till that day been concealed—yea,

III. *Some things commendable will be found in all, Then shall every man have praise of God.*

All are sinners. “There is none good but one, that is God.” Some “are sinners exceedingly.” Some will continue such till they shall have time no longer—die as they have lived, and be sentenced to “have their part in the lake of fire—which is the second death.”

But though numbers of this description will be found when the Lord comes, it is presumed that there will be none among them in whom there will be nothing commendable—who will never have done a praise worthy action.

When “every work is brought into judgment and every secret thing, whether it be good or evil,” every thing commendable which hath been done by the wicked, will come into the reckoning. Nothing will be overlooked, because done by sinners. The prejudices inherent in mankind often render them blind to what is commendable in an enemy, and cause them to magnify his failings; but not so the Deity. God is perfect. “The way of man will he render unto him,” whatever may be his general character.

The saints are not equal in virtue and the attainments of grace. Therefore the differences which will be made among them. When they shall stand before the Judge,

their whole probation, with all its circumstances, will be reviewed, and every praise worthy purpose, desire and action will be considered and rewarded. On the other hand, every neglect of duty and every deviation from it will come into the account and make deduction from the weight of glory reserved for them.

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And among the enemies of God, some will be found greater sinners than others—to have sinned longer—against greater lights, and to have been guilty of more and greater crimes. To such will be reserved the greater weight of woe. In order to these discriminations their whole probation will be considered. And in those on whom sentence of condemnation will pass, the righteous judge will take due notice of every pause which they shall have made in the ways of sin—of every instance in which they may have denied themselves, out of regard to the divine authority, though it may have been out of fear of God's judgments, and of every act of kindness done by them, to a fellow creature. Every thing of this nature, will be considered, and make some deduction from the punishment which would otherwise have been inflicted on them. The judge will pass nothing of this kind unnoticed, condemning the sinner to the same degree of suffering, as though it had not been found upon him. A cup of cold water given to a disciple of Christ, will not lose its reward. *

* Matthew x. 42.

“Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him he did many things, and heard him gladly.” Herod's punishment will not be, in every respect, the same, as though he had paid no attention to John's teaching. He will not be punished for refusing to hear John, when he did hear him or for refusing to do, what he did do, in compliance with his counsel: Though he will be condemned as, eventually the murderer of that holy man. His partial obedience might be extorted by fear; but this is preferable to disobedience; otherwise fear would not be urged as a motive to obedience. “Fear him who is able to destroy soul and body in hell.” If preferable to disobedience, a difference will be made between those who obey from no higher principle, and those who disobey.

Here God certainly makes a difference between them. When Rehoboam humbled himself in the time of his affliction, “the wrath of the Lord turned from him that he would not destroy him: And also in Judah things went well.” But his repentance was not unto life. The character given him at his death is that of a wicked man.

When Ahab, affrighted by the preaching of Elijah, as he was going to take possession of the vineyard of murdered Naboth, “humbled himself and walked softly:” God signified his approbation of his legal repentance and partial amendment, in preference to his former course; though he afterwards cut him off in his sins.

These are unequivocal evidences that partial obedience, though dictated by the servile principle of fear, is preferable, in divine estimation, to allowed disobedience. God makes a difference in his treatment of people here, on this account: suspends his judgments, and mitigates somewhat of their severity, where he sees this kind of relenting in sinners. If God doth this here, is there not reason to believe that

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he will do it hereafter: The rules of divine administration are doubtless uniform in time and eternity. Where he gives a comparative preference here, he will do the same hereafter. So we observe our Savior noting things commendable in some who did not belong to his kingdom. When the young ruler who came to inquire what he should do to inherit eternal life, declared that he had kept the commandments from his youth up, he was viewed with comparative approbation.—“Then Jesus beholding him, loved him.” It is not conceivable that his partial conformity to the divine law had not made him to differ from those who had allowedly disregarded it—that his character was as bad as theirs—though he soon made it evident that the one thing needful was not found upon him. *

* Mark x. 17, &c.

Some suppose that the unrenewed can do nothing but sin against God *with all their might*—that every purpose of their hearts is *necessarily* enmity against him, and all their volitions and actions determined opposition to his law and government: But we conceive that neither Scripture, nor experience justify the supposition—that were such their state, they would be in no degree, the subjects of moral government, and would not be addressed of God as moral agents.

Were mankind wholly given up of God, and his Spirit withdrawn from them, such might become their state; but this is not the case. The Holy Spirit strives with them. They are empowered to resist the Spirit, or cherish its influences. This is manifest from the divine exhortations addressed to them, and from their conduct. Sometimes they pause in the way to destruction—listen to counsels and warnings—do things which God requires, and deny themselves gratifications which are in their power, because God hath forbidden and threatened to punish them. The person is not to be found who hath not a witness in himself that this is the case.

Should we affirm that none, who are in a state of nature, can be influenced by sense of duty to deny themselves, or attempt obedience to God’s law, it might give occasion to false hopes. Those, the general course of whose lives is opposition to God, sure that they sometimes deny themselves, and like Herod, do things enjoined from above, might flatter themselves that they were children of God, while belonging to another family, and that they should have peace, when there was no peace to them. *Yet when the Lord cometh, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts, every man shall have praise of God.*

God will overlook nothing commendable which may have been done by the vilest of the human race, while on probation; and some things commendable will be found in the most degenerated; though in many, the good will be found so low as to leave them on the whole, the servants of sin, and consequently to take their portion among the workers of iniquity.

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REFLECTIONS,

I. The day is coming which will scatter the darkness or the present state. Here many things confound us. "We see but we understand not." We wonder sometimes at what God orders, and oftener at what he permits. The time approaches in which all these mysteries will be cleared up. We shall perceive wisdom and goodness in all the divine administration. Our wonder at providential regulations will terminate.

Now we often wonder at things done by our fellow men—are unable to discover the motives which actuate them—perhaps frequently mistake them. But this uncertainty will not be perpetual. The veil spread over these things will be removed when *the hidden things of darkness are brought to light and the counsels of the hearts made manifest*. Then, every hidden purpose will be laid open, and every secret counsel disclosed.

II. Vain are the attempts of mankind to conceal their crimes, or disguise their characters. For a time they may hide their nefarious views, and pass themselves for other manner of persons than they are; but it is only a temporary matter; all are hastening to an omniscient tribunal which will open every heart and life to general inspection. Every one will then be made to stand out, as he is to public view! "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid." Hitherto there are secret sins, and mistaken characters; but ere long there will be neither. "Every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it."

What folly then is hypocrisy? Every one would despise the delinquent, who, while passing to trial should impose on his fellows with protestations of innocence, when he knew the judge acquainted with his guilt, and that he would soon disclose it, and open it to public view. Such is the part acted by those who endeavor to hide their true characters while making their way to the bar of God.

III. These considerations, speak comfort to the righteous, and terror to the wicked. The sincerity of the former will ere long be made manifest. All the injurious charges brought against them, will appear to be injurious, and they will be cleared of every aspersion. Their integrity will be displayed, and they *will have praise of God*. Nothing they shall have done or suffered, out of regard to God will be forgotten or go unrewarded. Yea, their desires and purposes to honor him here, though ability or opportunity to carry them into effect might not be allowed them, will be proclaimed and rewarded. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love"—"David did well that it was in his heart to build an house to God's name"—therefore the divine promise "to build him an house and establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

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But the wicked who may have passed through life under the shades of darkness, been mistaken, perhaps, for the righteous, will rise at the great day, “to shame, and everlasting contempt.” Their sins will then find them out. For “God’s eyes art on the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” And all are written in God’s book, and reserved to judgment; when he “will give to every one, according to his works. Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” This will be enough to make miserable. There needs no more than the withdrawing of mercy, and leaving justice to take its course. This will be the portion of those who neglect offered salvation. But,

IV. Sinners who have, at all, denied themselves, out of regard to the divine authority, or done aught which God required, though ever so partially, will not lose the benefit of it. Proportioned to its nature, and the degree of rectitude found in it, it will deduct from the punishment which the want of it would have occasioned. The condemned will stand speechless before the judge—have no reason to offer why judgment should not be executed upon them. By the clear manifestation of their guilt, and the impartial justice of God, they will be constrained to acknowledge the perfect fairness and equity, yea, the moral necessity of the sentence by which the last gleam of their hope will be extinguished!

Thus will both the mercies and judgments of God be justified of all, when he *shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts.*

* * * * *

SERMON XVII.

God willing that all Men should be saved.

1 Timothy ii. 4.

“Who will have all Men to be saved,—.”

In verse first, the apostle directs “prayers and thanksgivings to be made for all men;”—which he declares to “be good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; *who will have all men to be saved.*” Had salvation been provided for only a part of the human race, prayer and thanksgivings could have been, consistently made only for a part. Those for whom no provision was made, would be in like state with persons who have committed the sin unto death, for whom St. John intimates prayer is not to be offered up. “There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it.” But such is naturally the state of none of the children of Adam. Divine goodness is extended to all, and salvation offered to them; therefore is prayer and praise to be offered up for all men.



It is now proposed, *briefly to consider the divine goodness expressed in the text—Who will have all men to be saved—then some abuses of the revelation which is made of this goodness to mankind.*

I. *We are to consider the divine goodness here expressed—Who will have all men to be saved.*

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The salvation intended, is that of the soul. This comprehends deliverance from merited sufferings, and the bestowment of happiness which is the contrast of it.

The provision which is made for the comfort and happiness of mankind in this life, evinces strange goodness in God. When we consider what man was made of God, and what he hath made himself, the divine benevolence here displayed, is wonderful! Strange that man was not destroyed and blotted out from among God's works!

Some suppose this to have been our first parents idea of the threatening in case of disobedience, and expressed by them, when they attempted to hide themselves from the divine presence, after their fall. *

* Genesis iii. 9.

Had man then been destroyed, the race would have been extinct. But he was spared; suffered long to continue and rear a family, from which the myriads of human kind have descended. Though exiled Eden, and doomed to labor and sorrow, he was still at the head of this lower creation, and creatures below him generally subservient to his comfortable subsistence. The ground was indeed cursed for his sake and fatiguing cultivation rendered necessary; but still it yielded the necessaries, and many of the comforts of life; though not the sweets of its primitive state.

These effusions of divine goodness were probably the wonder of angels, though so little noticed by men, the ungrateful objects of them.

But these were inconsiderable, compared with the strange provision made for their eternal salvation.

That God bears good will to mankind, not—withstanding their apostasy, and is desirous of their salvation, is from many considerations apparent. It is the spirit of the text, and the general language of the scriptures, as will be shewn in the sequel.

That God is willing that all should be saved, appears from the sufficiency of the provision which is made for the salvation of sinners; the frequent declarations that it is designed for all; the offers which are made indiscriminately to all; and the suitableness of the provision to the circumstances of all.

1. From the sufficiency of the provision which is made for the salvation of sinners, This is adequate to the salvation of the whole race. Christ, being a divine person, made an infinite atonement. In him there is a fulness of merit. Was the number of sinners ten times greater than that of our whole race, there would be no need of another Savior, or of Christ's dying again for their redemption. In him "dwells the whole fulness of the Godhead bodily." The reason all are not saved, is not a deficiency of merit in the

Redeemer, or any limitation of his satisfaction. Sinners “are not straitened in him, but in their own bowels.”

2. That God is willing all should be saved appears from the frequent declarations of scripture, that Christ died for all—Who gave himself a ransom *for all*, to be testified in due time—We see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels, that he, by the grace of God, should taste death *for every man*. The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one *died for all*, then were all dead; and that he *died for all*, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again.

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3. The same appears in the offers made *to all*. When after his resurrection Christ sent forth his apostles to effect his gracious purposes, both his orders and promises were indefinite—"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel *to every creature*. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Had salvation been provided for only a part of mankind, and the Savior been unwilling the residue should be saved, he would not have given charge to his ministers to tender salvation *to all—to every creature*, and declared that whoever came up to the specified conditions, should be saved.

Nothing false or insincere can be predicted of God our Savior. His words are truth. His offers and proposals are fair and open. That which appears the most obvious meaning of them is their meaning. And surely the offers of salvation appear to be made to all who hear the sound of the gospel; and they are invited and urged to accept them. They were so by Christ. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." * And they were so by his apostles when sent into all the earth to spread the gospel among the nations, and call them to come to Christ for life.

* John vii. 37.

4. The same thing appears from the suitableness of the provision which is made for the salvation of sinners, to the circumstances of all men.

Man needed an atonement, and he needed assistance, and both are provided in Christ. Of the former we have spoken, and there is no need to add. Man's weakness is such that he is unable of himself to conquer either spiritual enemies without, or his own corruptions within. Through Christ needed aid is offered to him; he is invited to the throne of grace, and assured that he shall not seek in vain, but "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find—If ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Though mankind have rebelled against God, he is more ready to hear their cries, and give his spirit to sanctify and save them, than the most affectionate earthly parent to shew kindness to his child.

The gospel is designed as a remedy for human weakness, equally as for human guile. It is every way adapted to the circumstances of the creatures to whom it offers salvation. It is a fair tender of pardon and peace, of life and happiness to all who hear its joyful sound; it not only opens these blessings to their view, but brings them within their reach.

5. The divine benevolence is farther evident from the exercise of forbearance towards ingrates, who neglect and slight offered salvation. God doth not soon enter into judgment with them, but waits with much long suffering; repeats his calls and warnings;

urges sinners in various ways, and by various means, to turn and live; inwardly by the strivings of his Spirit, and warnings of conscience; outwardly by his word; his providence, and the voice of those whom he sends “to warn the wicked from their way, and beseech them in Christ’s stead to be reconciled to God.”

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The reason of all these applications to sinful man, is that mentioned by St. Peter—"The Lord is long suffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

II. We are to consider some abuses of the revelation of divine goodness which is made to mankind.

There is no gift of God which depravity may not abuse. The belief of the divine perfections, especially of the divine mercy and benignity is often made the occasion of sin. Those whose "hearts are turned away from the Lord, when they hear the words of the curse, are wont to bless themselves in their hearts, saying, we shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our hearts, to add drunkenness to thirst." When called to repentance, they banish fear and lull themselves into security, with the revelation of divine grace and mercy which they find in the scriptures; making that a favor of death, which was ordained to be unto life—"With the Lord there is mercy; with him there is plenteous redemption; with him there is forgiveness;" not that he should be feared, but that his fear should be cast off, and his terror not make men afraid to sin—"God hath no pleasure in the death of sinners—judgment is his strange Work—he will not enter into judgment—will not destroy the work of his hands." Thus mercy is made to absorb the other divine attributes, and sinners emboldened in wickedness. By such considerations they make themselves vile without concern. Some become so hardened and unfeeling, that the approach of death doth not alarm them. By an habitual course of wickedness, their consciences are rendered callous, and they are insensible both to fear and shame, and continue so till death puts a period to probation, and seals them up for eternity!

These consequences are not apprehended at the entrance on a vicious course. The young sinner designs only to take some youthful liberties, and not to stray very far away, or long to deviate from the path of duty; but the farther he goes in the wrong, the stronger are his attachments to the pleasures of sin—the less his concern—the weaker and more defiant his purposes of amendment. He never finds the more convenient reason, which he promised himself at setting out in the way of wickedness; yea, the farther he proceeds in it, the greater is the difficulty of retracing his steps, and turning back from his wandering. Many who thus turn aside from the path of truth, probably settle into a state of security, and continue in it, till they have time no longer.

Was man grateful, divine goodness would lead him to repentance; but under the influence of depravity, it hath a different effect—is made the occasion of more ungodliness! What baseness! "Sin because grace abounds! Whose damnation is just! How can such escape? The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

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For sins of ignorance, and those into which men were surprized by unexpected temptations, sacrifices were ordered in the law, and pardon, on certain conditions, promised: But it was not promised presumptuous sinners. To them the law spake nothing but terror. "The soul that doth ought presumptuously—the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from his people. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall be utterly cutoff; his iniquity shall be upon him." *

* Numbers xv. 30, 31.

The person who lives in all good conscience, may hope in the divine mercy for the pardon of involuntary errors: But with what face can the willful offender ask mercy of God? No plea which is not affrontive can he make before him—"Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord: And shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

That awful threatening, or prophetic denunciation, "The Lord will not spare him; but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses written in this book [the law] shall lie upon him," regards willful sinners, flattering themselves with expectation of divine favor. *

* Deuteronomy xxix. 20.

When St. Paul would magnify the riches of divine grace in the salvation of the chief of sinners, he exemplifies it in himself—"Who before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious—Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." But he subjoins an alarming hint that those who sin wilfully, have no reason to expect like mercy from God. "But I obtained mercy *because* I did it ignorantly in unbelief." That no mercy would have been shewn him had he done those things presumptuously, is here intimated with sufficient plainness. This deserves the attention of those who sin presuming on divine mercy. Surely they cannot reasonably expect mercy from him "who is no respecter of persons," if Paul "obtained it *because he did those things ignorantly in unbelief.*" If this is duly considered, Will not presumptuous sinners believe and tremble? Will they not perceive their hopes to be vain?

2. Another abuse of the revelation of divine mercy is the universal scheme which is built upon it. The text and similar passages of scripture are alleged as evidence that none can be lost.

To help the argument, it is said—"To be influenced to obedience by fear is low and mercenary; and God would not urge men to duty by so unworthy a principle."



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But was not fear of punishment used as a guard to innocence while man remained upright? "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Had the influence of fear, operating to duty, been wrong, God would not have urged it as a motive to obedience. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." If God useth this as an argument to excite to duty, it must be a proper argument. That it is thus used in all his word, admits no dispute. Every teacher whom God hath sent to teach the way of life, and persuade men to walk in it, hath used it. The divine teacher is not to be excepted—"Fear him who is able to destroy soul and body in hell, yea, I say unto you, fear him." And when he delineates the process at the great day, after declaring that the righteous and the wicked will be separated from each other, the whole is closed with that solemn declaration—"These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

To be influenced by promises is no less mercenary than being driven by terror. And this is also proposed as an incitement to obedience. "God hath given us exceeding great and precious promises, that by them we should become partakers of a divine nature."

Every inspired teacher hath called men to repentance in the same manner, and urged it by the same arguments. Proof is needless. To pretend that application is not made, by divine order, to the hopes and fears of mankind, is trifling—Yea to pretend that they are not urged by the dread of eternal punishment, is to deny the most obvious truth.

And is there no cause for his fear? Doth God frighten men with vain terrors? Doth he threaten evils which can never come?

Or if this argument was necessary to be used with man before he fell, is it needless since he hath fallen?

But *God our Savior will have all men to saved*; and shall not that which he wills be effected? Can any thing contrary to his pleasure take place?

Much doth take place in this world, which, is not pleasing to God; which he doth not will, or approve. This may be predicated generally of sin. "Sin is the abominable thing which he hates.—He is angry with the wicked every day." Would he be angry, if all which is done was pleasing in his sight?

God is holy. Sin is opposition to his nature, forbidden by his law, and declared to be his abhorrence. To suppose that he should hate and forbid sin, yet approve of it and be pleased with it, is absurdity and folly.

God permits sin; but neither wills nor approves it. "Christ pleased not himself." * Much is permitted under his administration, which he doth not order, but forbids and abhors. Yea, God orders some things, as moral governor (in consequence of other things done

contrary to his directions) which are not pleasing to him, considered in themselves. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the

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children of men”—But finds it necessary to afflict. Grief and sorrow are known under the divine administration, and ordered out to mortals by providential dispensation. But these natural evils are always in consequence of moral evil, which is not the effect of divine influence, but ariseth from another source and hath another author. It ariseth from the abuse of powers which were given for better purposes. Where sin hath gone before, sorrows follow after; but they are not pleasing to the Supreme Governor.

* Rom. xv. 3.

The wickedness of the old world occasioned the deluge; but it is impossible to read the Mosaic account of those events, and suspect that they were pleasing to Deity.

We may make the same remark respecting the declensions of Israel and Judah and the judgments which followed. “O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, Thus ye speak, saying, if our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, as I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” * By another prophet we find God mourning over them —“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah, and set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.”

* Ezekial xxxiii. 10.

That people continued in their sins and perished in them: But will any who read these messages, sent them of God, conceive their crimes, and the desolations which followed, when they had filled up the measure of their iniquity, to be pleasing to God, or the effect of divine order and influence?

Will those who read our Savior’s lamentations over Jerusalem, and the destruction soon after brought upon that city and nation, because “they did not know the time of their visitation,” consider those events as pleasing to him? His predictions were verified—“their enemies cast a trench about them, compassed them round and kept them in on every side—laid their city even with the ground, and her children within her; not leaving one stone upon another—Zion was ploughed like a field”—vast numbers perished in the siege—many were crucified after the city was taken—the residue scattered among all nations, and the sword drawn out after them! The compassionate Redeemer called those sinners to repentance—warned them of the evils which they would bring on themselves, by refusing the grace which he offered them, and wept over them when filling up the measure of their guilt! But when they had been tried the appointed time, and continued obstinate, till the divine patience was exhausted, he entered into judgment with them and gave them according to their works.

Similar will be the event of persevering obstinacy in others. Man is placed here for trial—endowed with powers sufficient to render him a probationer; which implies capacity to use, or abuse his powers. The abuse is sin. The way of duty is made known, needed assistance conferred, the reasonableness of obedience shewn, and the injunction, “occupy; till I come,” subjoined, but no compulsion is used. Thus circumstanced, it is referred to man to choose for himself.

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God operates indeed on man; but only as on a free moral agent. Divine influences coincide with human liberty. Those who are willing and obedient find mercy. Over such the Savior rejoices, and their faith and love are rewarded with the rewards of grace. But those who neglect so great salvation, are left to perish in their sins.

That God can confidently do other than leave them to perish, is to us unknown. It may be impossible to renew them by repentance—beyond the power of Omnipotence to save them!

The conditions of salvation are fixed: No change can be made in them. “The impenitent heart treasureth up wrath. He that believeth not shall be damned. If we do not believe, yet God abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself.” The terms of acceptance with God are laid before us; the event depends on the choice we make. SUCH we conceive to be man’s situation here: Such the ground of the applications made to him in the gospel, and the promises and threatening annexed to the proposals therein contained. On another, supposition do they appear rational. On no other can we account for our Savior’s declaration that Sodom, had she enjoyed Capernaum’s advantages, would have remained till his day. *

* Matthew xi. 23.

Divine benevolence is great; but it will not secure salvation to gospel despisers: They “will wonder and perish.” As the first covenant had conditions annexed to it, so hath the new covenant. To pretend that there are none—that man hath no concern to secure the divine favor, is to charge folly on God, in all the overtures which are made to man in the gospel.

Life and death are now set before us. We may be saved, or we may perish. Which will be our portion depends on the effect which the proposals of grace have upon us. Today if ye will hear God’s voice harden not your hearts. Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation. Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Beware lest you * destroy a soul for which Christ died; and lest you have occasion at last to take up that lamentation—“The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved.”

* Romans xiv. 15.

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SERMON XVIII.

Balak’s inquiries relative to the service of God, and Balaam’s answer, briefly considered.

Micah vi. 6, 7, 8.



“Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with, thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression; the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?—He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

As mankind are endowed with reason, and profess to be governed by it, their revolts from God are practical criminations of him: Therefore his expostulations with his people of old, when they forsook him and followed other gods—“What iniquity have your fathers found in me? O my people what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me.” *

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* Jeremiah ii. 5. Micah vi. 3.

Israel as a people were going away from God, and he condescended to reason with them, and show them their ingratitude and baseness. To this end, he reminded them of his past care of them, and kindness to them, as a nation, from the time of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt—"I brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee from the house of servants"—After just glancing at that deliverance, he passes over the wonders wrought for them at the red sea, and in the wilderness, and their numerous rebellions, while he was leading them as a flock, and supplying their wants by a series of miracles, and enlarges on an event which took place on the borders of Canaan, the attempts made by Balak, the king of Moab, to prevail with him to leave his people and go over to him, and help him against them, and his faithfulness to Israel on that occasion—"O my people, remember now what Balak, king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam, the son of Beor answered him from Shittim to Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord." *

* Numbers xxii. &c.

Balak's consultations, or inquiries, are contained in the two last verses of our text: Balaam's answer in the third. In Balak's inquiries we see the ideas which he entertained of God, and of the service which he supposed would be acceptable to Him, and engage, him to forsake his people, and deliver him from his fears on their account. Balaam's answer corrects Balak's mistakes, and discovers surprizingly just apprehensions of the true God, and true religion, though depravity prevailed, and caused him to counteract his convictions, by advising Balak to measures directly opposed to his sense of duty.

To open and explain this subject is the design of the following discourse.

It may be proper to premise that Israel did not make war either on Moab or Ammon. Those nations were descended from Lot, and Moses was forbidden to molest them in possession of the lands which God had given them. Moab might have had peace, and the friendship of Israel, but refused it, and joined the confederacy against them. When the tribes of Israel reached the borders of Moab, which lay in their way to Canaan, Balak and his people were intimidated by their numbers, and by their martial appearance. They did not therefore, sue for peace, but resolved to neglect no measures to subdue and conquer them.

It was an ancient custom among the heathen at their entrance on a war, to devote the enemy to destruction, and solicit their gods to forsake them. Balak thought this a matter of importance before he entered into a war with Israel. This ceremony was commonly performed by the priests, or ministers of religion. How this had been to Moab we are not informed; but on occasion before us, the affrighted sovereign of that people, sent to some distance for Balaam, a famous soothsayer or diviner, of whose prevalence with the powers above he had a high opinion, to be the agent in this business.

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Balaam was really a remarkable person; few more so occur in history. Few others had more knowledge of the true God, or juster ideas of the service which he requires of mankind. But his character will be developed in the sequel.

This renowned soothsayer refused at first to listen to the invitation of the king of Moab, assigning a sufficient reason for his refusal —“The Lord refuseth to give me leave”—but when a second embassy arrived, more numerous and more honorable, and with the proffer of great honors and rewards, his ambition and covetousness were inflamed, and he resolved from that moment to secure them. The first seems to have been only a common embassy, and to have carried only the usual rewards of divination. We know what followed. Balaam sinned in asking a second time for liberty to go and curse Israel, when God had once refused him, and told him that they were blessed. He asked, however, and was in judgment permitted to go, but only to act agreeably to divine direction which would be given on the spot; but he went, determined to secure the wages of unrighteousness. Seeing his design, God met him in the way, and by a strange and miraculous communication and warning, made him afraid to curse his people, and even compelled him to bless them altogether. But to come to our subject,

I. We are to consider Balak's inquiries.—*Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?*

Balak had so deep a sense of the danger which threatened him, that he was ready to bring the most costly sacrifices, if they would avail to render propitious the God who had wrought such wonders in Egypt and in the wilderness for the salvation of his people. He would offer all the cattle, and all the oil of his kingdom, *thousands of ram, and ten thousands of rivers of oil!* Yea, he would even offer his *first born*, the heir of his crown! Would not refute the dearest of his offspring to atone for his sin, and bring over the God of Israel to be his God, in the time of his distress!

Such were his proposals. We may observe in them several mistakes respecting the service of God, or the homage which is acceptable to him; mistakes not uncommon among men. As,

First a supposition that sins may be atoned and mankind allowed to continue in them, if they will come up to the price. The country of Moab abounded with flocks, particularly with sheep; * it abounded also with oil; and Balak supposed that the divine favor might be obtained by sacrifices of this kind—by a profusion of them—*thousands of ram, and ten thousands of rivers of oil*. He knew himself a sinner—he knew that he had taken part against the God of Israel; had served other gods, who were his rivals. But now he saw his need of the divine favor and he wished to purchase it—at any price, to purchase it. He was ready to pay for his sins; only waited to know the price, and he would make the payment!

* 2 Kings iii. 4.

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Not a word do we hear of his parting with his sins and returning back by repentance.

Few left to the light of nature seem to have conceived the necessity of repentance, in order to obtain the divine favor. For their sins, they must somehow, make atonement, and they would then be forgiven, though they continued to commit them! Mankind have entertained different ideas of what was necessary to make atonement. The more common idea hath been, that it was to be done by sacrifice; however they came by that idea. It probably derived by tradition from the first family of our race. But there seems to have been a general mistake respecting the design of sacrifice. By those devoid of revelation, it hath not been considered as pointing to a divine sacrifice, but as having in *itself* an atoning virtue. So it seems to have been viewed by this Moabitish prince.

Another mistake respecting sacrifices, which hath been common in the world, is this—That their value depends on their cost to the offerer. This was a mistake of Balak. If common offerings, and the usual number of victims would not procure the divine favor and atone for his sins, he would offer more, and more costly ones—*thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil!* Such a profusion of sacrifices, of the same kind, or partly so, with those offered by Israel, so many more they were able, coming out of the wilderness, to offer, he hoped would prevail to detach from them their God, and buy him so to be his friend!

But if not, if these were too little, he would sacrifice his offspring! *Give his first born for his transgression—the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul!* A sacrifice much more costly, much more painful, than that of all earthly treasure! Surely such an offering must prevail!

Similar conclusions have not been very uncommon! The homage offered up to God hath been estimated by its cost to the offerer! A circumstance which adds nothing to its value. The value of what is done for God depends on its conformity to his orders. That its cost to the offerer enhances its value, in the divine estimation, supposes him to be pleased with the sufferings of his creatures, and delighted with their sorrows, than which, nothing is farther from truth. “God grieveth not willingly—Judgment is his strange work.” Were it otherwise, the more reluctant the offerer, the more acceptable would be the offering: But God loves a cheerful giver; yea, he is so pleased with this disposition, that he accepts and rewards it, where ability is wanting to carry it into action. “If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted.” *

* 2 Corinthians viii. 12.

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The sacrifices of old derived all their value from the sacrifice of Christ, to which they pointed. God had determined, when and how they would be offered. Additions to the number, or cost, added nothing to their value, but had a contrary effect, spoiled and rendered them unavailing. Human victims, the most costly, and therefore supposed by the heathen, to be the most efficacious, were so far from having power with God to draw down his blessing, that they most certainly drew his curse on all who offered them. This was one of the sins of the Canaanites, which above all others, availed to bring the divine judgments upon them. And when Israel fell into the same sin, it kindled the wrath of God against them to their destruction. This was the sin of Manasseh, “which God would not pardon.”

Balak first proposed other sacrifices—a profusion of them; but if they were not sufficient to atone for his sins and procure the friendship of Jehovah, seems to have thought that the sacrifice of his first born must avail!

Such were his blunders respecting the nature of that religion which would render him acceptable to the true God. He seems not once to have thought of repentance; or if he did, he made no offer of it—did not once propose “crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts.” He chose rather to sacrifice all the treasures of his kingdom, and all the members of his family, than part with his sins and become holy in heart and life.

Such is the temper of depravity. The servants of sin are sooner persuaded to make any other sacrifice than that of their lusts and corruptions. And many foolishly flatter themselves that other sacrifices will avail to procure the divine favor—that holiness of heart and life are not indispensibly requisite, but that something beside may be substituted in its stead. Countless examples of this folly meet us in history, and even in the history only catholic church of Christ!

Thus did Balak mistake the nature of true religion, and consider it as consisting in that which was foreign, yea, repugnant to its nature. Such were his proposals which he spread before Balaam, and of which he required his opinion. Let us hear then the answer of the Sage.

Balaam was better instructed: He appears to have understood the nature of true religion, and clearly points it out to Balak, though he neglected himself to conform to it. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly, with thy God?*

There is scarcely a better definition of true religion to be found in the bible.

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good.—From Balak’s inquiry we should be ready to conclude that he was ignorant of God and religion—that he supposed that God preferred sacrifice to justice and mercy—that sacrifice would supply their place and render them of no account. Balaam tells him that he had been better instructed; though



we know not where, or how. *He hath shewed thee, what is good;* and he appeals to Balak whether this was not the case—*What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, &c.*

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To *do justly*—There is no true religion where justice is not received as a foundation principle. “I the Lord love judgment; I hate robbery for burnt offerings; and I will direct their work in truth.” * Fraudulent people may pretend to religion; may make many and long prayer, but their religion is of no avail; their sacrifices are an abomination. + Witness the scribes and pharisees, who received the greater damnation.

* Isaiah l xi. 8. + Isaiah i. 10. &c.

The next characteristic trait here given of the good man, is the love of mercy. *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy?*

There is something particularly to be observed in the language here used—*love mercy*. —It may not be in every one’s power to shew mercy; but every man may, and every good man does *love mercy*. To “feed the hungry and clothe the naked,” are acts of mercy, but not in the power of all men. Some are, themselves wholly dependent on the mercy of others for their own support.

Justice often restrains and sets bounds to the exercise of mercy. The judge may be grieved for the malefactor, and wish that he could shew mercy to him, but find himself obliged to condemn him and suffer justice to take its course. The debts which a person hath contracted may require all his goods, or all his necessities do not require. In such cases he is under obligation to shut the hand of charity, even against the proper objects of it. We have no right to defraud some, that we may shew mercy to others. Justice is a prior duty. We are tied up to the discharge of it—are bound to *do justly*; whereas it is only required that we *love mercy*. The love of mercy will dispose us to shew mercy, where we have ability to do it without violating justice. Yea, it will cause us to do it with pleasure, rendering us like God, who “delights in mercy.”

Acts of mercy may proceed from other principles beside the love of mercy, but these do not answer to the divine requirement. In the view of him who sees the heart they are not characteristic of renovation, or a heart right with God.

The third particular here mentioned as constituting the finishing part of the good man’s character, is humility—that *he walks humbly with, his God*—that he is sensible of his imperfection, and of his need of mercy from God. This always makes a part of the good man’s character.

The good man, while he is just to all, and while kind and benevolent, and disposed to do good to all, as he hath opportunity and ability, retains a sense of his defects, of his remaining depravity—that he but too often deviates from his own principles—that in every thing he comes short of his duty. Therefore doth he confess himself “an unprofitable servant”—that he lays God under no obligation—yea, that he lives on mercy—that all the good things which he receives, are unmerited, the gifts of divine

grace—that was mercy denied him, and “the reward of his hands given to him, it would be ill with him” —he should be undone forever.

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Such is the character drawn by the Eastern soothsayer in the last verse of our text: And it is the perfect character of a child of God, in this state of imperfection, trial, and improvement, where he is pressing on towards that perfection which he never attains till he “puts off the body, and is clothed on with his house which is from heaven.” Then “the spirits of just men are made perfect,” and not till then.

“The spirits of just men”—The words are expressive, plainly implying that none who allow themselves in injustice are the children of God—that all the saints will eventually be found, to be “Israelites indeed in whom there is no guile.”

Thus did Balaam instruct Balak, or remind him of what God required. Balak did not regard him. He could not be persuaded to make such sacrifices as these. He would give all the treasures of his kingdom, and even the fruit of his body, to procure the favor of God; but to sacrifice his corruptions, and put on the temper of a saint!—These were hard requirements—he must be excused! Therefore did he dismiss his instructor, who hitherto had “spoken only the word which God had put into his mouth”—and went away though he went sorrowing!

The same is the temper of too many others. We may do much which God requires, may even go beyond and do much which he doth not require, and yet be nothing in religion. There must be the spirit and temper of true religion. There can be no commutation—Nothing will be accepted as a substitute. *We must do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God*, or have no part in him. Nothing without it will be accepted; not even “giving the body to be burned.”

People may also have a good speculative acquaintance with religion and yet remain devoid of it. Such cases sometimes occur. Such an one occurred in him who spake so well in our text. Balaam appears to have had a perfect knowledge of the nature of religion; to have understood what it was and wherein it consisted. He was sensible also of the importance of being found at last to have lived under the influence of it. Therefore when looking forward to the period of his dissolution did he utter that earnest wish or prayer—“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.” Yet he was not a good man! his knowledge resided in his head: It never reached his heart. “He loved the wages of unrighteousness;” lived and died under the government of depravity and wickedness! He dared not indeed to go in direct opposition to the letter of the divine command—dared not curse Israel with his lips, though he longed to do it, and wished the curse to fall upon them, while he was blessing them and forefilling their future greatness. But he dared privately to advise Balak “to cast a stumbling block before them”—To send among them the women of Moab, and seduce them to uncleanness and idolatry, in order to bring the curse of heaven upon them! His advice was followed

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and partly succeeded! Not to procure a victory for Moab, but to bring the judgments of God upon Israel; twenty four thousands of whom fell by the pestilence which was sent to punish “their sin the matter of Peor.” And more tragical events would probably have followed, had not Phinebas stood up and executed vengeance on some of the principal offenders, and thus turned away the anger of the Lord from his offending people.*

* Numbers xv. and xxi. 16.

* * * * *

Who can contemplate these things without astonishment! Who consider the character and conduct of Balaam and not be amazed! That a man so instructed respecting the divine character, the nature of religion, and the consequences which will follow human conduct here, should dare to set himself deliberately to evade the divine law, as wicked and artful men do human laws, surprises and confounds us! Yet so it certainly was in the case before us!

We are not left ignorant of the consequences: To him the “end of those things was death,” eternal death, for he died in rebellion against God. And he seems to have anticipated the event; when speaking of the divine being, the true God and Redeemer, he breaks out into that language—“I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh.”

We can form no judgment of a person’s moral state by his speculative knowledge of God and religion. Knowledge in divine things is important; on many accounts it is so; but it does not ensure goodness of heart, without which we cannot be saved; we may have “all knowledge,” yet perish in our sins. So it happened to Balaam, and probably to others beside him. “If ye know these things happy are ye, *if ye do them.*”

But we are chiefly concerned at home—to know our own state. *Do we do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God?* If these are found upon us, happy are we; but if any of them are habitually wanting to us, we “are yet in our sins, and the wrath of God abideth on us.”

If any are disposed to inquire with Balak, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?* Let them attend to the answer given by Balaam—if we add, reliance on divine grace in Christ no better answer can be given.

How far those of old were let into the gospel way of salvation we know not. Balaam expressed the temper of a child of God. Whoever possessed that temper relied on divine mercy, while endeavoring to fulfil all righteousness. Such would refer themselves to divine grace; and surely God would not be wanting to them. He might lead them by a



way which they understood not; “but would bring them to their desired haven, and unto God their exceeding joy. Their labor would not be in vain in the Lord.”

Dependence on divine mercy is still our duty. Though favored with gospel light, many things are yet hidden from us. Let us therefore do justly love mercy, and walk humbly with God, and he will guide us through the darkness, and bring us through to the rest which he hath prepared for those who love and serve, and trust him here. For these there is no commutation. Knowledge the most perfect; faith the most miraculous; and sacrifices the most costly, would all be of no avail. God hath shewn us what is good, and what he requires. May we hear and obey. Amen.



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SERMON XIX.

Confessing Christ an indispensable Duty.

2 Timothy ii, 12.

“—If we deny him, he also will deny us.”

This is predicated of Christ; and looks forward to the day when all mankind will stand before him as their judge.

Denying Christ is here declared to be a mortal sin. Those found guilty of it will hear that sentence—“Depart ye cursed!” But this is to be understood only of a persevering denial of him. Those who turn by a timely repentance, will find mercy. This is true of every sin. But repentance may be too late. It must antecede death, or it will be of no avail. The day of grace terminates with life. From that period man ceases to be a probationer, and his state is unalterably fixed.

When the offers of pardon and peace are sent abroad, some will not hear. Who will receive, and who reject the grace of life, is to us unknown. Our expectations are often disappointed. Some come to Christ of whom we had little hope; others cannot be persuaded, of whom our hopes were strong. We have only to “preach Christ; warning every man, and teaching every man,” and must leave the event.

Some live where the sound of gospel grace is not heard. “We” are made to differ from them. “To us is the word of this salvation sent.” But this doth not secure salvation to us. We must hear and obey. “If we neglect so great salvation, we shall not escape.”

Among the indispensable requirements of the gospel, is that of confessing Christ, Himself hath determined it. “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven.” *

* Matthew x. 32.

Whether the apostle had this declaration of our Savior’s in his eye; or it was revealed to him by the holy Spirit, we are not informed; but his language in the text is express to the same purpose—*If we deny him, he also will deny us.*

These declarations have a particular reference to the duty of appearing openly to be Christ’s disciples; especially in times of persecution, when Christian’s are exposed to sufferings and death for his sake. Even in such times, confessing Christ is a condition

of being confessed by him. If we think this a hard requirement, and refuse compliance, we shall have no part in him.

What are we then to understand *by confessing and denying Christ*.

Considering one of these may suffice. The text regards the latter. To this we will therefore turn our attention.

Christ may be denied in words; or in works; or by a perversion of the gospel, causing it to become another gospel. We will treat of each briefly.

I. Christ may be denied in words.

As “with the mouth confession is made to salvation,” so with the mouth we may “deny the Lord who bought us.” This is done by those who deny that Jesus is the Christ; Thus he was denied by the Jews, among whom he was born, and passed the days of his earthly residence.

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That people had many peculiar advantages for knowing Christ, and many special evidences of his truth. "To them were committed the oracles of God." They had the prophets who testified of Christ. To them did he appeal, and by them call on the Jews to try his claims to the Messiasship—"Search the scriptures; they are they which testify of me." That people also witnessed his miracles, "which were such as no man could do except God were with him." They witnessed the wonders which attended his birth—those which attended, and followed his death—many of that nation, who had seen his crucifixion, and the soldier's spear pierce his heart while he hung on the cross, saw him alive after his passion; and a sufficient number, mostly, if not wholly Jews, witnessed his ascension. Yet as a people they rejected him, and continued in unbelief! Not only denied him before Pilate, but notwithstanding the teaching and miracles of the apostles, persevered in their denial of him, and perished in it! This was foretold. Christ warned them of the event of their infidelity—"If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall perish in your sins." But they would not hear.

By the Gentiles the gospel was more kindly received. Though devoid of that knowledge of God and true religion which might have prepared them for the reception of it, when they witnessed the mighty works, wrought by those who preached it, they believed. Miracles are appeals to the senses of mankind. And when those who had worshipped dumb idols, beheld the wonders wrought by the ministers of Christ, they perceived that they were sent of God, and became obedient to the faith. Then did "many come from the east and west, and set down in the kingdom of God; while the children of the kingdom were call out." Christianity spread abroad. "The heathen were given to the Son for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession." For several ages, most who were educated in Christian lands, and blessed with revelation, professed to believe the gospel. But in later ages there hath been a falling away, agreeably to the predictions which went before, and many deny the truth of the gospel, and reject it as fabulous.

II. Christ may be denied in works. He is so by some who in words confess him.

Those who enroll themselves among Christ's disciples, thereby engage to be his followers. This is enjoined and made a term of acceptance. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me—whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

To follow Christ is to cultivate his temper, and tread in his steps. "Christ was meek and lowly in heart." He did God's commandments. It was "his meat to do the will of him that sent him." Those who are his disciples have learnt of him. The same mind is in them, which is in him. When this divine temper is wrought into the soul, it appears in the life. Those who have his spirit, walk as he walked.

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Some call themselves Christians, who do not follow Christ. But he doth not acknowledge them to be his. He ranks them among those who deny him, “Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and done: the things which I say? Then are ye my friends, when ye do all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.”

Christ's name is blasphemed, when those who call themselves after him live in allowed wickedness. Sore are the wounds which he hath received in the house of his friends. No other have been so deep and deadly.

But those who while they call themselves Christ's friends, live like the wicked world, discover their hypocrisy—that they are not of Christ's flock—“His flock hear his voice and follow him.” Others may creep in unawares, but they are not of his fold. The apostle speaks of these false professors in his epistle to Titus. * “They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good works reprobate.” +

* Titus i. 16. + Titus i. 16.

Others deny Christ by refusing to confess him: “For the refusal is in works to deny him.”

Under the former dispensation certain duties were enjoined as tokens of subjection to the divine Sovereign. To neglect them, was considered as breaking the covenant of God. “And God said to Abram, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou and thy seed after thee. This is my covenant which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee: Every man child among you shall be circumcised. The uncircumcised man child shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.” ++ An attendance on the passover was enjoined under the same penalty. The person who should neglect it, was ordered to be cut off from Israel. Every rite and ceremony enjoined in the law was obligatory. To neglect them was to set up the standard of rebellion against God—deny his sovereignty—his right to give law. Those who persevered in neglect, after warnings, were no more to be considered as his people.

++ Genesis xvii. 9-14.

Under the gospel dispensation, duties of like import are enjoined, and under the same penalty. The tokens of belonging to Christ are commanded. To neglect them is to reject the Savior, and forfeit the benefits of an interest in him. Among these an open profession of faith in Christ, is one of the chief. So it was considered by the apostles, and primitive Christians. They dared not neglect it when it cost every worldly comfort, and even life. Neither was it a groundless fear which excited them to so costly a duty. Their Lord, had expressly declared, that “whoever should be ashamed of him, before an evil and adulterous generation, he would be ashamed of them before his Father, and before his angels.”

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If we attend to our context we shall see that the apostle has here a special reference to denying Christ in this way—"Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead, according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying, for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we differ, we shall also reign with him: *If we deny him, he also will deny us*: If we believe not; yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself."

The apostle persevered though he suffered the loss of all things, and incurred every indignity and sorrow; and even when he foresaw the loss of life, in consequence of adhering to the Christian cause and continuing to preach the gospel. When some who were concerned for him, would have dissuaded him from adventuring among the enemies of Christianity, especially as his dangers and sufferings among them, were foretold by a prophet, he refused their counsel and adhered to his purpose, though tenderly affected with their concern for him. "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus," and when his last conflict approached, apprized of what was before him, he advanced without dismay—"I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand."

St. Paul might have avoided all the evils which he endured because he belonged to Christ, by only practically denying him: But he dared not deny him. He knew the consequences which would follow the part he acted. "If we suffer we shall also reign with him; *if we deny him, he also will deny us*. Having respect to the recompence of reward," he pressed on, exulting in the prospect before him—"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day."

If to neglect professing Christ, when it exposed to such sufferings was considered as denying him, and incurred the forfeiture of an interest in him, will it now be dispensed with? No, when it exposeth to no suffering, or loss? When it both became the most cheap and easy of all duties?

Are the terms of acceptance with God in Christ changed? Are they not the same as formerly? Doubtless they are essentially the same. "There is no respect of persons with God." If to neglect the badges of discipleship was formerly to deny Christ, it is still to deny him. *If we deny him, he also will deny us*.

III. Christ may be denied by a perversion of the gospel, causing it to become another gospel.

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Some of this description were found in the primitive church. Such were those who made Christ the minister of sin—who considered the design of his coming, not to be “to destroy the works of the devil,” but to render it safe to live in sin and indulge depravity. Such were those who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes; and the doctrine of Balaam, which were probably nearly akin, giving countenance to uncleanness. Such were also those pretendedly enlightened persons, who claimed knowledge in divine things, superior to that of the apostles, and taught that chastity, and temperance, and sundry other duties enjoined of God, were not obligatory on believers. These are described by St. Peter and Jude, as enemies of Christ.

In later ages the gospel hath not been less corrupted, by some, who have called themselves Christians. It hath become in their hands, another gospel.

It maybe difficult precisely to determine, all who in this way deny Christ: But when the manifest tendency of any scheme, called Christian, is to lead to sin, render secure in sin, or build the hope of salvation on any other foundation than the mercy of God, and merits of the Redeemer, it must lead to a practical denial of Christ. To the sacred standard should every system be referred. Those which deviate essentially there from, lead to a denial of Christ; and will produce a denial by him before his Father in heaven.

REFLECTIONS.

If we do not mistake the Scriptures, those who deny Christ are without hope; and those who reject and those who neglect the gospel, or refuse to confess the Savior, are to be reckoned among them.

Some are otherwise minded. “If a person only acts sincerely, no matter what his religious principles, (say some) or whether he hath religious principles; he will find mercy with God and be accepted of him;” an opinion which is spreading in this liberal age!

We would gladly adopt it, and receive to the arms of charity all who appear to act honestly, could we see reason for it. But, in our apprehension, the word of truth condemns those who deny Christ, and declares that they will be denied by him before his heavenly Father. We read of damnable heresies—of those who are given up to strong delusions that they should believe a lie that they might be damned. —And find an express declaration, cutting off unbelievers from all hope.—“He that believeth not shall be damned.”

Whatever God may do with those who have not the gospel, those to whom it is sent must believe, receive and obey it, or perish in their sins. This is so plainly and expressly declared in the word of truth, that we wonder doubts should arise in the minds of those who believe it.



Nor is it less strange, that confessing Christ should be thought a matter of indifference. Scripture is equally express respecting this matter, as the other. We have seen that under the former dispensation, God's covenant and the tokens of it were commanded, under penalty of excision from his people—That in the apostolic age, Christ was to be confessed, under penalty of being denied by him in the presence of God. These are not matters of doubt.

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They are stoney ground hearers who “are offended when persecution ariseth because of the word.” These bring no fruit to perfection.

If the terms of acceptance with Christ are the same now as formerly: If they are not lowered down from their original, a denial of him, either verbal or practical, will shut men out of his kingdom.

It becomes those who have a hope toward God while such their state, to consider these things. “It is a faithful saying—If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him; *If we deny him, he also will deny us.*”

* * * * *

SERMON XX.

The Fear which terminates in the Second Death.

Revelation xxi. 8.

“The fearful—shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.”

The terms on which only we can be Christ’s disciples are laid before us in the Scriptures, and we are counselled to consider them before we engage to be his.

Though Christ was born to be a king, his kingdom is not of this world. He doth not persuade men with the prospect of great things here; but on the contrary warns his followers, that “in this world they shall have tribulation;” pointing them to another, as the place of their rest, and teaching them there to expect the reward of their labors and suffering here. And here the saints in every age, have groaned, being burdened. Had God provided nothing better for them, he would be ashamed to be called their God.

The primitive Christians drank largely of the bitter cup. All the apostles, except John, are said to have sealed their testimony with their blood. John at an advanced age, died peaceably in his bed at Ephesus. But he did not escape persecution here. When the revelation was made to him, he was in exile for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus. For his consolation, and for the edification of the church, he was visited in his lonely state, by the exalted Redeemer, who unveiled futurity before him, briefly sketching the changes which were to pass over his people till the consummation of all things. The vision closed with the solemn, dreadful process of the great day, and its consequences to the righteous and to the wicked.

The divine visitant enlarged on the glories of the heavenly state beyond any of the prophets who had gone before. The description is clothed in figurative language,

affording only a partial view of “the glory which is to be revealed;” sufficient however to convince us, that “eye hath not seen, ear heard, or the heart of man conceived the things which God hath prepared for those who love him.”

But who will be made to possess these glorious things? They are offered to all who hear the sound of the gospel; but conquering believers will only attain them. Their contrast will be the portion of others.

This life is a warfare, in which we are called to contend with our own corruptions and with the powers of darkness—“He that overcometh shall inherit all things:” But those who are overcome, *will have their part in the lake of fire—which is the second death.*

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To understand the grounds of this context is highly important. Mistakes here may be fatal. To assist the inquirer, the characters of conquerors and captives are drawn in the scriptures. The verse of which the text is a part, mentions several general characters of the latter kind, and determines their future portion—*The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.*

In the prosecution of our subject, only one of these general characters will be considered—the *fearful*.

Who then are intended by *the fearful*? And what is the fear which leads to destruction?

Fearful, is a term seldom used to describe sinners. It occurs, we believe, in no other scripture. Every kind of fear is not sinful; much less inconsistent with a state of grace. “The fear of Lord is the beginning of wisdom”—it disposes the subject of it to mind the things which belong to peace, and flee to the hope set before him in gospel. The fear of God is often used to describe the good man, and given as a leading trait in his character. It is noted in favor of Obadiah, the servant of Ahab, that he “feared the Lord greatly.”

To have no fear of God before one’s eyes, is expressive of great obduracy in sin; of the last grade of depravity. Yet in the text, the fearful, are mentioned as the first rank of those who will have their part in the burning lake! What then is this fear?

It may be of several kinds; particularly—that to which precludes trust in God, and reliance on his grace in Christ—that which operates to explain away the law of God—that which puts men upon duty in order to atone for sin—and that which shrinks from the hardships of religion.

I. The fear which leads down to the lake of fire, may be that which precludes trust in God and reliance on his grace in Christ.

Faith in Christ, and reliance on divine grace in him, are conditions of salvation. Where these are wanting Christ will not profit. Faith and reliance are united. The latter is dependant on the former, and riseth out of it. “He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

The fearful and unbelieving are here set together—the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part—Perhaps they are thus joined to intimate that the fear intended precludes the faith to which the promises are made.

The sinner who is the subject of this fear hath so deep a sense of the sinfulness of sin, especially of his own, that he is afraid to make God his hope—afraid to look up to the



throne of grace, or to ask mercy of God. He would gladly flee the divine presence, like the first guilty pair, when they heard the voice of God walking in the garden after their fall. When fear hath this effect, it drives the sinner from the mercy which alone can save him.

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“Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came to seek and save that which was lost.” To sinners, mercy is offered in him. Were we without sin, we should have no need of mercy. If we flee from Christ because we are sinners, we flee the mercy which alone can save us, and put offered salvation from us; for it is offered us only in him. To drive sinners away from the Savior by fear, when he can hold them no longer secure in sin, is an old device of the deceiver, which hath probably often succeeded.

On secure and awakened sinners, different delusive arts are practised. The former are persuaded that sin is a trivial evil, far from meriting eternal punishment; that God is not greatly offended at it; that it is easy to obtain forgiveness; that as we are required to forgive every offender who saith, I repent, God will do the same; that it is only to ask mercy, when we can sin no longer, and it will be immediately granted; so that there is very little danger in sin. But those who are awakened—who see the evil of sin, and tremble for fear of God’s judgments, are tempted to believe that divine justice will only be exercised, especially to them—that their sins are unpardonable; their day of grace ended, and that they have nothing before them but “a certain fearful looking for of judgment.” In such suggestion, the design of the tempter is to drive sinners to despair, and thus drive them away from Christ. If he avails to effect it, his end is gained; for there is salvation in no other.

It is emphatically true of the despairing sinner, that he “cannot go to Christ for life.” All who go to him, believe him able and willing to save. Devoid of this faith none can go to him. Therefore doth the fear which precludes faith lead down to ruin.

II. *Fear which operates to explain away the law of God, hath the same effect.*

This is sometimes the effect of fear. Those who believe that there is a God, and that the holy scriptures are his word, cannot feel secure while they consider themselves condemned by his law, and view themselves as the objects of his wrath.

Therefore do the slaves of depravity endeavor to explain away God’s law—therefore to persuade themselves that certain duties are not required—that certain self denials are not enjoined; or that there is something in their particular case which exempts them from *this or that*, which is required of others.

The cunning which some discover in finding out excuses and evasions, by which to cheat themselves and silence their consciences, is affecting. It shews them to be the slaves of Satan, and servants of corruption, and that they love their masters, and refuse to go out free, when liberty is offered.

When people of this description pretend to inquire what is their duty, their real design is to evade the obligations of it. And they often succeed to persuade themselves that they are free from the obligations of it. But few others are deceived. The veil of the covering

spread over their designs and views, is opaque only to themselves; to others it is transparent, and leaves them without excuse.

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Frequent instances of this unfairness are visible in the world. When people make themselves easy and secure, without faith which works by love and purifies the heart—without repentance which mourns for sin as dishonorable to God, and in itself an evil thing, and a bitter, and without devotedness to the service of God, as well as a reliance on his grace in Christ, no matter what they substitute in the place of these graces, all is of no avail; hope is built on the sand. That many of these vain substitutes are to be found among men, Who is insensible? When fear hath this effect, it leads down to the fiery lake.

III. Sometimes *fear puts men upon duty in order to atone for sin and merit the divine favor*. Afraid of God's judgments, they set themselves to do commanded duties, and place their dependence on these doings of their own.

Duties done by men have nothing meritorious in them. The design of many things which God hath enjoined is to serve as a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. None are intended to save by any virtue in them. By nothing which man can do is God made his debtor. Neither doth ought done by man recommend to the divine favor if perverted and made the ground of hope toward God.

The sinner's best recommendation to the divine favor is a sense of his own demerit, which leads him humble and self abased to cast himself on grace in a mediator. His most prevalent prayer is that made by the publican—"God be merciful to me a sinner." Sinners are invited to the Savior, and encouraged to hope in him—"Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth. It is a faithful saying, that Christ came into the world to save sinners." But he saves only those who receive and trust in him. If we go about to establish our own righteousness, relying on our own doings as the ground of our acceptance with God, he will give to us according to our works—"Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled: This shall ye have from mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow." *

Isaiah I. 11.

Not that sinners are to neglect the means of grace, or indulge in sin. When God promised his church to give them a new heart, and cause them to walk in his statutes, he declared that those blessings should be given in answer to prayer—"Yet for this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." And when the apostle teaches how to seek renewing grace, he directs to "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness, the ingrafted word."

Saving grace is perhaps, never given till it is asked of God. Sinners are made to see their need of this divine gift and led to cry to God for it. It is then when they ask that they receive. That they shall not ask in vain, is intimated with sufficient clearness in the word of truth. "Whosoever shalt call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved. If thou

knewest the gift of God—*thou wouldest have asked of him*, and he would have given thee living water.”

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Yet the sinner merits nothing by any doings of his. The true penitent is sensible of it. He relies on grace alone; and asks mercy of God for the sake of him “who died for his offences, and rose again for his justification.” He seeks in the use of appointed means because it is the way of duty, and the way in which God is wont “to have mercy, on whom he will have mercy;” who are commonly chosen from among those who seek his face.

As fear puts some on duty, it excites others to that which is not duty—puts them on doing things which are not required. Such are the pilgrimages and penances of the Romanists; and such the severities which some others have practised on themselves with a view to atone for sin and render Deity propitious.

These have no tendency to conciliate heaven. A curse is more likely to follow them than a blessing; yet in this way some have thought to atone for sin and make peace with an offended God!*

* Vide Sermon on Colossians ii. 8.

IV. There is yet one other kind of fear which leads to destruction—that *which causes men to shrink from the hardships of religion*; and decline the difficulties which lie in the way of duty.

Difficulties and temptations were not peculiar to the first ages of Christianity. St. Paul, after mentioning his own, declares them, in a measure, common to all Christ’s followers —“Yea, and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.”

The trials and difficulties of the righteous are divers, but none escape them. Many arise from indwelling corruption—many from an insnaring world—many from Satan’s malice and devices.

In fallen man there is a bias to error and wickedness. Not to suffer his own lusts to draw him away, and entice him to sin, requires great self denial.

From a wicked world temptations also arise and difficulties spring up. In this land, the enemies of religion, have not power to kill and destroy the faithful; but they have power to pour contempt upon them. Cruel mockings may severely try those who fear neither the gibbet, nor the stake. These do try the people of God at this day.

Neither do the powers of darkness cease to trouble and afflict—to assault the faithful with their temptations, and to lay snares to entangle them.

“Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” Satan’s devices are without number—his attacks are made from every quarter; and he is often so hidden that it is difficult to discover him. Sometimes he assumes the mark of religion —is “transformed into an angel of light,” the more effectually to cover

his dark designs. Such is his enmity that he is indefatigable in his endeavors to seduce and to destroy—such his craft and experience, that he is wise to accomplish his nefarious designs: And against the saints his rage is the greater, because he knoweth that his time is short.

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Here the people of God live in a state of warfare—conflict with many enemies and suffer many sorrows. Often they are called to suffer for Christ—because they are numbered among his followers and wear his livery.

If any of these things move us, if we are afraid to encounter these hardships, are discouraged in our Christian course and induced to turn back from after Christ, our fear will destroy us—it will cause us *to have our part in the lake of fire—which is the second death.*

This hath happened to some who have assumed the Christian name, and for a time appeared among Christ's disciples! They have forsaken him.

There is an hour of temptation, which trieth those who dwell on the earth; many fail in the trying hour. Attacked by enemies and assaulted by temptations, they yield themselves captives to their spiritual enemies. This happens to some who had “heard the word and received it with joy—in the time of temptation, they are offended and fall away.” Wanting courage to stand on the Lord's side, when it exposes them to reproach and sufferings, they suffer themselves to be overcome of evil, and fall from their steadfastness. These are Christians only in name. The real Christian possesseth a noble courage which raiseth him superior to every trial, and enableth him to subdue every enemy. The storms of temptation beat upon him; but he stands firm—resists the powers of darkness and his own corruptions—is moved neither by the frowns, nor flatteries of the world. Like an eminent saint of old, he “hath respect to the recompence of reward,” keeps heaven in his eye, and presseth on in his way thither. “Through Christ strengthening him, he doth all things and abounds—holds out to the end and is made more than a conqueror.”

To such “pertain the promises—they overcome—will inherit all things. God will be their God, and they will be his children.”

But those who cannot, “endure hardness as good soldiers”—who faint, and fail in the day of trial, suffering the enemy to prevail, and themselves to be overcome, “will lose that which they have wrought— others will take their crowns, *and they will have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone: Which is the second death.*”

Thus we have seen who are intended by the fearful, and their sad state. Influenced by fear which drives them from the Savior; or leads them to explain away God's law; or drive them to duty in order to atone for sin; or too timid to take up the cross and follow Christ, they have no part in him. They are afraid of misery; and their fear indulged, will bring misery upon them far beyond their fear! For “who knows the power of God's anger.”

Before us the door of mercy is yet open. We are invited to Christ for life. God hath no pleasure in the death of sinners. He is ready to receive the returning prodigal. His arm

is not shortened that it cannot save. He offers pardon and peace to the chief of sinners. The deeper sense we have of sin, the more we abhor ourselves for sin, the more welcome to his grace.

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Weary and heavy laden sinners are particularly invited to the Savior. He will not send them empty away. As the returning prodigal was received by his father, so is every repenting sinner, by his Father in heaven. When the prodigal resolved to return with, a “Father I have sinned—the father saw him a great way off,” and all his bowels yearned over him—“he had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and killed him”—bid him a hearty welcome—lavished the richest favors on him, and called all to rejoice at his return. In like manner our heavenly Father receives the returning penitent. This is the spirit of the parable.

Fear not then, ye who mourn in Zion. Come empty and naked as ye are, and fall down before an offended God, with, “Father I have sinned. —God be merciful to me a sinner.” Come thus to God, and cast yourselves on his grace in Christ, and his grace will be sufficient for you. We are warranted to promise you a kind reception.

Let none think to hide their sins by excuses or palliations. They are all open to the divine eye. “There is no darkness, nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” Neither let any think to atone for their sins by doings of their own. The blood of Christ is the only atonement. Our best services are polluted with sin. Let us endeavor to see our sins as they are, renounce them all, and repair to the mercy of God in Christ. There is a fulness of merit in Christ, and a fulness of mercy in God. There we may trust and not be ashamed.

Let none be discouraged by the difficulties which lie in their way, or faint under the hardships of the cross. If God calls us to trials he will support us under them—yea, if we make him our hope, and are not needlessly wanting to ourselves, he will make us more than conquerors; he will make us triumphers in Christ. But if we fear to enter the lists against our spiritual enemies or to endure ought to which we are called in the way of duty, whether it be contempt, sufferings, or loss, we shall bring greater sorrows on ourselves by shrinking back in the day of trial, than by pressing forward, and bearing all which duty requires.

Our sorrows, if we abide faithful, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel, will be only temporary; and under the pressure of them, we shall be supported by Omnipotence; but if we draw back, and refuse to deny ourselves, fainting in the day of trial, our sorrows and sufferings will be eternal, and as such as Omnipotence can only inflict!

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SERMON XXI.

The Ends of Family Institution, with observations on the Importance of Education.

Malachi ii. 15.

“And did not he make one? Ye had he the residue of the Spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed.—”

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Toward the close of the Babylonish captivity, religion revived among the Jews. Several zealous and able reformers were raised up and advanced to power, whose influence was blessed to call back that people from their declensions, and prepare them for mercy. But the effect of their labors was only temporary. When they were gone off the stage, the people again apostatized, neglected the worship and ordinances of God, and became vicious and corrupt. This prophet, who lived several ages after their return to Canaan, was sent to reprove their irreligion and the immoralities, which abounded among them and had infected every order of men.

One of the sins then rife in Israel, was a family sin. Family contentions, which frequently terminated in divorces, were become common.

Divorces were permitted to the Hebrews, “for the hardness of their hearts, but it was not so from the beginning.”

Larger communities are all made up of families. Evils therefore which affect the latter, cannot but affect the former. Were all the families which compose an empire divided and unhappy, the empire would be so.

It is also worthy of notice, that the first rudiments of character, which render good or bad, and cause people to be blessings or curses in society, are commonly begun in those nurseries of our race. The bias there given, seldom wholly wears off; it is generally carried, in degree, through life. Probably many of the evils which afflicted the Jews in the days of this prophet, had their origin in the cradles of the nation. He was therefore directed to strike at the root of evils, and by endeavoring to reform the smaller societies of which the larger were composed, to reform the whole. With this view he led back the minds of those among whom he ministered, to the origin of families, and declared the merciful design of the Most High, in their institution—*That he might seek a godly seed.*

Seeking a godly seed is not the only design. It is however a principal design, and will be chiefly regarded in the following discourse.

One thing designed is the comfort and advantage of the several members of these little communities. But to the attainment of these ends, they must keep respectively, in their places, and act faithfully in them. The heads must live together in harmony, and unite in ordering the common affairs of the society; and the inferior members must submit to their authority, and do the duties of their stations.

Human happiness greatly depends on the temper and conduct of those who are connected in the nearest relations, and live together. Suppose trouble abroad, yet if one hath peace and friendship in his family, and finds order and affection at home, he will not be very unhappy. He will often “retire to his secret chambers, and shut the

doors about him, till the evils are past.” But the house divided against itself, is a scene of confusion and trouble. Contentions there are like a continual dropping.

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The man who hath affluence and honor; who is respected or envied abroad, is but a wretch, if his retirements are unquiet; if his family connexions are peevish and disagreeable, and the inferior members rise in rebellion and refuse obedience to his reasonable requirements, or neglect the duties of their stations. Fidelity and affection in the nearest relations, yields the greatest temporal felicity; the want of them occasions the most pungent grief which is experienced in life; that which arises from sense of guilt excepted.

The part acted by every member of a family, effects the whole. None can rejoice or mourn alone. All participate in the joy or grief. All are affected by the discharge, or neglect of relative duties: Joy and sorrow keep pace with them.

Neither are the evils which arise from these abuses to be avoided by celibacy, without incurring others of a serious nature. Man is formed for society. An help meet was necessary even in Eden. To have remained alone would have rendered an earthly paradise a tiresome place. Therefore was a suitable companion given of God, to crown the joys of innocence.

The comfort and advantage of the members is manifestly one design of family institution; but where the duties of the several relations are neglected, or counteracted, the ends are frustrated, and the blessing changed into a curse. "It is better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman." And the woman, who instead of a kind and virtuous companion, is joined to a tyrant, or a man of Belial, must have sorrow upon, sorrow, till death comes to her relief.

But the design of family institution expressed in the last clause of the text—*That he might find a godly seed, will be chiefly attended to.*

We are here taught that God made one, and only one to be man's companion and helper—that *he might seek a godly feed*. One is necessary for this purpose; more would rather hinder than help. With one there is a joint interest; more would cause divisions.

To answer the ends proposed, the connexion must be for life. It must not be left to the parties or either of them, to dissolve it at pleasure, as the Jews of that age contended. This liberty the prophet shews to be contrary to the spirit and design of marriage. He observes that though God *had the residue of the Spirit*—all power, and could easily have made many, he made only one, to be the companion and helper of man—that this indicated the design of marriage to be an indissoluble connexion, which was ordained to continue till death. This which is intimated in the text, is confirmed by our Savior in his reply to the Pharisees who questioned him on this subject. *

* Matthew xix. 3-10.

In farther discussing our subject, *after a few desultory observations on the importance of education, especially parental education, we shall inquire in what ways, and by what means parents are required to fed a godly seed.*

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Much culture is necessary to man's attaining his proper rank in creation. This should begin at an early period, and naturally devolves on parents, who, by providential appointment, are guardians of the infancy and childhood of their offspring.

Brutes need no instruction in order to fill the places designed for them of the Creator. Neither do they need example. Instinct supplies their places—teacheth all which they need to know; and teacheth perfectly. The several kinds of beasts and birds, shut out from their dams, and secluded from their own species, act according to their natures in the same manner, as though brought up with them—discover the same disposition—use the same methods of seeking their food, and providing for themselves and their young—and express themselves in the same language, or by the same notes. Nature left to herself, respecting every thing which belongs to them, is a sufficient, yea an infallible instructor. Some of the brutes may be taught to mimic man; others to know and serve him; but these are foreign to their rank. Everything, properly belonging to them, is taught by nature, independent of man. Had man never existed, some of them might have lived and filled their places in creation without him.

But man, the head of this lower world, requires particular attention. His mind requires more than his body. Should man come forward to act his part here, with only the same kind of attention which nature teacheth the brute to bestow on her young, what would he be? How would he appear? Suppose some savage horde to attend only to the bodies of their offspring, during infancy and childhood, and then send them abroad to follow nature!—Uncultivated nature! Living at large like the brutal inhabitants of the forest! Can we form an idea of ought more shocking? Surely such a people would be more brutal than the brutes!

To prevent these dreadfuls, and render man the noble creature for which he is designed, happy in himself, an honor to his Creator, and a blessing among God's works, are the ends proposed in education. These usually originate in that culture which is begun by parents. The foundation of honor or infamy, usefulness or mischief, happiness or misery, is commonly laid in the morning of life. The impressions then made, are deep and lasting; the bias then given to the mind, goes far to form the character of the man. We see therefore the goodness of God in an institution which hath such important objects in view—which is designed to plant in infant minds the seeds of virtue, and form mankind for usefulness and honor.—*And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed.*

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This work would have been incumbent on man had he retained his first estate. It would then have belonged to parents to cultivate the tender mind and direct it in right ways. Marriage was instituted before the apostasy, of which a principal design is that mentioned in the text: For the prophet speaks of man in his original state. In innocence man had his work assigned him—was made for action. Idleness would have constituted no part of his felicity, had he remained upright. When he came out of the Creator's hand, he was "put into the garden to dress it and to keep it." His disposition to idleness may have been occasioned by the fall. Had man retained his maker's image, it is not probable that young minds would have received habits of virtue, and been imbued with knowledge, without parental aid—that instinct would have supplied the place of instruction, and superseded the use of it.

Had man remained upright his whole work have been diverse from that which now employs him. The earth would have required little culture —none which would have wearied its inhabitants. The mind, free from every corrupt bias, would have been open to instruction, which would have flowed from the parent and been received by the child, with delightful ease and joy. Man devoted to the service of God, would have devoted his all to God, especially his offspring. Then to have poured knowledge, and especially the knowledge of God, into the placid docile mind of the pious youth, what delight would it have given to the soul glowing with divine love!

Since the apostasy, children are the joy of parents. With all their depravity and perverseness, which greatly lower down the comfort parents would otherwise occasion, they love them next to life, and see their improvements with peculiar joy. Especially doth the godly parent rejoice to witness in them good things toward the Lord— religious dispositions—concern to know and serve God, and become a *godly seed*. "He hath no greater joy than to observe his children walking in the truth." Had man retained his first estate, his joy of this kind would have been full. He would have trained up a holy, happy progeny—"a seed to serve the Lord."

In the present state of human nature, the raising of a *godly seed*, is more difficult, but no less necessary. Endeavors to this end may be even more so. Man left from his childhood, uninstructed and unrestrained, to follow his natural bias, would become a monster among God's creatures! Therefore the importance of parental faithfulness, as divine honor, and human happiness are regarded.

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SERMON XXII.

Parental Duties considered and urged.

Malachi ii. 15.

“And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the Spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed.”

Some general observations on the importance of education, especially parental education, were made in the preceding discourse. We are now to consider the ways and means by which parents, are *to seek a godly seed*.

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Only general directions can here be given. Much will be left to the discretion of those concerned.

Some of the principal parental duties are, *Dedication of their children to God, followed by instruction—restraint—good example, and prayer.*

We shall treat on each of these briefly in their order.

1. Of *dedication of children to God*. By a *godly seed*, children consecrated to the service of God, and set apart for him, is commonly intended, This implies some rites of consecration. These there have been, probably, from the beginning; though we have no information what they were, till the days of Abram.

Before the flood we read of “sons of God” who married “the daughters of men;” a sad union which led to the universal degeneracy of mankind. The “sons of God” are supposed to have been the descendants of Seth; “the daughters of men,” to have been of the family of Cain. But why the distinction of “sons of God, and daughters of men?” It arose, no doubt, from external differences. The former had the seal of godliness set upon them, whatever that seal might be; and were trained up to attend the worship and ordinances of God—they were visibly of the household of faith; none of which were the case with the latter. * That the former were all renewed, and children of God by regeneration, is not probable—they are termed sons of God, on account of their covenant relation to him.

* Tenders of pardon and life were made to the whole human race, through a Mediator, and the church at first included the whole family of Adam; but this did not long continue. Cain, enraged that his offering was not accepted, slew his brother, and “went out from the presence of the Lord”—left his father’s house, in which God was worshipped, and where his ordinances were administered—cast off religion, and taught his children to disregard it. His progeny were not deficient in worldly wisdom. They cultivated the arts of life, and made improvements in them, as appears from the sketch of their history given by Moses. + But they were without God in the world; having cast off his fear, and the apprehension of his presence, and their accountableness, which often follow the dereliction of the divine institutions.

+ Genesis iv. 17-22.

So the posterity of Jacob were called “the children of God—the people of God—a holy seed—a royal priesthood,” because of their external, nominal distinctions. These appropriate terms continued as long as they remained God’s visible people, and had the seal of his covenant set upon them, though they had so corrupted themselves as to be even worse than the heathen. And Jerusalem is called the *holy city* even after it had filled up the measure of its wickedness by murdering the Lord of glory. *

* Matthew xxvii. 53.

From the days of Abraham, we know the seal of God's covenant, and how parents have been required to dedicate their offspring to him, as a visible sign of their being consecrated to his service, and as a bond on parents to train them up in his fear. And those who have been of the household of faith, and been duly instructed, have considered themselves obliged to discharge these duties; nor have they neglected them.

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2. Dedication *must be followed by instruction*. Parents must cultivate the tender mind—instill the principles of virtue—infuse the knowledge of God, and of the duties due to God and man. This is a matter of the greatest importance. If youthful minds are not imbued with knowledge and virtue, they will not remain blank; the void will be filled with that which tends to mischief, and leads to woe and infamy.

When we look among pagans and savages, we are struck with their vices and follies, which raise our disgust, or excite our pity. But who hath made us to differ from them! Is it not that divine Sovereign who “divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam,” who cast our lot among the civilized and enlightened, who having been taught, of God, taught us the way of happiness? Had we been born among heathens, we should probably have been heathens; if among savages, should not have differed from them—should have gloried, perhaps in those refinements in cruelty, which they consider an accomplishment, but which we shudder to hear related. It is not probable that we should have had native discernment sufficient to have raised us above our fellows—to have enabled us to discover their delusions and the absurdity of their views. Had we been denied revelation, we should probably have been ignorant of our fallen state and need of a Savior, and might have “perished for lack of vision.”

How far God might have pitied our necessary ignorance, we know not; but we can now discern no way of salvation, except by faith in Christ, with repentance from dead works. Now, the knowledge of these, and the necessity of holiness of heart and life, we have received, not by immediate revelation, but from our fellow men. And most of those who receive them, to saving effect, receive the first impressions in early life; receive them from those with whom they are conversant in their tender years. The forming mankind to virtue, and rendering them *a godly seed*, depends much on the means *then* used with them, and the bias then given to the mind.

3. Restraint is *also necessary in the morning of life*. BY nature man is inclined to evil. This disposition originated in the apostasy and descends to the whole race, rendering them untractable and unreachable—easily susceptible of bad impressions and indisposed to good ones. It appears and operates at a very early period of life. “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear.”—

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Such declarations are not indeed to be understood literally. None are equal transgressors, before they are capable of moral action, which is the state of the new born infant. He cannot speak lies who hath not yet attained the power of speech. The poison of human depravity may, however be compared to that of the serpent, which begins in its formation, and discovers itself when first capable of action. We see the effects of depravity in the child, while reason is yet weak and only budding forth. It is one of the first appearances in the progress of a human being from infancy to manhood. When these are discovered, restraint should begin. Parents who seek a *godly seed*, should no longer delay to counteract the corrupt disposition, and endeavor to give the young creature, committed to their care, another and a better bias.

But, alas! Parental affection too often degenerates into weakness, and giving way to natural perverseness, suffers it to take its course; the consequences of which are often fatal to peace and honor in after life; perhaps in that also which is to come. It is of primary importance that restraint should hold back the young agent from that which is evil; and as far as may be, prevent him from associating with the vile, who disregard the voice of conscience and harden themselves in sin.

Suitable correction to impress an early sense of the evil of sin, and praise to encourage and allure in the paths of virtue, are also acts of kindness to the unexperienced creature who is entering on the war of life, and coming forward to act its part among enemies and temptations, and thus to prepare for honor or infamy, joy or misery eternal. Though no fruit of this kind attention may immediately appear beneficial consequences commonly follow; though sometimes at a later period than was expected; yea after expectation hath ceased.

4. Example is *another mean of seeking a godly seed*.

Good example is particularly incumbent on all who are exalted to rule, whether in larger, or smaller communities. In the history of Israel we observe the morals of the nation commonly agreeing with those of the governing prince. Nor was this peculiar to that people; it holds generally, in a considerable degree, of every other. The manners and morals of all who live in society, usually take a tinge from those of their rulers. This is particularly the case with smaller societies; especially with families. Children often imbibe the sentiments, learn the manners, and catch somewhat of the tempers of those with whom they live, as well as learn their language. *Do we seek a godly seed?* It concerns us to be careful what examples we set before the youth who attend us.

Youth watch and observe adults, especially those to whom they look up as friends, and whose love and kindness they daily experience. Adults are disposed to think favorably of those who shew them kindness. From the view of a child, it hides every fault. That a thing was done by a respected parent justifies it to a child, however criminal it might appear in another.

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The temper and conduct, of a benefactor, make a deeper impression than his words, and have more influence on the judgment of those entering on life. Even little children feel the force of our Savior's rule of judging—"By their fruits ye shall know them." Every thing conspires to prejudice children in favor of parents, and to dispose them to follow their examples. Bad example is in them especially seducing. Children generally follow it, where it is set before them. Coinciding with their natural bias, precept and counsel are commonly lost upon them, if taught by parental example to do evil. It is therefore of the greatest importance, especially to the members of a family, that the head should "behave himself wisely in a perfect way, and walk within his house with a perfect heart."

5. *Prayer, especially family prayer is another means seeking a godly seed.*

This duty is important, as it tends to solemnize the heart, and produce a serious and devout temper; and as it tends to draw down the divine blessing on those who attend it.

When children witness a parent daily looking up to heaven, and fervently imploring the divine blessing on himself and them—when they hear him humbly confessing sin, and its demerits, and imploring pardon—when they observe him devoutly thanking God for existence, for continuance in life, and for all its comforts—when they hear him asking grace to help and divine direction and guidance—when they see him besieging the throne of grace for the Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify them, enable them to do every duty, fill them with love to God and man, enable them to bear injuries and requite them with kindness, yea, to be good and do good—to make them faithful unto death and then to receive them to the mansions of glory, and are called to join in these solemn addresses to heaven, What other lesson is equally instructive? What hath so dire a tendency to solemnize the heart and impress it with the most just and weighty religious sentiments? In this view, family prayer is of vast importance. If attended as every serious person may attend it, cannot be wholly without effect, and hath often the happiest effect.

It is not great talents, or showy gifts, but seriousness, solemnity and fervor, which render prayer prevalent with God and beneficial to man, as a means of exciting to other duties, and producing religious awe and reverence.

This duty is also important, as tending to draw down the divine blessing on the devout worshipper and on his connexions.

Every good gift cometh down from God; but his gifts are usually bestowed in answer to prayer—"Ye have not because ye ask not—Ask, and it shall be given you—for every one that asketh, receiveth." —Spiritual mercies are seldom given but in answer to prayer; and seldom long denied to earnest persevering prayer. This is the spirit of one of our Savior's parables, * and the purport of many passages in the word of God.

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* Luke xviii. 1, &c.

And when a person hath omitted nothing in his power to make his children wise to salvation, what so natural, what so reasonable, as to bring them to God, and pour out his soul before him, for his blessing upon them? And what so prevalent with “him who heareth prayer?”

It is storied of Augustine, who lived in the fourth century, that though the son of an eminently pious mother, he was a very vicious youth—that a Christian seeing him pass in the street, spake of him as an abandoned character, with whom it was disgraceful to associate—which another hearing, observed, that he was the child of so many prayers, *that he could not believe that he would be lost*—nor was he lost. Those prayers were heard. He was called of God, and like Saul of Tarsus, made a chosen vessel to bear God’s name to a scoffing world, and do much in the cause of the divine Redeemer. *

* Witherspoon’s Sermon on Education.

The fervent prayers which godly parents offer up for their children, ascend like the prayers and aims of good Cornelius for a memorial before God. When sincere and persevering, they return not empty. They often draw down the divine blessing on those for whom they are offered up. If they fail through filial obstinacy and perverseness, they draw a blessing on themselves, to their eternal joy.

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These are some of the ways in which parents should seek a godly feed. But, alas! These duties are much neglected; therefore the declension of religion, and the prevalence of vice.

Those who enter into covenant with God, bind themselves to discharge these duties. Others are not devoid of obligation to do the same. They are duties which rise out of the parental relation, and are indissolubly connected with it.

Parents have a fondness for their children, and with their felicity. But do not some who believe them made for eternity, take care only for the mortal part, which after all their care must ere long become food for worms, and turn to dust! Are there not parents who neither dedicate their children to God, nor teach them his fear, nor walk before them in the right way, nor commend them to the divine mercy! Cruel parents! Unhappy children! How difficult, how dangerous their situation! By nature disposed to error—assaulted by subtil enemies, whose temptations fall in with their natural bias, and are strengthened by the conduct of those whom they love as friends and revere as guides! Little chance have such unexperienced and unsuspecting creatures to escape the snares which surround them! Dangerous, and almost desperate is their situation!

Perhaps the endless misery of some may be greatly chargeable on those who under God, gave them being! Affecting thought! It concerns parents to think on these things. If they consider, they must feel their obligation *to seek a godly seed*, and be afraid to neglect it.

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And let pious parents be persuaded to labor and not faint in the discharge of the duties which they owe to God, and the young immortals committed to their care. Though their counsels may be condemned, and their prayers seem not to be regarded by him who hath power to change the heart, let them not be discouraged, but persevere. “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.” Though the seed lie long under the clods, it will not be lost, but some how, bring forth fruit.

The counsels, warnings, and examples of faithful godly parents commonly make some impression on the children who affect to disregard them. The most dissolute have their serious moments; their pangs of remorse and terror. At such seasons their parents’ warnings, prayers and tears recur to their minds, and seem to rise up before them. This often happens after parental labors have ceased; and after the impressions they might have made, were supposed to have been effaced, they sometimes produce happy effects.

Few children who have been dedicated to God, taught to know and serve him, and the consequences which will follow their conduct here, and witnessed their parents’ deep concern, and earned cries to God in their behalf can forget them—they must, they do, at times, affect them. While any thing of this nature remains, there is hope. Some, who in early life, scoff at warning and counsel, are afterwards brought to repentance: And such often testify, that impressions made by parental faithfulness in their tender years, were the means of their awakening and amendment. This should encourage those whose children give them little hope, to persevere in the discharge of duty.

“The Lord said of Abraham—I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, *that the Lord might bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*” What? The richest and most lasting blessings—*because “he would command his children—to keep the way of the Lord.”*

“It is not a vain thing to serve God. Then—(when he maketh up his jewels) shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.” In no other way can we serve him more acceptably than by following Abraham’s example—“commanding our households to serve the Lord,” and setting them the example. Whoso doth it, “shall in no wise lose his reward.”

And happy the youth who second the endeavors of their parents to render them a *godly seed*. Such “will find life and obtain favor of the Lord.” Here, they rejoice the hearts of those who love them, and smooth the rugged path of age. The years which to others have no pleasures in them, are not devoid of comfort to those who witness filial piety and hope to live again in a godly offspring. Such parents rejoice in death, and their *godly seed*, will rejoice with them forever, in heavenly mansions.



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SERMON XXIII.

The Blessing of God on Filial Piety.

Jeremiah xxxv. 19.

“Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before me forever.”

Israel were greatly depraved before the days of this prophet, who was sent to reprove and call them to repentance. The prophet faithfully discharged his trust; but labored to very little effect. The chiefs of the nation were offended at its warnings and predictions—rose up against him—shut him up in prison; yea in a dark dungeon, where he sank in the mire; and even sought his life! He was not, however discouraged.. He continued “to warn the wicked from his way, that he should turn from it. None of these things moved him.”

This was not the only messenger sent of God to warn that people—he sent to them all his servants, the prophets; but they would not hear; The Jews of that age flattered themselves, that God would never enter into judgment with them. “He might pour his fury on the heathen; but they should escape—their place and nation would never feel the effects of his wrath, or become the theatre of his judgments—they were his people—necessary to his honor—he was their God; and would continue their God, whatever their character, or conduct.”

The prophets warned them of their mistake—told them that the judgments of heaven hung over them—that their city and sanctuary would be destroyed, many of them perish in the war, and the residue he removed into strange lands, there to serve their enemies —“but they seemed to that degenerate people as those who mocked, and they believed them not.”

There is a certain grade of depravity which scoffs at warnings and laughs at the shakings of God's spear! When this hath become the general character of a people, desolating judgments are near. Those who conceive mercy to be the only attribute of Deity; or the only attribute which he can exercise *towards them*, are commonly deaf to warnings. Sure evidence that they are given up of God—that his spirit hath ceased to strive with them. Rarely are those brought to repentance who entertain such views of God. Perhaps never, unless their views of him are changed. They have no fear of God before their eyes. If mercy absorbed every other attribute, there could be no place for fear. And of what enormity are those incapable who have lost the fear of God? Such

corruption of principle is the bane of practice, and prelude of ruin and wretchedness. The history of the Hebrews, and the history of mankind, confirm the truth of this remark.

This prophet having long warned his charge to no purpose, is here directed to apply to them in another manner—to try to shame them into contrition, by setting before them the part acted by a particular family which dwelt among them—the Rechabites, who had for ages religiously obeyed the injunctions of one of their ancestors, left probably as his dying charge.

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Some of that progenitor's requirements seemed rigorous, but being the order of a respected ancestor the family considered them as obligatory; nor could they be persuaded to violate them in any particular, though publicly invited to it by a prophet.

It may be proper here to make some inquiries relative to these Rechabites—to the person whose charge they conceived so binding; and the nature and design of the charge.

The Rechabites are said to have been a branch of the Kenites, and to have descended from Hobab, the son of Jethro, Moses' father in law. *

* Vide Henry and Brown's Dictionary.

While Israel were encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai, that Midianitish priest, or prince, visited Moses, bringing with him, Zipporah, the wife of Moses and her children, who had been sent to her father's as a place of safety, during the troubles in Egypt. Not long after, Hobab, the son of Jethro, appears to have been with Israel in the wilderness; and he was invited to go with them to the land of promise, and take his lot among them, and was promised an equal share of blessings with the seed of Jacob—"If thou wilt go with us, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee." At first Hobab declined, but he eventually complied; as his descendants were among the Hebrews after their settlement in Canaan, and they continued among them, and remained a distinct family, down to the captivity.

One branch of these Kenites was denominated from Rechab, an illustrious chief of the house of Hobab; who had a son, or descendant, named Jonadab, or Jehonadab, as his name is sometimes written. Jonadab was renowned for wisdom and piety. He flourished in the days of Jehu, almost three centuries before the Babylonish captivity; and was so famed for sanctity and attachment to true religion, that only being seen in his company was a recommendation to the regard of its friends. Therefore was he treated with respect by Jehu, while he pretended a regard for the true God—therefore was he taken up by that prince into his chariot, and made his partner in the destruction of idolatry. Such was the man who left this charge to his descendants, which was so sacredly regarded by them, for so long a term.

This was a remarkable family. Another who have paid equal attention to the orders of a departed progenitor, and in which none of the members appear to have degenerated from his virtue, is not perhaps to be found in the annals of mankind! But our surprise will increase if we attend to the nature of the charge.

The prophet was directed to gather the whole family of the Rechabites—bring them into the house of the Lord—set wine before them and invite them to drink. He obeyed; offering them a treat, as a family known and respected in Israel.

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This was not done to tempt them, but to reprove the Jews, who resorted in great numbers to the temple; though they had cast off the fear of the God there worshipped. God knew, and had probably informed the prophet, that the wine would be refused. It was refused, and the reason, assigned—"We will drink no wine; for Jonadab,—the son of Rechab, our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, ye, nor your sons forever, Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor have any: But all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days, in the land where ye be strangers."

Some of these may seem to be strange restrictions; but they speak the piety of him who laid them, and his regard to the eternal, if not to the temporal interests, of his posterity. The prohibition seems to have been the same with the law of the Nazerites. Wine is doubtless here used in a large sense, for every kind of strong drink. "Wine was given to make glad the heart of man." He is allowed to use it with temperance and sobriety: But so many abuse it to their own hurt, and to the injury of society, that it is rather a curse, than a blessing, to the world. Seeing the evils which resulted from the abuse—the devastation of men and morals, which it occasioned, this good man, from love to his offspring, warned them wholly to abstain from it. And what evils would many others have avoided, had they considered the counsel as given to them, and like this family, religiously regarded it? The ravages of intemperance, exceed those of the sword; and the moral evils it hath occasioned surpass description!

But why the other restrictions included in the charge? Why must the descendants of Jonadab be denied the comfort of warm and convenient dwellings, and reside in tents through every season of the year, to all generations? Why must they possess neither fields nor vineyards, which were allowed to others, and promised to Israel, as part of the blessing, when they should settle in Canaan?

Peculiarities unknown to us, might render it proper for them to submit to self denials to which others are not called. What they were we presume not to determine. *

* Mr. Henry undertakes to assign the reasons of all these injunctions; but as none can be assigned which are not merely conjectural, we choose rather to leave each one to make his own conjectures, as he may find occasion.

Mankind are exceedingly prone to set up their rest here, and promise themselves permanent dwellings on this rolling ball. Could this man of God persuade his posterity that this was not their home, and engage them to seek another country, that is, an heavenly, and lay up their treasure there, whatever self denials it might cost them, it must have been, on the whole for their advantage. This might be the general design of his counsel.

But whatever might be the design, admirable was the effect. The whole family seemed to have listened to his advice, and for many ages to have obeyed his voice! "Thus have

we obeyed the voice of Jonadab, the son of Rechab our father, in all that he charged us
—and done according to all that he commanded us!"

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This was not said only of themselves, who then stood before the prophet, but of the whole family, from the time the charge was given, down to that day. There is not the smallest probability that a numerous family would inquire after, and find out a code of rules and regulations which had been given nearly three centuries before, and all take it on them to observe them, if they had been neglected by their fathers, down to their time. They had doubtless been observed with punctuality from the days of Jonadab. Their answer to the prophet implies it. This had been known in Israel. Therefore were they brought into public view, and made the occasion of a solemn rebuke of that favored, but ungrateful people who had disregarded the injunctions of an infinite God! This was the end proposed in bringing the Rechabites into the temple at this time, and gave occasion to the record here made to their honor, and to the blessings promised them from above.

Some may laugh at the singularity of this strange family—may consider it an evidence of weakness to pay such regard to the silly requisitions of a superstitious ancestor—deny themselves so many comforts—make themselves so singular—engage those with whom they married to conform to the rules of their house, and instil the same into their children from generation to generation! But whatever we may think of them, it is manifest that this supposed weakness met the divine approbation. The prophet speaks of them with honor; blesseth them in the name of the Lord, and declares, in his name, that their filial piety shall not go unrewarded. “And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and—done according to all that he commanded you: *Therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before me forever.*”

These are not simply expressions of approbation, but contain invaluable promises. They are made in the language of the old testament, but to those blessed with gospel light, their meaning is not obscure or difficult. The promise secured the continuance of this family, and a succession of men of piety and virtue in it as long as God’s people continued—They should *never want a man to stand before the Lord*—to serve him. That family had no office at the temple, but in a course of regular devotion, they stood before God, to minister unto him. This should continue—they should remain a religious family. Men of piety should always be found among them.

When the prophet had laid these matters before the Jews, he made the application, and denounced the judgments of God against them, unless they turned by repentance. “Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Go, and tell the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem—Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? Saith the Lord. The words of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father’s commandment: Notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me.”

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The prophet then proceeded to remind them of the warnings which had been given them, and the means which had been used with them, and to denounce the judgments of God against them—"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, I will bring upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and have called unto them, but they have not answered."

If we consider the state of that people, and the advantages which they had neglected and abused, we shall be convinced that their guilt was attended with many aggravations—no other people had so many advantages and means of information; and few beside were equally depraved.

The family of Rechab might rise up against them and condemn them. That family had been long obedient to a man like themselves—the Jews had been disobedient to the God who is above. Jonadab was dead—if his descendants disregarded his injunctions, he might have no power to punish their disobedience; but the God of Israel lived—was acquainted with all their crimes, and able to punish their sin upon them. Neither doth it appear that the Rechabites had ever been reminded of the orders of their progenitor, or their obligation to obey him; but the Jews had been often reminded of their duty; in the stated, and ordinary means of grace they were daily reminded of their obligation to obey God; and he had also sent all his servants the prophets, to call them to repentance; neither had God required such self denials of his people, as Jonadab of his posterity—yet Jonadab had been obeyed, and God had been disobeyed! His people "would not receive instruction." Therefore were his judgments executed upon them, agreeably to his threatening; and they are left on record for our instruction. "Now these things happened unto them for ensamples [sic]; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

REFLECTIONS.

In the part acted by the father of the Rechabites, we witness the concern of a good man, that his children should mind the things of religion. That good man did not scruple to lay heavy burdens on his descendants, and cut them off from many temporal enjoyments, if it might serve to keep them humble, and cause them *to stand before the Lord*. He chose rather to have his family poor, than to have them proud and vicious.—Hardships which might serve to keep them mindful of their situation here, he judged advantageous: Therefore the charge he left with them.

Pious parents do not generally leave such things in charge to their children. They do not, however, neglect the concerns of religion, or leave their families ignorant of them, or their obligation to regard them. They teach them to fear the Lord, and live in all good conscience before him.



II. In the historical sketch here given of the Rechabites, we see how good people of old, were influenced by parental authority—how they considered themselves bound to remember and obey the injunctions of religious ancestors, as they wished the blessing of God. Where such injunctions are disregarded it is an evidence of great depravity.

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Sad instances of this kind we sometimes witness in this degenerate age. We sometimes see godly parents, who had labored before in vain to render their children truly religious, spend their last hours in urging them not to receive the grace of God in vain—see them with deep concern, and with their dying breath, charging them to mind the things of religion, and not rest until they have found the Savior. Though at first some impression seems to be made, it often soon wears off, and the warnings and counsels of those who loved them as their own souls, are forgotten and neglected!

Could these things be foreseen, sense of duty would only extort such admonitions from a pious parent, at the solemn period of his departure; for like a neglected gospel, they are “a favor of death unto death,” to those who hear them!

But this is not always the case. No means have a more direct and powerful tendency to awaken the secure, and excite the attention of the careless, than the dying concern and counsel of the saints. Perhaps no other means are oftener blessed to this end. This leads us to observe,

III. That the part we act here may have consequences, long after we shall have gone off the stage. This venerable Kenite left a solemn charge to his posterity; but who could foresee the effect? There was little reason to expect that his descendants would regard it, and be advantaged by it for centuries; yet it seems to have been the case! His counsels, strengthened by his example, made an indelible impression, and were means of distinguishing his family for many generations!

This should encourage others to follow his example—to charge their children to “keep the way of the Lord, and walk in his ordinances and commandments blameless.” Who knows that his posterity may not imitate those of this man of God? And for as long a term? Who can determine that his good example, and counsels may not do good on earth, when his body shall be mouldering in the grave, and his soul rejoicing in the presence of his God.

On the other hand, there is more than equal reason to expect that a parent's bad example will be no less extensively influential to mischief. Many are seduced to their ruin by the contagion of evil example; nor is any other more perniciously prevalent than that of a parent, or progenitor.

Be it then the concern of all who fear the Lord to charge their children, to fear him, and to set them the example of “standing before the Lord.” So to do, is to sow the seeds of virtue and piety. A harvest may follow, even after expectation hath failed. If no other advantage accrues, the faithful will deliver his own soul; he may be the occasion of delivering others; “converting sinners from the error of their ways; saving souls from death, and hiding multitudes of sins.” *

* James v. 19, 20.

IV. The honorable mention made of the Rechabites, and the blessings promised them, should influence children to listen to the pious counsels of their parents, and attend the duties which they consider important, and charge them to attend, especially at the close of life.

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That the godly when on the verge of eternity, are divinely influenced to warn their friends, and predict the good or evil before them, was an opinion which prevailed among the ancients. Therefore the sacred attention paid to their dying words, and scrupulous regard of their dying counsels. Whether we admit, or reject the sentiment, the counsels which are given at such seasons are serious, solemn, and the effect of love unfeigned. Those to whom they are given commonly view matters in the same light, and consider them as interesting realities, when they come to be themselves in similar circumstances.

Have our pious ancestors left ought in charge to us? It concerns us to consider their counsels and injunctions; and unless we have clear and strong reasons forbidding, we are bound to obey them.

Children are usually safe in following the last counsels of their parents. Few who sustain that endearing relation, are devoid of concern for the honor and happiness of their offspring. However they may have themselves conducted, while in the pursuit of worldly objects, or under the influence of appetite or passion, when they come to stand on the brink of another world, the fascinating charms of this, lose their power—the infinite difference between time and eternity appears; and the true value of objects is seen and estimated. Then the counsel which is given is that of wisdom—it points to duty—to peace and honor—to joy and glory,

It is further observable that rich promises are made in scripture to those who honor and obey their parents, and dreadful curses denounced against those who despise and disobey them. “Honor thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee and that thou mayest live long upon the earth. This is the first commandment with promise. The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.” These scriptures are not of private interpretation.

V. Where the blessing of heaven hath long rested on a family, and religion been prevalent in it for many generations, the right way becomes comparatively easy. Those born there, grow up in the fear of God, and are early taught to know and serve him. But how aggravated the guilt of those who under such circumstances forsake the way of the Lord—cut of the entail of mercy and entail a curse on their posterity—shut up the kingdom of heaven against their own offspring; neither going in themselves, nor suffering those who are entering to go in?

Lost to the fear of God, such hardened sinners may cry peace, but there is no peace to them! It concerns them to look to themselves, for evil is before them! A descent from pious ancestors will not turn away the wrath of God, from those who harden themselves in sin. No—It increaseth their guilt and will increase their condemnation. The Jews flattered themselves “because they had Abraham to their father; but many came from the east and from the west and set down with Abraham in the kingdom of God, and the



children of the kingdom were cast out” —Yea, having filled up the measure of their sins, wrath came upon them, to the uttermost, in this world; and in that to come, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha than for them.

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SERMON XXIV.

The Character and Supports of Widows indeed.

1 Timothy v. 5.

“Now she that is a Widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.” *

* Preached at the house of one made a widow by her husband’s desertion; who left her in straitened circumstances to provide for a young family.

Timothy was ordained a bishop of the church at Ephesus; and this epistle was written to him by St. Paul, his spiritual father, to teach him “how to behave himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God.”

The former part of the context contains directions respecting the treatment of widows; and especially poor widows who belonged to the church, and were supported at their expense. He is first directed to “honor widows who were widows indeed.” Here the apostle explains his meaning, by designating the character intended. Now “*She that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.*”

Every widow did not answer to this description. There were some who answered to no part of it, as he shews below. These Timothy was not required to honor—not directed to provide for them, or employ them in the business of the church; though certain poor and pious women were then used to minister to the sick, of their own sex, and discharge other charitable labors among them.

In discoursing on our subject, we shall *make a few observations on the sorrows of widowhood; then glance at the duties of it; and the supports which God hath provided for widows indeed.*

A widowed state is naturally desolate, Most widows pass many solitary hours—a lonesome and melancholy situation;—especially after having known and enjoyed the social intercourse of connubial life. The value of all our comforts is best known by experience; more especially by their loss, after a temporary possession.

But the conjugal connexion is sometimes unhappy. In such cases a widowed state is a release from the trials and difficulties which attended it, which may be severe and distressing. The misconduct, or unkindness of those in the nearest relation, wounds in the tenderest part, and occasions the most pungent grief. True.—Yet a state of

widowhood, after such a connexion, is commonly more unhappy than after a happy marriage. Many disagreeables are generally left to afflict the desolate. Reflections on such connexions and the trying scenes passed while they continued, are disagreeable; and many cares peculiar to their situation often distress the widows. The care of offspring, where there are offspring, devolves wholly on them; which, if left in straitened circumstances, is often a burden they are unable to bear. And where aid is kindly afforded, still the concern which lies on them, is oft times distressing. “Pangs and sorrows take hold upon them—their couch is wet with tears; their eyes consumed with grief.” If those thus tried are *widows indeed*, they follow the line drawn in the text—*trust in God, and continue in prayers and supplications night and day*.

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As it is the duty, it is also the comfort and support of *the desolate to trust in God*. When streams dry up, we go to the fountain: So when creature comforts fail, interest unites with duty, in pointing us to the Creator. He is the source of comfort—that which comes by means of the creature comes from him. The creature is only the medium of conveyance.

When the saints become desolate—when their worldly comforts fail and their hopes decay, they are directed to return to God and put their trust in him; and also to bring with them, those for whom they feel interested—their helpless dear ones, and he hath promised them protection. “Leave thy fatherless children, and I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me.”

Fallen creatures are exceedingly prone to lean to the world—to promise themselves comfort in it, and support from it. They generally look elsewhere before they look to God. Disappointed in one worldly object they often run to another, and another. They never come to the Creator, and make him their hope, till convinced that what they seek is not to be found in the creature. God sometimes brings his people into straits, and strips them of their earthly dependencies, that having no where else to trust they may come to him and cast their care upon him.

Even the Christian may need the rod of adversity to keep him mindful of his dependence on God, and prevent his resting on the creature for support. For after union with Christ, worldly objects retain too large a share of his affection, and he is too much inclined to lean upon them. His attachment to these things is often too strong; draws away his heart from God, and renders him too little mindful of him who is his portion and rest. Therefore is it often necessary to deprive him of his earthly dependencies, that being desolate, he may return to God and renew his reliance on him.

It becomes the desolate, not only to trust in God, but to be thankful that they may trust in him. Those who have God for their portion, have an abiding satisfying portion. God will be more and better to them than earthly friends, or earthly treasures. Friends often forsake them; or cease to be friends, and become enemies—“Riches take to themselves wings and fly away.” But God abides; he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. *

* Hebrews xiii. 5.

Now *she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, while she trusteth in God continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.*

Those of this character when they find themselves destitute of worldly comforts and supports, go to God and pour out their souls into his bosom. Like the Psalmist they stir up themselves to trust in him. We find that saint expostulating with himself in a time of

trouble and darkness, and chiding his despondent temper. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

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While thus stirring up themselves to trust in God, the saints pour out their souls before him in fervent prayer. This the apostle declares to be the manner of those, whom he terms *widows indeed—they trust in God, and continue in supplications and prayers night and day.*

Such was the aged Anna, who met the infant Savior, when he was brought into the temple, to do for him after the custom of the law. “She departed not from the temple, but served God, with fastings and prayers night and day.”

The child, when in affliction, is wont to run to its parents and tell them the sad tale of its sorrows. So the child of God, stripped of other supports, spreads its grief before him who possesses all power, and is able to deliver out of all distresses: And as the child continues its cries and pleadings with its parent, as long as its sorrows continue; so the child of God, while it remains in affliction, perseveres in supplications and prayers to its Father in heaven.

When seeking temporal blessings the good man asks with submission, “Not as I will but as thou wilt”—teach me to acquiesce in thy dealings and to say “thy will be done.” But when seeking spiritual blessings, he cannot be too importunate, or persevering. Respecting these, the divine glory, unites with his interest, in requiring him to “be instant in prayer—to pray and not faint.” Or, to use the bold language of the prophet, to resolve to “give God no rest,” till he hears and helps. In such cases the saints may plead God’s honor and the glory of his great name, as well as their own necessities.

When we come to ask mercy of God, and to pray for grace to love and serve him, we may plead and expostulate for the bestowment. Is it not thy will, that we should be renewed and sanctified—that we should repent of sin—believe the gospel, and follow after holiness? Is it not thy will that we should become new creatures—love thee—love our duty, and resign ourselves to thy disposal? Is it not thy will, that we should act with propriety under every trial, and discharge with faithfulness every duty—that we should honor thee in adversity, as well as in prosperity? Grant us then those divine influences which are necessary for us. The honor of thy great name is concerned—it unites with our necessities in requiting the bestowment of the mercies which we ask.

Thus did Moses when pleading for Israel, when God had threatened to destroy them for their rebellions against him. “Now if thou kill this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the same of thee, shall speak saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore hath he slain them in the wilderness—pardon, I beseech thee, the sin of this people, according to the greatness of thy mercy”—So Joshua, on a similar occasion: His plea in their behalf is urged from this consideration, that the honor of God was concerned, and required the mercy which he implored—“What wilt thou do unto thy great name? What? If Israel turn their backs before their enemies? If thy people fail to drive out their enemies and possess the land which thou hast sworn to give them?”

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We may use the same argument when interceding for the grace which we need to enable us to glorify God by a becoming temper and conduct under trials, and by a suitable improvement of providential dispensations; and it will be our best plea, or most prevalent argument.

We may meet with discouragements—God may seem deaf to our cries—to delay his mercy; but if we “pray and faint not,” he will not always say to us, nay. He will hear and help us. For his own name’s sake he will do it.

When the woman of Canaan asked mercy for her daughter, no encouragement was given to her first petition—the reply seemed harsh —“It is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to dogs.” But she persevered, and her faith, and fervor prevailed. “Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” The same will be the answer to every humble suppliant for spiritual mercies, and for divine supports, who perseveres in his addresses at the throne of grace.

Respecting temporal matters, we know not what to pray for as we ought —know not what is best for us. Afflictions may be mercies. They often are so. Some have blessed God for them here; more will probably do it hereafter. That they do not usually denote want of love in God, is manifest from the declarations of his word—“Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons—if ye are without chastisement, then are ye bastards and not sons.” Those were determined sinners, given over to reprobation, of whom God said, “Why should ye be stricken any more! Ye will revolt more and more.”

When afflictions serve to purge away sin—to “purify and make white,” they are changed into mercies. Instead of complaining, we have reason to bless God for them. This hath often happened. Afflictions arrest the attention—lead to consideration, and reclaim from error. “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep thy word.”

Prosperity hath often a different effect. To the wicked it is frequently fatal in its consequences; here they have their good things, and they rest in them, forgetful of God, and the other world which they must soon enter, to receive according to their works. Neither do the people of God always escape injury when they attain the things they here desire. The prosperity we covet is more dangerous than the adversity we dread. Few can bear prosperity—few remain long uncorrupted in a prosperous state. A state so difficult and dangerous is seldom long the state of the righteous. It is more commonly the state of the wicked. The righteous have their trials here; and this kind of trial, [prosperity] hath more often seduced them, than its opposite. David and Solomon were sad examples of the baleful effects of power and greatness, riches and honor; but they were brought back to God and duty by the rod of disappointment;—by the correctings of affliction.

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Adversity is not always productive of good. Some repine at the orders of providence—at their lot in the world. Trials sour their minds and render them morose and peevish. We read of some who “blaspheme the God of heaven” because of their sufferings. These are enemies of God, and their sufferings here, are a prelude to greater sufferings hereafter. The case is different with those who have Christ’s spirit; they see a providence in whatever they meet with here; refer themselves to him who rules over all to choose for them, and order out their changes, not doubting but his grace will be sufficient for them, and all work for their good.

We are sure that God orders wisely. The station then, which he assigns to us, is most suitable for us; the comforts and corrections which he dispenses, most fit and proper. If wise for ourselves we would not wish for alterations in them. We shall only be concerned to follow where God leads, and only pray that he will not leave us, but guide us to his kingdom.

Let us bring home these considerations, and inquire how we are affected by God’s dealings with us, and what temper we maintain? We have comforts and corrections. Do we see the hand of God in them; acknowledge the comforts to be undeserved, and the corrections less than our demerits? Do we bless God for the former, and humble ourselves under the latter? Or do the former render us forgetful of God, and proud and scornful towards men? Do the latter humble and abase us; keep us mindful that this is not our rest, and quicken our preparations for that world where all tears will be wiped away from our eyes? Or do they cause us to murmur and repine, as though we suffered unjustly?

Both mercies and afflictions will be a favor of life or death, according to the effect which they have upon us, and the temper and disposition they produce in us. If mercies increase our love to God, and concern to honor him, then are they mercies indeed. So are afflictions, if they humble us and quicken us in the way of duty; but if their effect is different they increase our guilt, and will increase our condemnation.

Whatever may be our situation here—whether we have kind and faithful friends, or are left desolate, or are surrounded with enemies; whether we have joys or sorrows, we need the divine influence to enable us to make a good improvement, and to render them the occasion of good. We need divine aid and influence, no less in prosperity than in adversity. Whatever, therefore, may be our situation and circumstances, sensible of our weakness and blindness, let us return to God as our rest, *trust in him, and continue in supplications and prayers night and day*; and his grace will be sufficient for us; for he hath said to none “seek ye my face in vain.”

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SERMON XXV.

The Good Man Useful In Life and Happy in Death.

Psalm xxxvii. 37.

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“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: For the end of that man is peace.” *

* Preached at the funeral of Asa Witter, Esq. Oct. 9th, 1792.

The subject of this psalm is the way and end of the righteous and the wicked. It is designed to calm the minds of good people when tried with adversity, and to reconcile them to the divine administration in the unequal distributions of Providence, and the apparent disregard of character, in those distributions. With these views, the writer, after glancing at the lives of saints and sinners, calls our attention to their end, noting the manner of their exit out of life.

The text relates to the righteous. In discoursing upon it, *We shall consider the excellence of their characters, and their peaceful end; and add a few reflections.*

I. We are to consider the excellence of their characters. Mark the perfect man and behold the upright.—

The *perfect man*.—This may seem a strange representation of an imperfect creature—a creature which viewed in the glass of the divine law appears deformed, and tried by the perfect rule must be condemned—a creature whose best services can find acceptance with God, only on the plan of grace! For such is man since the apostasy—such the saints feel and confess themselves. But however strange the representation, it is drawn by the pen of inspiration, and applied to the saints.

Perfection is sometimes attributed to particular saints. “Noah was a just man and *perfect* in his generation.” Similar is the description given of Job. “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job: And that man was perfect and upright.”

In the text, the term perfect, hath not a particular reference, but refers generally, to those who have been renewed by divine grace. But when applied to a fallen creature it must be understood with limitation. We have seen it applied to Job: Hear him then speaking of himself—“If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me. If I say I am *perfect* it shall prove me perverse.”

St. John held a high rank among the faithful; yet speaking of the saints, and including himself, he observes—“If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins”. * St. Paul had before declared that “there is none righteous, and that the Scripture hath concluded all under sin.”

* 1 John i. 8-10.

In what sense then are the saints perfect? And wherein consists the excellence of their character?



1. The saints are *perfect* in Christ. "In him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." His righteousness is made theirs. "They are complete in him. He is made of God unto them wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption." In this view every good man is a *perfect* man.

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The saints before the gospel day were but very partially instructed respecting the way of salvation. They knew not how they were to be saved through a Redeemer who had not come in the flesh. But the matter was open to the divine eye. And it is observable that the term *perfect* is never assumed by the saints. They confess their own emptiness and abase themselves before God. Where perfection is attributed to them, it is always by those who spake as moved by the Holy Ghost.

2. The saints are the subjects not only of an imputed, but also of an inherent righteousness: And have been so from the beginning. Noah was a just man and perfect—Job *perfect* and upright. In this respect they were not made to differ from other saints. All the saints are born of God—they are renewed after the image of the Creator and made to bear the image of the heavenly. The change which takes place in them causes them to favor the things of God; to love holiness, and delight to do good as they have opportunity and ability.

They are just and upright; just toward man, and upright before God.

Justice respects the part which mankind act toward one another. It is opposed to fraud and injustice. The just man is fair in his dealings —gives to all their dues—is careful to fulfil every trust, and to do by others as he would others should do by him.

Such is the character given of him of old, who “was *perfect* in his generations,” when “the whole earth was filled with violence, because all flesh had corrupted their way,” And every good man follows his example; hath respect to all God’s commandments, and hates every evil way. Perfection, in the strict sense of the term, is his wish, and his aim, though he doth not expect to attain it while resident in the body. But he “forgets the things which are behind and reaching forth to those which are before, he presses on,” endeavoring a nearer conformity to the divine pattern.

While he is just toward man, he is sincere toward God, acting uprightly before him. He is really the good man he appears. His profession is not dissembled. His heart is right—his eye single. Sincerity is gospel perfection. In this true religion very essentially consists: And it is found on all the saints.

The good man keeps in mind his covenant engagements. For the vows of God are upon him and he is careful to fulfil them. He doth not wish to be released from his obligations with which he is bound to be the Lord’s and to serve him. He is concerned to honor God—thinks nothing unimportant which he hath required, though the reasons of the requirement may lie out of sight. “Lord what wilt thou have me to do?” is his daily inquiry. And he seeks to know, that he may do his duty. He waits on God in the ways of his appointment, and is busy about the work assigned him. He is also steady in his counsels and uniform in his conduct. His heart is established by grace, and

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his life accords with the inward principle. He is not whiffing and unsteady, “carried about by every wind of doctrine”—taken and drawn away by every new scheme of religion; but “holds fast the faithful word; and is able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince gainsayers.” He doth not “put his hand to the plough and look back,” but perseveres to the end, and is faithful unto death. The fear and love of God reigning in his heart, govern his life and direct his way, rendering him an uniform character. Therefore do those most intimately —acquainted with him, convinced of his integrity—: that he is free from duplicity, and that he abhors evil, and all approaches toward it, both value him themselves, and make him known to others; and by bringing him into public view, render him a public blessing. Neither doth he disappoint their expectations, but according to his ability, acquits himself with honor, and doth good to all around him.

Others may differ from him in speculative opinions; other good men. Such differences are unavoidable in this state of darkness and uncertainty. No two persons see alike in every thing, whatever may be pretended. But those who know *the perfect and upright man*, will generally allow that he acts sincerely towards God and man. While those who are connected with him by tender ties, who are so happy as to make with him the journey of life, are led by a thousand kind offices and nameless acts of benevolence and goodness to revere and love him.

Such is the character intended in the text—Such *the perfect man and upright* in himself, and in the estimation of those who know him. Thus doth he pass through life, feeling and confessing his deficiencies, lamenting that he can do no more for God’s honor, and relying on grace alone in Christ, for acceptance with him.

When a person of this description “having served his generation, by the will of God falls asleep,” not only relatives and near connexions, but all who know his worth, mourn his exit, and weeping around his corse, bedew his hearse with tears. His name is revered, his memory is blessed, and even envy is silent.

II. We are to consider his peaceful end—*The end of that man is peace.*

By a person’s *end*, his death, the period of his mortal life is intended. It doth not intend the end of his existence—the modern infidel terms used to express death. So in other scriptures; as when God foretold the destruction of the old world—“The end of all flesh is before me.” So Balaam, when looking forward to his exit out of life—“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.” Had death been the period of his existence, it would have been a matter of indifference whether it found him righteous or wicked. As to hope in death there would have been no difference. But this is not the case. Man hath an immortal part within. At the period of mortal life, he enters on an interminable state.

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Mark *the perfect man, and behold the upright: For the end of that man is peace.* He finds peace at the approach of death—in death, and after death. In order to a due estimation of the value of true religion in Himself, and in its reward, we are here called to observe the good man's *end*. It demands our careful attention. For the scene is peculiarly instructive. It animates to a discharge of the duties of life and supports under its troubles; especially at the approach of death, when worldly comforts fly away.

The wicked who live in habitual neglect of religion, or the indulgence of vicious desires, are commonly filled with dismay and horror, if reason remains, when they perceive their end draw nigh. The flights which they have cast on the gospel, and on the grace therein offered; their neglects of known duty; their acts of injustice, intemperance, uncleanness, or other immoralities, the remembrance of which were almost obliterated by time, at that awful period rise up before them! Conscience awakes; and when they consider the denunciations of divine wrath against those who do such things, and have pleasure in them, fear harrows up their souls! They anticipate eternal woe, and are filled with agonizing horror! Then do they appear all hurry and confusion! The great work of life to do, and opportunity gone forever! Bewailing past madness they cry undone! Undone! Such often continues their state, till the king of terrors driving them away without hope, shuts up the scene!

But *the perfect and upright man*, how happily different when death draws near? If possessed of himself, like the still summer's evening, he is calm and serene. He talks of death with as much composure, as one returning from a strange country, to his native land; or as one returning from captivity and slavery, to his father's house, to his family, and to the society of friends, dear as life, and with much more raised expectations!

Some ties of nature—dear connexions, bind him indeed to earth, and would detain him here; but stronger bonds allure and draw him away toward a better world. If concern for dear ones he must leave behind intrudes and tempts him to wish a longer stay, he remembers that though he dies, his God lives—that God hath stiled himself the “Father of the fatherless and judge of the widow;” that he hath said “Leave thy fatherless children with me, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me.” Supported by such comforting declarations—such kind promises of a faithful God, and the allured belief of his mercy and truth, he resigns them to his care and leaves them with him, not doubting, but he will preserve them, or dispose of them, as shall be most for his own glory, and their good.

As to temporal matters, which often trouble those, who are chiefly concerned about worldly things, they cannot greatly affect one who believes himself heir to an eternal inheritance. For the comfort of those whom he leaves behind, he wishes to have his temporalities settled, and his accompts intelligible; that no disputes may arise, no injustice be done; but as to any concern which he personally takes in them, they appear in his view contemptible. He views them as unworthy his regard, as the beggar, who

hath been called to the possession of a crown the rags which he casts off to put on his robes.

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As death approacheth, *the perfect and upright man*, who realizeth his state, looks back with comfort, approving the part he hath acted, after renovation, and forward to the enjoyment of God, with stedfast hope and strong consolation.

We have this happiness of a dying saint, exemplified in St. Paul—"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid, up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day."—His rejoicing was "the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, he had had his conversion in the world." In the testimony of his conscience, he read the evidence of his good estate —of his sincerity towards God, and of his interest in Christ, He viewed nothing which he had done as meritorious—as laying God under obligation, Grace in Christ was all his hope. But he considered his love to God, and his zeal in his cause, as evidential that he was born of God, and the subject of divine grace in the Redeemer. Thence he inferred his title to the inheritance, prepared of God for those who love him.

Other saints do the same. In the testimony of conscience that they love God, and have obtained grace to serve him, they read their interest in the covenant and in the promises, in all their divine fulness.

This is the best, yea, the only evidence, of an interest in them. Where this is found, the matter is determined; there can be no reasonable doubt of their good estate; but where it is wanting, every thing beside is of no avail.

It is natural for a servant, when he sees a reckoning day at hand, to look back, and inquire how he hath improved his trust, and what account he hath to give? And from the testimony of conscience, he anticipates the reception he may expect from his lord. MANKIND feel themselves accountable to God and naturally expect to receive from his impartial hand, according to their works; and when they perceive their probation drawing to a close, they naturally look about them, and inquire how they can appear before their Judge?

The dying Christian is sometimes heard observing to those about him —"My glass is almost run. Would to God I had been more faithful, and done more for him who loved me, and gave himself for me. But blessed be his name, he hath enabled me to choose him for my portion, and enabled me to serve him in sincerity; though I have done it with much weakness and imperfection. Now I rely on his grace; his grace will be sufficient for me; it will support me in death, and reward my poor services with an eternal reward."

But if conscience, as death approacheth, speaks a different language —If it testifies to a departing soul—"You have neglected, the great salvation—lived in pleasure and been wanton, minding only earthly things," it fills the soul with anguish unutterable, causing it to anticipate eternal horrors!

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The *perfect and upright*, as he rejoiceth at the approach of death, if reason remains, often rejoiceth in death. “When he walks the dark valley, God’s rod and staff comfort him—He fears no evil because God is with him.” He is sometimes, ready to exclaim in the triumphant language of the resurrection, “O death! where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?”

Sometimes indeed, the upright, while here, “walk in darkness” —Sometimes the lamp of reason goes out, before the departure of the soul; so that the dying Christian hath no sense of his situation. At other times, God may hide his face from those whom his soul loves, and cause them to go on their way sorrowing. Possibly this may continue to the close of life! But if it doth, the clouds are all dispersed at the moment of death, No sooner are the clayey tabernacles dissolved, than the veil is rent, and the brightness of celestial glory shines in upon them. Peace eternal and divine, is theirs forever. Clouds will no more hide God’s face—Fears and doubts, no more distress them; nor Satan call his fiery darts at them, again forever.

In the other world, God will dwell with his people, and “wipe away all tears from their eyes: There will be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain; for the former things will all have passed away. There will be no more curse, because no more sin. For the spirits of the just will be made perfect.” They will then be with God and rejoice before him; for they will have “entered into his temple to go no more out.”

REFLECTIONS

I. The considerations which have been suggested afford comfort to the righteous, while groaning under the burdens and sorrows of life, and support in the solemn hour of death. They minister consolation also to those who mourn the loss of pious friends—an occasion of sorrow which we often experience in this vale of tears.

Here all have trials and afflictions—the *perfect and upright* not excepted. But the time is short. The good man’s trouble terminates with mortal life. *His end is peace*—his immortality glorious.

The wicked are dismayed when they look forward and consider their end, or the time of their departure. To the good man it is desirable—“He then rests from his labors, and his works follow him.” St. Paul, “had a desire to depart, and be with Christ.” He knew that “a crown of righteousness was laid up for him which the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give him at that day.” This was not peculiar to him; it is common to all those “who love Christ’s appearing.” Those now in glory were lately sufferers here: But their sufferings are ended—“They have entered into peace: They rest in their beds, walking in their uprightness.”



II. Our subject teacheth the conditions on which only we can hope for peace in death, and happiness after death. These depend on the use which we make of life—on the manner in which we are affected by the overtures made us in the gospel; they are the fruit of receiving Christ and obeying the gospel; for it brings salvation only to those who obey it.

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Would we “die the death of the righteous, and have our last end like his,” our lives must be preparatory—we must “mind the things which belong to our peace—live in all good conscience before God, and not suffer ourselves to be moved away from the hope of the gospel.”

III. Though when “the mystery of God shall be finished, his judgments will be made manifest;” hitherto, “his way is in the sea, and his judgments are a great deep.” We know that his way is perfect; but witness many things in the divine administration, which we do not understand. We have no line to fathom the depths of providence.

Often *the perfect and the upright* are early removed out of life —those who are friends of religion, and supporters of order and justice; whose hearts are filled with benevolence—who are the excellent of the earth! While those of different characters, who we should suppose might well be spared, yea, whose removal, we should judge a mercy to the world, are left to prolong their days! Some who are early vicious, and daily grow worse are nevertheless continued, and permitted to dishonor God, and spread error and mischief among mankind, till at “an hundred years old they die accursed!”

Such events often occur, and under the divine administration! They are permitted of him who cannot mistake! In a sense, they are the Lord’s doings, and marvelous in our eyes!

“The Lord reigneth, let the earth, rejoice—Clouds and darkness are round about him: Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.”

* * * * *

SERMON XXVI.

Departed Saints Fellowservants with those yet on Earth.

Revelation xxii. 9.

“I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets.”

The revelation made to St. John in the isle of Patmos, was a comfort to the suffering apostle, and a blessing to the church. “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the word, of this prophecy.” The beginning indeed was dark; the prophetic sketch, was for sometime, gloomy: It unfolded a strange scene of declensions and abominations, which were to disgrace the church of Christ and mar its beauty; and dismal series of woes on woes, for many ages. The church then so pure, was to be corrupted, to become “the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth, and to make herself drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus!” When the



apostle “saw, he wondered with great admiration.” Had the vision closed with similar discoveries, no joy would have been occasioned by them; but grief ineffable. The apostle might have sunk under them. But they finally appeared diverse, and adapted to comfort him, and fill his heart with joy. He saw the cause of Christ triumphant—true religion to have become universal, and heavenly glory the reward of the faithful!

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When the veil which had been spread over these things was drawn aside, and they broke out to the view of this man of God, he seems to have been enraptured and lost in ecstasy. He prostrated himself in adoration of the celestial messenger: But was forbidden by the angel —“See, thou do it not; I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus.—Worship God.” This happened at the beginning of the joyful part of the vision, when the triumphs of Christianity were first disclosed. *

* Revelation xix. 10.

We are under no temptation to give undue honors to bearers of evil tidings; But even “the feet of those who bring good tidings are beautiful.”

The angel having thus restrained the apostle from paying him divine homage, proceeded to finish the sketch which he had begun of the glory which remains for the people of God. When it was nearly completed, the still imbodied saint, again forgot himself, and overcome by a sight too strong and glorious for frail humanity fell down in humble adoration of the heavenly minister!

Mad with joy he appears to have been bewildered, and in a momentary delirium; but was again prevented by the angel; and the same reason assigned as before—*I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets.*

This declaration is remarkable. How are we to understand it?

It should seem that this messenger from above was originally one of our race. *I am thy fellowservant.*—

We are inclined to believe that he had once inhabited a human body, and had his residence on earth—that this was one of the old prophets, who having been released from the work to which he had been first called, was now serving God under another form, in a more dignified station and with greater powers than he had possessed while yet on probation.

We may mistake the Scripture but have been induced to believe that when the saints drop these bodies, and are joined “to the spirits of the just made perfect,” they become angels, and are afterwards employed in the service of God, as his messengers and agents, whom he “sends forth to minister to the heirs of salvation,” and to transact business for which he hath fitted them, and in which he is pleased to employ them.

Some reasons for this belief are adduced in the following discourse.

When a child of God is released from the body, he is freed from the remains of depravity, and from this native bias to evil, and according to his nature, made perfect in holiness. His reason is retained; yea, his rational capacity is enlarged; and those who

are associated with the blessed inhabitants of the upper world, doubtless enjoy better means of information than are to be found on earth.

Some indeed, have fancied, that soul and body sleep together from the epoch of death till the resurrection. That during that term, the soul is chained down in a state of insensibility! That the happiness of the saints, during the intermediate term, is no other than a sleep without dreams—a temporary nonexistence! Strange!

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The thoughts of death would make the good man tremble, did he conceive such to be its nature. Here he is compassed with infirmity, and groans, being burdened. But such an existence, which capacitates him to do somewhat to honor God, and benefit man, is preferable to a suspension of existence.

Suspension of existence! What is a suspension of existence, but a temporary annihilation!—A complete solecism! From such a state there could be no resurrection. There could be only another creation, which must constitute not the same, but another creature. The idea of a suspension of existence, is scarcely supportable; and the reality of it contradicted by every part of revelation.

Death is represented in the Scriptures, as a separation of soul and body; not as their sleeping together. “Thou changest his countenance, *sendeth him away*,” is a description of death drawn by Job—which answers to that given of Rachel’s—

“*As her soul was departing*, for she died.” And a resurrection is represented as a return of the soul to the body from which it had been separated: As of the widow’s son whom Elijah raised from the dead —“*And the soul of the child came into him again*, and he revived.” The language of the New Testament is the same. “This day thou shalt be fellow sufferer on the cross, whose body was the same day committed to the grave.” St. Paul “had a desire *to depart* and to be with Christ,” which he opposed to *abiding in the flesh*. If soul and body sleep together in the grave, he would have been no sooner with Christ. than though he had lived here till the resurrection. When St. John was indulged a sight of heaven, he saw the souls of the martyrs who had been slain before that period, and heard them crying for vengeance on the murderers who were yet living on earth. *

* Revelation vi. 9, 10.

The Scriptures are so explicit respecting the state of the dead, that a suspicion that they remain senseless while their bodies moulder in the dust, appears strange. The righteous dead certainly rejoice in God’s presence and are associated with fellow saints. The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, feed them, and leads them “to fountains of living waters; and God wipes away all tears from their eyes.”

Neither do they remain inactive—“They serve God day and night—in his temple,” some may say. God’s temple may here mean the universe, that vast temple which he hath built in every part of which his saints may serve him. *

* Revelation xxi. 22.

Surely the glorified spirit is not confined to a single apartment in the house of God, and not suffered to go abroad, and see his glory, and the exercise of his perfections in the works of creation and providence! Were such his situation, it would differ little from that



of the delinquent who is confined to his cell, or prison. Such cannot be the state of a glorified soul—of a soul released from a body, which while on trial, served as a clog to restrain the servant, and prevent him from quitting the station, in which he had been placed, or leaving the work assigned him. It cannot be the state of one sanctified throughout; of one raised above temptation, either to stray into devious paths, or be slothful in the service of his God.

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Much of our felicity here ariseth from a contemplation of the works of creation and providence. In these we see divine wisdom and goodness; learn to know God; to fear and love him. The good man carries this disposition with him when he exchangeth worlds; his desire of knowledge, and especially the knowledge of God, and the works and ways of God. And is there not reason to believe that glorified saints have power and liberty to range among the works of the all perfect Sovereign; trace the evidences of the divine perfections, and witness their effects, and that this is one source of their happiness?

A relish for knowledge is a quality of the mind, natural to it, and inseparable from it. We observe it in children, who at an early period discover a desire of information, and perpetually seek it by questioning those more advanced. The same disposition is resident in adults, and productive of the attainments in science which both delight the mind and dignify the man. In heaven, the glorified spirit, hath doubtless advantages for attaining the knowledge of God and divine things, and opportunity to satisfy his desire after it, if it can be satisfied; for it is itself a happiness. It gives a zest to information, and will probably continue, and be an endless source of enjoyment. The creature may never know so much of god as to desire no farther knowledge of him; or so much of the works and ways of god, as to with no increase of that knowledge. Acquisitions in knowledge and enjoyment may progress together in the world of spirits. And who can fix their limits? They may be as boundless as eternity!

Turn now your thoughts on Sir Isaac Newton that renowned philosopher and Christian. Was his enlarged and inquisitive mind satisfied at death? Did not he carry with him a desire to visit every planet, not only of our own but of other systems, and pry into the *arcana* of nature to be found in them all? If enabled and permitted, he may still be ranging among the works of God, to learn yet more of his wisdom, power and goodness, in his works and ways, which are unsearchable, and past the comprehension of created beings! Probably other glorified Spirits have a Share; it, may be a large share of the same temper.

And if they are capable of bearing the message of their divine Sovereign, or doing aught for his honor, it must be a pleasure to glorified spirits to be so employed. Here the good man delights to serve the Lord. Will this cease to be his disposition when the remains of depravity shall be done away? Will not this disposition be increased and strengthened? Or is there reason to think that those will have no power to serve God, who are freed from sluggish bodies?

Of certain glorified spirits it was declared to the apostle, as we have seen, that they “serve God day and night”—They have no need of rest—they never grow weary. How they serve God without the use of bodily organs, is to us unknown. But it doth not follow that they are incapable of it. God can give them power, and teach them to accomplish all his pleasure.

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That departed saints have sometimes been sent down to our world, to make known God's will, and deliver his messages, we believe to be taught in the scriptures—*I am thy fellow servant and of thy brethren the prophets*.

Who not of our race could have made such a declaration? A *fellowservant*, is a servant of the same species, or rank. Our fellows are our equals; those of the same class in creation. Brutes are creatures; but we do not consider them as *fellow creatures*. We might, however, with as much propriety as the angel could call himself John's *fellowservant*, had he belonged to another species, or class or servants.

The term *prophet*, carries, in our apprehension, the same thing in it —speaks the heavenly messenger to have been one of our race. By prophets, we understand inspired men. We believe this to be every where its meaning in the scriptures. And the term *brethren*—“*of thy brethren the prophets*”, confirms our sense of the text—*I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets*. Strange language, if this was one of the angels who kept their first estate; one who never dwelt in flesh, nor inhabited a human body! But if this was one of the old prophets, Samuel, Nathan, Daniel, or any other of those who had tabernacled in flesh, and been sent to warn his brethren, and foretell things to come, the language is easy and natural. *

* * * * *

* *Sundulos sou gar eimi, xai ton adelphon sou ton prophaton*. Doct. Doddridge in his notes on this passage observes, that it may be rendered *I am thy fellow servant and the fellow servant of thy brethren the prophets*.

But the translation in the Bible is perfectly literal. The sentence is elliptical. The elipsis may as well be filled by *tis*, as by *sundoulos*. If filled by the former, it reads thus, *I am a fellow servant, and one of the brethren the prophets*. This, for the reasons given above, we conceive to be the sense of the passage. The learned reader will judge for himself.

* * * * *

If we search the scriptures, we shall see that the saints whose bodies were in the grave, have been sometimes thus used of God.

When Saul went to consult the powers of darkness, because the Lord did not answer him in the time of his distress, Samuel, who had died some time before, was sent of God to reprove that rebellious prince, and denounce his doom.

Some indeed suppose that the apparition was not Samuel, but an infernal! But the sacred historian represents it as being Samuel, and why should we reject his testimony?

The sorceress had not power by her charms, to call back the prophet from the world of spirits. But God had power to send him on his business; to enable him to make himself visible, and foretel the evils which then hung over Saul and Israel: And from several considerations we think it evident that he did do it.

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The woman appears to have been surprized when she saw Samuel. To her, he was an unexpected visitor. By his means she found out Saul, whom before she did not know in his disguise.—Apostate spirits if they ever gave responses to those who consulted them, commonly flattered them in their crimes, or gave ambiguous answers to their inquiries; but not so the ghost which appeared on this occasion. Most pointedly did it reprove the abandoned prince, who was adding iniquity to transgression, and hardening himself in the time of trouble! And most expressly did it foretel the evils which were coming on the offending inquirer, his family and people! Could an apostate spirit have done these things? Or would he if he could? God hath sometimes used wicked men to foretel future events, and compelled them to denounce his judgments; but have we any account of his making this use of fallen angels? Of his making known his purposes to them, and enabling them to give the genuine proof of true prophets? It is further observable, that part of the message related to taking the kingdom from Saul, and giving it to David—"The Lord hath done to him as he spake by me," is his language. God had foretold this by Samuel; not by Satan, or a messenger of Satan.

There is every reason to believe that Samuel really appeared on this occasion—that God sent him to deliver the sad message to the impious rebel, who instead of humbling himself in the time of his trouble, sinned yet more against the Lord.

If we attribute these divine communications to infernal agency, why not others? If once we turn aside from the literal sense of scripture, where shall we stop? But should we doubt whether in this instance, a departed saint was sent down to visit earth, and transact the business of HIM who is Lord of all, other instances may certainly be adduced—if not in the Old Testament, yet beyond a doubt in the New. But this will be the subject of another discourse.

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SERMON XXVII.

Departed Saints Fellow servants with those yet on Earth.

REVELATION xxii.

"I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets."

That the saints do not remain insensible, while their bodies are in the dull, but become angels, * see and serve God and bear his messages, and minister to the heirs of salvation, hath been argued from several considerations, in the preceding discourse; but we chiefly depend on revelation. The text and several other scriptures, we conceive to be our purpose, and sufficient to establish our theory, and that the same is illustrated and confirmed by sacred history, both of the Old and New Testament. One instance of a

departed saint, sent as a messenger from heaven to earth, hath been adduced from the Old Testament: We now advert to the New.

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* The term angel signifies a messenger. If glorified saints are used to carry God's messages, or sent to do his business, they are made angels, in the proper sense of the word. Such appear to have been the angelic band, who united in praising God, when the Lamb prevailed to open the book of his decrees and reveal them to the apostle—"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God, kings and priests: *And we shall reign on the earth.*" * Surely these must have been of our race.

* REVELATION v. 9, 10.

Here our proof is explicit. We can conceive of no evasion. Two of our race *who had long before been removed from earth to heaven*, were certainly sent to visit the Savior, just before this sufferings—Moses and Elias, who attended him on the mount, whither he retired with three of his disciples, and conversed with him in their presence. St. Luke hath described their appearance, and told the subject of their conversation—"Who appeared, in glory and spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." *

* Luke ix. 29.

Moses had then been dead more than fourteen centuries. Elias had not tasted death, but he had been changed. That change had passed upon him which will pass on the saints who shall be alive at Christ's coming. The change must have been great, or he could not have ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire, or lived above the region of air which surrounds this globe.

These two saints, seem, on this occasion, to have been assimilated to each other—"They both appeared in glory"—were company for each other, and sent together to testify for Christ, before chosen witnesses. Our Savior's resurrection was also attended by witnesses who had been for time in the world of spirits—"And the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." *

* Matthew xxvii. 52, 53.

But it is only departed saints who are employed to bear God's messages. There is no intimation in scripture, that those who die in their sins, are afterwards sent, or suffered to go abroad. There is reason to believe, that as the saints are made perfect at death, so all that bears an affinity to goodness, ceases at that period, in the unrenewed, and that they put on the complete image of him who is termed their father. If this is the case, they would spread mischief and misery, were they permitted access to those who remain in the body, and liable to temptation. However this might be, we are assured that they are confined in the infernal prison, and will continue prisoners till the great day.



This is intimated by our Savior, when he warns the sinner to “agree with his adversary quickly, while in the way with him—lest he should be cast into prison”—because should this happen there will be no release “till he shall pay the utmost farthing.” This speaks the state of impenitents, to be from the time of their death, that of prisoners, who can neither break their prison, or obtain, so much as a temporary release, till they shall have suffered all their demerits.

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The same is intimated in the parable of the rich man Lazarus. The rich sinner is represented as passing, at death, into a place of torment, and confinement, and as despairing of even a momentary enlargement. Other wise he would not have requested that Lazarus might be sent to warn his brethren who were then living on earth, but rather that he might have gone himself. Him they would have known; and he could have given them a feeling description of the miseries which living in pleasure, regardless of the one thing needful, will draw after it. Many advantages might have been expected from this personal appearance to his brethren, but he preferred no such petition.

His prayer that Lazarus might be sent, was probably intended to intimate that departed spirits remember their former state on earth, and the relatives and acquaintance whom they leave upon it; that they retain a concern for them; that they know that good spirits are used of God to transact matters relative to their spiritual concerns, and that those who die in their sins are kept in confinement, and not permitted to go forth; no, not to warn fellow sinners, whom they have left behind them.

This agrees with what is said by St. Peter, respecting the antediluvians. He speaks of those as being “spirits in prison” in the apostolic age, “who were disobedient, when the long suffering of God waited with them, in the days of Noah.”

It farther appears that their imprisonment is a state of darkness. “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness? to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” This darkness is probably a contrast to the light enjoyed by glorified saints. They are doubtless let into the purposes of heaven—to them the mystery of divine providence is opened. They see and admire the wisdom and goodness of God, in those dispensations, which while here, filled them with wonder. But it seems that the wicked are not let into these things, but driven away in darkness, and left enveloped in it—“None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.”

This may serve to explain a passage in Job, which might seem opposed to our construction of the text—“His sons come to honor and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them.” * If we understand this of the wicked, it will harmonize with the other scriptures which have been adduced. Though some understand the words of Job, as descriptive of a man's state at the approach of death, at which period he is often lost and bewildered, and consequently unaffected with, any thing which may happen to his dearest connexions, for whom, in health, and while possessed of reason, he felt greatly interested. This construction is favored by the words which follow, in which he is represented as still pained in body, as well as mind—“But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn.” +

* Job xiv. 21. + Vid. Henry in locum.

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If we do not mistake the scriptures, our pious departed friends may sometimes attend us, and witness the manner in which we act our parts.

Natural relations terminate with life; but we do not believe that the friendships here contracted cease at death; that the remembrance of the kind offices done to a good man here is then obliterated; that those who had been helpers of one another in this life are forever lost to each other when they cease to be together here; or that the endearments of friendship and reciprocal affection are then extinguished to revive not more.

Departed spirits must retain a remembrance of what they did here, and of those who acted with them. They cannot otherwise give account of themselves; or witness the divine justice and impartiality relative to matters which had been common to themselves and others. But these will be made manifest. All in heaven and on earth will see and confess the perfect rectitude of the divine administration.

Some suppose that the knowledge of things done on earth, and regard for mortals would render departed saints unhappy; that therefore they are incredible.

But is not God grieved at the obstinacy of sinners? “When God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth—it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” * Was he then unhappy? Departed saints may have similar sensations, whatever may be implied in them. The same objection may be made to the divine knowledge of mankind, as to that of the saints—We do not take it on us to explain either. The same may also be objected to supposing that the saints will be made acquainted with the decisions of the Judge at the great day—that they will then see any who were dear to them here, sent away with the workers of iniquity.

* Genesis vi. 5.

If the manifest rectitude, and moral necessity of the divine decisions, will then satisfy the righteous, and their greater love to God reconcile them to the execution of his judgments on all the impenitent, why not as soon as they shall have put off the remains of depravity, and become “the spirits of the just made perfect?” THOSE in glory are doubtless acquainted with the moral state of the world —“There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.” *

* Luke xv. 7-10

That the powers of light and darkness take part in the concerns of mankind, and interest themselves in their affairs, and that they conflict with each other on their account, we are taught in revelation. *



Our departed friends who have known and loved us here, may be among the invisible witnesses of our conduct, and among our invisible helpers. They may rejoice, if we act well our parts, or weep if we are numbered among sinners, or careless neglecters of the grace of life.

* Daniel x. 13. Jude 9

Perhaps the pious parent who hath died in the Lord, may regard the little orphan which he hath left behind. Experienced in the troubles and difficulties, snares and temptations of this life, he may watch over it, and in ways to us unknown “do it good and not evil all the days of its life.” Little ones are not destitute of invisible keepers —“*Their angels* do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” *

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* Matthew xviii. 10.

Some are early called out of life; make but a transient visit to the scene of sorrow, and just taste the bitter cup of affliction. But though short their stay, they may yet begin to form some dear connexions—connexions which might perhaps have been ensnaring; for more set bad, than good examples before the little strangers committed to their care. These, taken from the evils to come, may be friends to those who had appear to befriend their helpless state in this strange land—may watch for their good, and rejoice if they see them minding the things which belong to their peace, and by a wise improvement of more talents than had been committed to themselves, preparing for greater joys and honors in the kingdom of God.

Those who had sustained a still nearer relation—who had been “one flesh” may bear like regard to those “with whom they had taken sweet counsel and walked to the house of God in company”—and may be the first to welcome their arrival at the world of joy.

The Romish church have abused the doctrine which we conceive to be contained in the text, by decreeing adoration to departed saints. Others have gone into the opposite extreme, denying that they know ought of terrestrial matters, or have any concern in them. Adoration belongs exclusively to God. It belongs neither to glorified saints, nor to angels of light, though the latter “are all sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation.” * “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

* Hebrews i. 14.

The righteous are not suffered to continue here by reason of death. Their removal is one of our severest trials. Our subject ministers support and comfort under it. When we reflect upon it, we seem to hear them calling to us from behind the scene, with “Weep not for us—we are not dead. Our bodies sleep, but our spirits wake”—Death is not the period of our existence. It is only our removal—our birth day into the world of glory.—We are joined “to the spirits of the just made perfect”—enjoy the society and that of the angels of God—behold the face of our heavenly Father, and of the divine Redeemer. We rejoice to see you “followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”—are ready to help you in your work, and to shout God’s praises, and unite in songs of triumph, should you come off conquerors, and rise from your humble state of sorrows, sufferings and temptations, to be our companions in glory.

These are consoling and animating views. They tend to excite a divine ambition in working out our salvation.

We are yet doomed “to bear the heat and burden day.” But we are not alone—not unobserved. God, angels, and the good, who were lately “our companions in tribulation,” witness the part we act. We would not dishonor ourselves in their view, and

sink ourselves in their estimation. If they are ready to help our infirmity, we would not render their heavenly aid of no avail, or cut ourselves off from enjoying their society.

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Consider some dear departed child of God thus interested in your concerns, and you will find it a spur to duty, and an incentive to labor and not faint in the work assigned you, preparatory to your joining the church of the first born above. Think now that the godly ones who loved you here, and labored to animate you in the service of God—or those who lately looked to you for counsel and guidance, having made their way to glory, are waiting your arrival and longing to hail your entrance into the kingdom, and by all the strength of your love to them, now freed from the imperfections of their earthly residence, and made glorious and heavenly, you will find yourself drawn on toward that state of blessedness, in which you hope again to rejoice with those whose distresses you witnessed here—yea whose dying agonies, may have chilled your frame and filled you with anguish unutterable!

To meet them again, and find yourself and them, forever removed from the fear of evil, either natural or moral—forever secure the divine friendship—forever happy and glorious in the enjoyment of God, “the former things being all passed away, and all tears forever wiped from your eyes!” There to recount with those blessed spirits, the travels and trials of this life, and look back, perhaps, on many hairbreadth escapes from eternal death! There, to dwell on the wonders of divine love and mercy exercised towards you, and often in things which you once thought to be against you! Who would not willingly suffer many deaths to enjoy these things?

Such considerations are animating in duty, and supporting in times of trial. If realized, we shall adopt the language of the suffering apostle—“None of these things move me, neither do I count my life dear to myself, that I may finish my course with joy”—and share such blessed society—such inconceivable felicity and glory in my Father’s house above, in which are many mansions!

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SERMON XXVIII.

The Danger of Deviating from Divine Institutions.

Colossians ii, 8.

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

St. Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles. The care of the churches gathered among them devolved particularly on him. At the writing of this epistle he had no personal acquaintance with the church to which it is addressed.* Epaphras, a bishop of the Colossians, then his fellow prisoner at Rome, had made him acquainted with their state, and the danger they were in from false teachers, who, during the absence of their



minister, labored to turn them from the duplicity of the gospel; and this letter was written, through divine influence, to guard them against those deceivers, and persuade them to abide in Christ.

* Verse 1.

To this end he counselled them to keep to the divine directions, carefully avoiding every alteration, or addition, which might be urged upon them by uninspired men, though they might come with a shew of wisdom and humility, and profession of regard to the honor of God and happiness.

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Many of the most successful attacks on God's earthly kingdom have been made in this way. Open rebellion against God, is found chiefly on those who have no faith in him; who are therefore devoid of his fear. Others are tempted mostly to other sins, and induced to make indirect opposition to the divine government, from them, the tempter hides the truth, and leads them into error, and thus causes them to pull down the cause which they aim to build up, and fight against God with a view to serve him.

So much of God appears in his works, that comparatively few can be made to doubt his existence, or his providential government. Hence few are prevailed with to renounce his fear and rise directly against him; but many are deceived, and consequently engaged to act with his enemies.

Here a common source of seduction hath been suggesting improvements on divine institutions—that *this* and *that*, which God hath not ordered, would help his cause and promote his interest. Sometimes the improvements are attempted under pretence of divine order, and urged with his authority; but this veil is not always spread over endeavors to change his institutes. They are often urged as means adapted to help his cause, without pretence to divine order requiring the use of them; Much, it is alleged, is left to human discretion. This taken for granted, the rest is easy. It is only to say *these measures* are wise and good, calculated to help on the cause of God, and whoever denies it, is considered as fighting against God.

Thus men are led away from the divine institutions to those of human invention. Human wisdom is exalted above divine; and all with a view to glorify God!

Thus was the tempter laboring, through the instrumentality of his agents, to seduce the Colossians, when this epistle was written, and it is chiefly intended to counteract their influence, and prevent that church from being moved away from the hope of the gospel, which they had received.

In discussing the subject, We shall first *glance at the measures used by those deceivers*—then consider *the success which hath attended this mode of fighting against God, and seducing mankind, adding a few observations on the influence of tradition and the rudiments and customs of the world.*

The Colossian seducers appear to have been of two kinds—Jewish and Gentile. The former seem not to have differed from those at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, and those in Judea. They were Jewish Christians, who were so attached to the Mosaic ritual, that they wished to continue it, and graft Christianity upon it, rendering the religion of Christ only an appendage to that of Moses. They insisted that the ceremonial law remained in force—insisted especially on the observance of circumcision; and probably on the traditions so highly valued by the Pharisees. But the apostle assured this Gentile Church, that they were complete “in Christ”,

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and needed nothing of this kind to recommend them to God, or to secure his favor—that “Christ had blotted out the hand writing of ordinances, and taken it away, nailing it to his cross”—that the ceremonial law, being only “a shadow of good things to come,” was fulfilled in Christ, and no longer obligatory; and warned them to stand fast in their Christian liberty, and suffer no man to judge them respecting such things, or impose such burdens upon them.

The Gentile seducers were converts from Paganism, and no less eager to introduce the tenets and rites of their superstition. One of the errors, which, from the particular mention made of it, they seem to have urged, was the worshipping of angels, “Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.”

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* Verse 18.

Mankind seem, at a pretty early period, generally to have given into the idea of so vast a distance between God and man, that man is unworthy to come into his presence, and can approach him acceptably only through a mediator. But just views of a mediator were never communicated to the scattered branches of our race, or soon lost from among them. Most of the heathens offered religious homage to departed heroes; or to those who had been revered while inhabitants of earth. To them were their prayers addressed, that they might bear them to the God of nature, and by their influence render him propitious.

Here was the appearance of humility—So sensible of their unworthiness that they dared not approach God in their own names, or present their own petitions—others who had ceased to sin, and been admitted to the divine presence, must intercede for them. But this was “a voluntary humility”—not ordered of God—a mere matter of human invention.

A mediator is indeed necessary for man since the fall; but man is not left to choose his mediator. One every way suitable is provided, through whom we may have access to God: “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

The apostle further observes, that those who directed them to worship angels, arrogated a knowledge of matters not revealed. God hath given no intimation of such use to be made of angels, but ordered man to approach him in the name of Christ. Those who go to God in other ways, or depending on other intercessors, are said “not to hold the head.” * “The head of every man is Christ.” + Such people will lose their reward. “Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility and

worshipping of angels”—The rewards of grace are promised to obedience but not to “willful worship, or voluntary humility.” The utmost these can hope is forgiveness.

Verse 9. + 1 Corinthians xi. 3.

When Paul assured the Colossians that they were “complete in Christ,” he had reference to the errors of all the deceivers who were laboring to seduce them. Gentile philosophy is as useless to the Christian, as Jewish rites. Christ hath the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him. We’ have only to rely on divine mercy, through faith, in him, and we shall not be ashamed.

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Such we conceive to be the sum of the instructions and warnings here given to the Colossians. They were only to keep to the divine directions, and seek salvation agreeably thereto, regardless of *the traditions of men and rudiments of the world*.

All error is deviation from divine rule. To this men are tempted with a view to honor God. This is a fruitful source of error. And when error is once generated, it is often diffused and perpetuated by tradition, custom, and *the rudiments of the world*.

We proceed to consider *the success which hath attended this mode of fighting against God—that is, suggesting improvements on divine institutions and appointments*.

The first attempt to seduce our race seems to have been of this kind. “The woman being deceived was in the transgression,” Made upright, she could not have been persuaded to disobey God, unless she was led to believe that she might, some how, honor God in consequence of that disobedience. But how?—“In the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”—— Then she could honor God better than while destitute of knowledge which would liken her to superior intelligences. “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat.” Thus some suppose the tempter to have prevailed against her. It may be thought strange that she should expect good to rise out of evil. Her descendants have often entertained such expectations; but they are depraved, and their minds are darkened.

Whether this was the sophism by which Satan's victory was obtained, we presume not to determine. It is however certain that he prevailed by deception; by persuading our common mother that advantage would accrue from ceasing to follow the divine directions.

Cain, her eldest son, fell into a sin of the same kind; was induced to change divine institutions. “Cain brought the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord,” instead of the firstlings of the flock. The fruit of the ground did not typify the sacrifice of Christ, and had not been ordered of God. It was a mode of honoring him of Cain's devising. He thought to improve on divine appointments; or dared to change them to suit his circumstances. “Cain was a tiller of the ground.” The fruits of the ground were the product of his own labors —“Of such as he had, he would bring his offering. What advantage would accrue from changing with his brother to procure what God had required? God needed nothing and could receive nothing from his creatures.”

Abel believed himself under obligation to conform to the divine order, and in that way to seek the divine favor. Cain had not this faith. He was confident that another way would do as well; and followed the dictates of his own fancied wisdom. * Therefore their different reception. Had Cain been equally obedient with Abel no difference would have been made. Cain is appealed to, to judge of this matter for himself—“If thou dost well,

shalt thou not be accepted?" TO do well, is to regulate principle and practice by the divine order; in both these Cain was deficient. They are commonly united. Error in principle occasions error in practice.

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* These are not mere conjectures—they are intimated by St. Jude, when he declares the schismatics of his day “have gone in the way of Cain and Core.” Core, or Korah, certainly attempted to change a divine order by which the functions of the priesthood were appropriated to the family of Aaron. And the schismatics, who were contemporary with the apostles, set themselves up for teachers in the church without a regular, or supernal call to the ministry. These went in the way of Cain. His sin must therefore have been a departure from divine institutions.

Not many ages after the deluge idolatry was introduced into the world, and corrupted and spoiled the worship of God. This seems to have been, at first, a design to improve on the homage which was paid to the true God.

Adoration offered to other than God, is idolatry. This is of two kinds—that offered to angels, and departed spirits, and that offered to the heavenly bodies and to images. The former is said to have been originally designed to engage those to whom it was addressed to act the part of mediators with God. The heavenly bodies were adored as the supposed residences of Deity. Image worship was intended to help devotion. It was thought that visible representations would serve to impress a reverence for the objects of worship on the mind, and solemnize the heart. With this view, images and paintings were introduced into temples and places of worship. They appeared to have effect. The worshippers seemed more devout. A happy discovery, which had not occurred to Omniscience!

To increase the good effects, further improvements were suggested. Images were made of the precious metals, and enriched with gems and costly attire, and art was exhausted to embellish them. They were also consecrated with magnificent and solemn rites. After consecration, the celestials to whom they dedicated, were supposed to descend and dwell in them, and thus to be present with their worshippers, to hear their prayers, witness their gratitude, and smell a sweet savor in their sacrifices. And as temples were built, and images consecrated chiefly to inferior deities, who were worshipped as mediators, the homage which was paid to them was suited to the conceptions which the worshippers entertained of the objects of their worship; and being mostly taken from among men, the offerings were adapted to the characters which they had respectively sustained while resident in the body. Hence the homage paid to Baal, Moloch, Mars, Bacchus, Venus and others. Thus every abomination was sanctioned, and made an object of religion!

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The use of images was common among the Easterns at an early period, and communicated to the Hebrews, who were conversant with them, before their settlement in Canaan. In Egypt, or certainly in the wilderness it was found among them. They were particularly guilty of this sin while Moses was on the mount with God. And the use which they then made of images was the same which hath been mentioned. As soon as the golden calf was finished, Aaron, who had entered into their views, made proclamation—"Tomorrow is the feast of the Lord—[of Jehovah.]" Moses, who had greatly helped them in the worship and service of God, was gone, and the idol was intended to supply his place; to help their devotion, and excite them to honor the true God! "Up make us Gods— for this Moses—we wot not what is become of him."

The idolatrous worship of the Romanists in later ages is of the same kind. Their churches abound with rich images, and are adorned with exquisite paintings; the likeness of Christ agonising on the cross, and other affecting representations, designed to impress religious subjection the heart and excite devotion. Such is the use which they profess to make of them. And they seem not devoid of effect. Protestants who have attended their worship, have observed greater appearances of fervor, and greater moving of the passions, than are usual in the religious assemblies of other denominations of Christians. And their adoration of angels and departed saints, is only as of mediators and intercessors, who may present their prayers, and obtain favor for them—the very idolatry of paganism.

In these things there is a shew of wisdom and humility—wisdom to devise means to impress a sense of religion, and humility to draw nigh to God by the intervention of those more worthy than themselves; and the means seem not destitute of influence; they produce warm zeal, and all the fervor of devotion; yea, all those feelings and emotions which are thought by some to constitute the offence of religion.

And why is not all this right? Why are not these ways of honoring God and exciting devotion commendable, when they render the worshipper thus fervent in spirit to serve the Lord?

The reason is obvious—they are not required—yea, they are forbidden of the divine Sovereign. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him *only* shalt thou serve. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth—I the Lord thy God am a jealous God."—

Pretending to honor God by direct disobedience is peculiarly affrontive. Such worshippers "provoke him to his face. Their offerings his soul hateth. They are a smoke in his nose, and a fire that burneth all the day." Every thing of this nature, whatever may be its design, is rebellion against God. Against no other sin hath he manifested greater indignation.

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No instance can be adduced of such homage being accepted, or of good resulting from such worship. Yea, it hath commonly been followed with the severest marks of the divine resentment. Witness the evils which came upon Israel when they made the golden calf, to help their devotions. Witness those which fell on the family and kingdom of Jeroboam, when he forsook the appointed worship of God, and the ministry of the Levites whom God had appointed to wait at the altar. Jeroboam did not introduce the worship of Baal, or the other heathen gods. This was done afterwards by the influence of Jezebel. He only appointed other places of worship, beside that which God had chosen, and consecrated others to minister who had not the attachments of the Levites to the house of David and city of Zion, and made images to help the devotion of his people; and lo! his family perish; a brand of infamy is set on his name; and because his people walk in his ways, they are finally “broken and cease to be a people!”

The divine resentment of attempts to change the ordinances of God, or make innovations in his worship even where they seem *to have been done out of concern for his honor*, is left on record in his word. Saul once offered sacrifice. The necessity of his affairs seemed to require it. He professed to have done it with reluctance, but to have thought it his duty—“I said the Philistines will come down upon me, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.” But Saul was not of the family of Aaron, to whom the right of sacrificing solely appertained by divine appointment. Hence instead of conciliating the divine favor, his officious zeal offended heaven—for that act of disobedience he was threatened with deposition; and a repetition of attempting to improve on divine orders, in sparing the best cattle of Amalek to sacrifice unto the Lord, confirmed the sentence, * placed another on the throne, and led to the ruin of the rebellious prince. Uzzah only put forth his hand to steady the trembling ark, and was struck dead for his rashness, beside the ark of God. +

* 1 Samuel xiii. 1-14, xv. 15-13. + 2 Samuel vi. 6, 7.

Some spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit, have made changes in the divine institutions, and attempted improvements upon them, since the commencement of the gospel day. This hath been a leading trait of character in the chiefs of the Romish church. Many of the heads of that communion have signalized themselves in this way. And some of their alterations have operated to impress what was thought to be religion, as hath been observed. Another way in which they have manifested the same disposition hath been the multiplying of holy days. Under various pretences, nearly half the days in the year have been consecrated to religion, by order of those gods on earth. Some real, and many fictitious saints, have days consecrated to their memory.

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Here is a great shew of wisdom, and zeal for God, and his cause in the world; calling men so often from their temporal concerns to attend to the duties of religion! Who can do other than approve it? Doubtless many have been deceived by appearances, and considered those as wise and good who have done these things. But this is far from being their character. These have been the doings of “Antichrist, the Man of sin —the Son of perdition! Because of these things cometh the wrath of God, on the children of disobedience!” All these specious measures are no better than Saul’s sacrificing, Uzzah’s steadying the ark, and the use of images in divine worship! They are opposition to the orders of the Most High, and rebellion against him.

“Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work” —Whoever takes it on himself to alter this appointment, “thinks to change times and laws;” which was foretold of him who should “speak great words against the Most High.” *

* Daniel vii. 25.

The Lord’s day, is the only day which God hath sanctified under the gospel dispensation. This infinite wisdom judged sufficient. Had more been requisite, more would have been consecrated by divine order. But not a hint of any other holy day is to be found in the New Testament. +

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+ Neither the day of Christ’s birth, death, resurrection or ascension appear to have been regarded as holy time, or any way distinguished from the other days of the year, during the apostolic age. The former of these is not marked in the scriptures. Whether it happened on the twentyfifth of December, or at some other season is uncertain. So are the times in which the apostles and primitive Christians suffered martyrdom. These events are veiled. Divine providence hath hidden them from mankind, probably for the same reason that the body of Moses was hidden from Israel—to prevent its being made an object of idolatrous worship—or for the same which is supposed to have occasioned our Lord’s seeming neglect of his mother, and his severer reproof given to Peter, than to any other of his disciples—“Get thee behind me Satan;” namely, that idolatrous honor, which he foresaw would be afterwards paid them by some called Christians.

Easter is once mentioned in our translation of the New Testament; but it is not found in the Greek original. The word there used is “Pasxa,” the Passover. It is mentioned only to note the time in which Herod intended to have brought forth Peter and delivered him up to his enemies. *

* Acts xii. 4.

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Occasional calls there may be to fasting and thanksgiving; and we have scripture warrant for attending them in their seasons. But fixing on certain days of the year, or month, statedly to call men from their secular business to attend to religion, and requiring the consecration of them to religion is adding to the book of God. However well intended, it goes on mistaken principles, and however specious in appearance, is affronting the wisdom and authority of heaven.

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Most of the errors referred to above, are found among Pagans or Catholics; but is nothing of the same kind chargeable on Protestants? “Are there not with us sins against the Lord our God?” And of the same nature with those we have been contemplating? The knowledge of other’s errors in ay be for our warning; but the knowledge of our own is requisite to our reformation. Where then are we directed of God, religiously to observe Christmas, Lent, or Easter? Where to attend the eucharist only twice or thrice a year; and never without one, or more preparatory lectures? * Where to add a third prayer at the administration of that ordinance, when our divine pattern only blessed the bread before he distributed it to his disciples, and gave thanks to the Father, before he divided to them the cup? Where are we directed to attend quarterly seasons of prayer, or to hold weekly conferences for religious purposes?

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* We would not be understood to intend that all religious meeting on week days are unlawful. Special occasions often require them. But the Lord’s day is the only time set apart by divine order for the stated attendance. No other hath he consecrated to the business of religion. Neither would we be considered as denying the legality of ever uniting to seek the Lord previous to the celebration of eucharist. We may look to God to assist and accept us in every duty. But if we consider these preparatory exercises as indispensibly requisite, and as constituting a part of the duty, we do it without divine warrant.

From an attention to the gospel history, we are induced to believe that the celebration of that ordinance constituted a part of the common duties of every Lord’s day, while the apostles ministered in the Christian church; + and that an attendance at the sacramental table, was not distinguished by any special preparatory exercises, diverse from those which anteceded other sanctuary duties. No trace of distinction, in these respects, is to be found in scripture; neither precept nor example can be adduced to support it. Whence then its origin?

+ Acts xx. 7.

Did not it derive from Rome? We know the errors of the Romish church relative to the eucharist; and their tendency to induce a belief that it is more holy, and requires greater sanctity in communicant, than is requisite to an attendance on other ordinances. And the same notion is prevalent and many who have withdrawn from the communion of that church. Many serious people who attend other religious duties with pleasure and advantage, are afraid to obey Christ’s dying command! Is not this a relic of popery? When Luther left the papal communion, his reformation, particularly relative to this ordinance, was but partial. Many other protestants retain a tinge of catholic leaven. Is not the distinction respecting the sanctity of divine ordinances from this source? It is not found in the gospel. If the exercises under consideration

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serve to perpetuate this unscriptural distinction, and to drive men from a plain and important duty, they have a baleful effect. They may be well intended. Doubtless they are so by the generality of those who attend them. It is painful to be obliged to dissent from men whom we receive as brethren, and revere as Christians. But after much deliberation, such are our views of the subject before us; and we offer them to the serious consideration of the followers of Christ.

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But these are well intended. So probably was Uzzah's steadying the ark—But some of these do help on the cause of God, and even more than the stale attendance on Lord's day duties. So thought those who introduced images and paintings into churches. [Some indeed attend those who neglected Lord's day duties.]

Have we then discovered defects in the divine plan! And do we feel ourselves capable of making emendations in it!—Of "teaching eternal wisdom how to rule!"—How to effect its purposes of mercy!

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ. Vain man would be wise—He naturally thinks himself qualified, even to ameliorate divine institutions. Temptation to this sin coincides with a natural bias in depraved humanity. Many and very mischievous errors have issued from it. Would we escape the snare, we must listen to the apostle speaking in the text. The sum of his advice is to keep to the divine directions, especially in matters of religion. These are contained and plainly taught in the holy Scriptures, which we have in our hands, and of the sense of which we must judge for ourselves; remembering that we are accountable to God the judge of all.

As some are *spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit*, others are corrupted by regard to *the tradition of men and rudiments of the world*. This endangered the Colossians, and eventually ruined the church at Rome. The leading errors of paganism were thereby introduced into that Christian church, and rendered it completely antichristian. Errors which seemed to have been destroyed by Christianity, were again revived, and the abominations which they had occasioned, were acted over again with enlargements!

The *traditions of men and rudiments of the world*, have still their seducing influence. Most men swim down with the current of the times —adopt the sentiments and conform to the usages of those with whom they live. The popular scheme of religion, they consider as the orthodox scheme, and the religion of the land, the true religion. Therefore is one nation Papists, another Protestants, one Calvinists, another Lutherans. These differences of sentiment do not arise from differences in the mental constitutions of nations, but from the accidental differences of situation.

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Few have sufficient independence of mind to “judge of themselves what is right.” Many who “call Christ Lord, receive for doctrines the commandments of men.” Therefore doth religion vary like the fashions of the world. Was the fashion of the world to be the rule of judgment, it might be wise to follow it: But “we must every one give an account of himself to God,” and be judged by the rule which he hath given us. It becomes as therefore to “call no man master, because one is our Master, even Christ.” To him we are accountable. At our peril do we neglect obedience to his commands.

It concerns us to do all things according to the pattern drawn out before us in the Scriptures. Against the natural bias to affect improvements on divine institutions, and against the prevalence of fashion and contagion of popular opinion, we should be particularly on our guard. “For cursed is every one who confirmeth not all the words of God’s law to do them, and all the people shall say, Amen.”

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SERMON XXIX.

The Sins of Communities Noted and Punished.

Matthew xxiii. 36.

“Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.”

This is predicated of the judgments of God on those who had shed the blood of his saints. The Savior declares that all the righteous blood which had been shed on the earth from that of Abel down to the gospel day, should come on that generation!

But is not this unreasonable and contrary to the Scriptures? “Far be wickedness from God and iniquity from the Almighty. For the work of man shall be rendered unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways—The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” Such is the language of revelation.

And is not that of reason the same? Will reason justify punishing some men for other men’s sins? Those who lived in the days of our Savior had no share in the murder of Abel, or of many others who had died by wicked hands. Those dire events had been accomplished before they had existence. How then could they be answerable for them? To solve this mystery we must consider man in a twofold view—as an individual and as the member of a community.

As individuals mankind are solely accountable for the parts which they act personally. In the judgment of the great day, they will only be judged for the use which they shall have made of the talents committed to them here—“We must all appear before the

judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether good or bad,"

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But every individual is a member of the human race, and of some community. The race, as such, and the larger branches of it, the nations and empires into which it is divided, are amenable to the Supreme Governor, and liable to punishment, if in their public characters, they rebel against him. And righteous individuals, may be involved in the judgments sent to punish the sins of the community to which they belong. They often are so. Personal rectitude is not designated by an exemption from national calamities. Discriminations will eventually be made in its favor, but not here. Here “all things come alike unto all, and there is one event to the righteous and the wicked.”

To shew such to be the general rule of the divine administration in the government of the world, is the design of the following discourse: Which will explain the text.

The world, and the communities into which it is divided, have their probation no less than persons; and there are reasons in which God enters into judgment with them and adjusts retributions to their moral states.

In discussing the subject, we shall treat, *first of families, then of larger communities, and of the world.*

The first family of our race affords an example to our purpose. Before that family was increased by a single branch issuing from it, it rebelled against God, and God entered into judgment with it, and punished its sin upon it. And the punishments was not restricted to the offending pair, but extended to their race in common with themselves: All were doomed to sufferings and death *in consequence of their sin*. And the sentence hath been executing upon them from that period to the present time. Mankind have gone through life sorrowing; and “death hath reigned even over those, who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” Neither have discriminations been made in favor of the saints, but they have been involved in the general calamity, and groaned with the rest of the creation.

In some respects this was an exempt case, but in the general diffusion of punishment on the various branches of the family, it accords with the divine administration respecting other families, as appears from sacred history, and from the general history of the human race. Countless examples might be adduced.

The murder of Abel was not punished solely on Cain, but also on his family. The ground cursed for *his* sin, did not yield *to them* its strength; and they were deprived of those religious instructions which they would no doubt have received, had their father dwelt “in the presence of the Lord,” or remained in the family of Adam which contained the church of God. Many of the evils which fell on that sinner, fell also on his children and rested on them till the extinction of his race by the deluge.

Similar were the consequences which followed the sins of Ham and Esau: But these more properly rank under the head of communities: But instances of families which

have suffered, yea perished, by judgments sent to punish the sins of their heads, often occur.

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When sundry of the princes of Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness, and attempted a subversion of the government which God had instituted for his people, they did not perish alone, but their families perished with them, though no intimations are given that they were all *partakers* in their sin—yea, though it is more than intimated that *some of them* were not capable of partaking in it —“They came out and stood in the doors of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little ones.” And as soon as Moses had warned the congregation, and foretold the manner of their death, “the ground clave asunder that was under them, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their houses—and they and all that appertained to them went down alive into the pit, and the earth doted upon them; and they perished.” *

* Numbers xvi. 27-33.

To these might be added the families of Achan, Eli, Saul, Jeroboam, Baasha, Ahab and others. No special personal guilt was found on many members of these families. They died to expiate family guilt. We know of none chargeable on Abimelech, or the other priests who were slain by order of Saul. The sins of Eli and his house, were punished upon them, agreeably to the divine denunciation, first by a nameless prophet; afterwards by Samuel. In one of the sons of Jeroboam, “were found good things toward the Lord God of Israel:” Therefore was he removed by an early death, and the residue of the family were afterwards destroyed with the sword to punish the sin of the father, “who had sinned and made Israel to sin.”

The divine administration is still the same. In later ages instances might be adduced, especially among princes, of families extirpated (after a term of family probation, which had been abused by wickedness and dishonored by crimes) to punish family guilt. But these might be more liable to be disputed than those recorded in sacred history. Though we think it evident, from common observation, that the curse of heaven usually rests on the descendants of those who cast off the fear of God and harden themselves in sin, and that God visits the iniquities of fathers on their children.

We turn our attention next to larger communities. Here we find the divine administration regulated by the same rules.

Morals are as necessary to larger communities as to families, or individuals, alike required of them. And they are equally amenable to HIM who is over all, and receive like returns from his impartial hands, according to their works. The chief difference made between communities and persons, respects the time and place, in which they are judged and rewarded: Respecting the former, they take place in this world; respecting the latter, in that to come. Persons will live again after death. Communities, as such, exist only here. Here therefore communities must be remunerated [sic]. They are so. God tries them, and proportions retributions to their moral state. “Righteousness exalteth a nation;” but wickedness degrades and destroys it. The

strength and happiness of a people are proportioned to their morals, and increase and diminish with them.

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Perhaps it will be said, These are the natural conferences of moral good and evil. They are so. And these consequences are the effects of divine order; of the constitution which God hath established. Hence the divine declaration by the prophet: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my fight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said, I would benefit them." *

* Jeremiah xviii. 7-10.

This declaration is verified in the divine administration. God often bears with nations and communities, even to long suffering; but if they continue to revolt, he fails not to punish their sin upon them. When a community hath filled up the measure of its iniquity, judgment is executed upon it; not according to the moral character of those who then compose it, but according to its character considered as a nation which hath been tried God's appointed time.

While a community is on trial its conduct is recorded; its acts of disobedience to the divine Sovereign are charged to the community, and when its probation ends, they are brought into the reckoning and punished upon it, unless repentance and reformation intervene and prevent it. That "the sin of the Amorites was not full," was assigned as a reason for deferring the settlement of Abram's race in the land of Canaan. God would not enter into judgment with them, till the measure of their guilt had reached a certain height; but the sins of every generation helped to swell the account, till they were ripe for ruin. The Hebrews were then ordered to destroy them utterly—"every thing that breathed." It was not the sins of only that generation which occasioned this sentence, but the sins of the nations. Many individuals who had no personal guilt were included in the sentence, and destroyed by its execution. The infants perished with the adults. The divine judgments executed on other wicked communities, have been similar. Sodom, and her daughters were each of them a petty kingdom; and when they had severally filled up the measure of their crimes, they all perished together, old and young.

If more examples are desired, look to the seed of Jacob. That people had a long probation; but when they had filled up the measure of national guilt, their sins were brought to remembrance and punished upon them. The ten tribes revolted from God, when they left the house of David and set Jeroboam on the throne. For more than two centuries and an half God waited with them, and warned them of the evils which their sins would bring upon them; but they repented not. When their iniquity was full, he gave their enemies power over them; "rooted them up out of the good land which he had given their fathers, and scattered them beyond the river."

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The kingdom of Judah remained about an hundred and thirty years after “Ephraim was broken that he was not a people.” Those, who adhered to the house of David did not revolt so early as those who seceded at the division of the kingdom. Divine worship according to the law of Moses, was kept up among them; and several pious princes reigned over them. But though the progress of impiety was less rapid than in the other kingdom, there was a departure from the living God, and idolatry and immorality prevailed, till they also filled up the measure of their sins. Then, impartial heaven “stretched over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab.” *

* 2 Kings xxi. 13.

The generation on which those judgments were executed was greatly depraved, and like the men of Sodom, sinners exceedingly; but their sins alone would not have occasioned those desolations; they were added to the national account, and filled up the measure of national guilt. One of their kings did much to swell that account. Mention is made, more than once, of his sins, particularly of the innocent blood which he shed, as fixing the doom of the nation, rendering prayer for it unavailing and its ruin inevitable. “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people: Cast them out of my sight; I will cause them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, *because of Manassah, the king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.*” * Wantonly shedding the blood of his subjects, was one of the sins charged upon him. This sin is, in a sense, unpardonable. “Blood defileth the land; and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed in it, but by the blood of him that shed it.” + Manasseh’s blood was not shed. Therefore was the land destined to suffer, Josiah, who reigned after Manasseh, was pious; but after he had done every thing in his power to atone for the sins of his fathers, and reclaim the nation, and not wholly without effect, it is expressly noted that “the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.” And after the judgments had been executed, it is again remarked that they were sent to punish the sins of that wicked ruler—“Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, *for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed, for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon.*” ++

* Jeremiah xv. 1-4. + Numbers xxxv. 33. ++ 2 Kings xxiii. 26, xxiv. 3, 4.

Manasseh was gone off the stage; so were all who had shared in his guilt; that prince had, moreover, repented and obtained personal forgiveness; but his crimes had filled up the measure of national wickedness, and judgment must follow. There was no remedy.

These are conclusive evidence that the sins of a people, and especially of the rulers of a people, which are not punished by the civil arm, are charged to the people, and eventually punished upon them.

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As there are seasons in which God judgeth nations and communities, and renders to them according to their works, there are also seasons in which he doth the same by the world. That this will be done at the end of the world, or at the judgment of the great day, is not matter of doubt with believers in revelation. But some other seasons of divine judgment are now more particularly intended. For there are seasons in which God's judgments are abroad in the earth—in which the sins of the world seem to be brought to remembrance, and punished on its inhabitants.

Eminently such was the six hundredth year of the life of Noah. "When the earth was corrupt before God, and filled with violence," he entered into judgment, and punished the sin of the world, in the destruction of its inhabitants. God did not "do his work, his strange work, or bring to pass his act, his strange act," as soon as "the wickedness of man was great, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually." He waited long. But when the vast term allowed to antediluvian sinners was expired, he swept off a race who had been disobedient while long suffering mercy waited with them.

The sin of the world was then full. Human guilt had long been augmenting, and at length occasioned that awful display of divine justice. Many who were at that time destroyed were, no doubt great and old offenders; but many others differed from them, were but entering on life, not capable, of personal guilt, yet they were involved in the general calamity. Those of every character perished together, "The flood came and took them all away."

There hath been no other season in which the divine judgments toward the whole world have been so signally manifest as at the deluge. There have however, been times in which they have been very general and very severe. One of those times was at hand in our Savior's day. On the generation which lived when he suffered for the sins of men, were some of the vials of divine wrath poured out, though not those in which the wrath of God was filled up. Perhaps at no period yet past, that of the deluge excepted, hath God visited the sins of men with greater severity. If the divine judgments fell then more particularly on the Jews, the other nations did not escape. If the Jews suffered more than others, there were reasons; nor are they wholly concealed.

The Jews had enjoyed greater religious privileges than others—had more means of instruction in divine things, and had neglected and abused them, and seem to have more completely filled up the measure of their iniquity than any other people. "To whom much is given, of them is the more required; and those who know their duty and yet do things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with many stripes."

God was also at that time avenging "the righteous blood which had been shed upon the earth"—the blood of his saints who had been martyred, of which more than a double portion was chargeable on that people. They had of old killed the prophets, and persecuted those who had been sent of God to warn them from their ways. The same

was still their governing temper, and to a greater degree than at any former period of their history.

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They were also the church of God; and he was now entering into judgment with his church, as a community the measure of whose iniquity was full. This was nearly their situation when the Savior addressed them, as in our context—"Fill ye up the measure of your fathers." THIS was not a command, but a prediction of what was then nearly accomplished; and he told them how it would be completed—by their killing and crucifying the messengers of heaven, at whose head was the divine messenger who then addressed them—that when they should have done these things, God would enter into judgment with them, and avenge on them "all the righteous blood which had been shed in his church from the foundation of the world." *Verify I say unto you, all these things shall come on this generation.* And he assured them that it would desolate their country, and that it would remain destitute of those religious privileges which they then enjoyed, till they should become of another spirit—"Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

As soon as Christ was alone with his disciples he gave them a description of those desolations which is recorded in the following chapter, and is so plain, and made such an impression on the Christians of that day, who were mostly Jews, that they fled at the approach of the Roman armies and escaped the calamities which overwhelmed their nation. Whoever reads the history of that age will be convinced of the truth of that prediction—Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to that time, no, nor ever shall see. "Those were the days of vengeance, that all things which were written might be fulfilled."

Another of the seasons of divine judgments occurred at the subversion of the Roman empire by the Northern barbarians. That mighty empire comprehended a very large portion of the then known world. It had become exceedingly populous. Italy, in particular was chiefly covered with the dwellings of men, like one continued city; and almost the whole empire swarmed with inhabitants, and many parts were cultivated like a garden. But when those savages broke into it, they carried fire and sword wherever they went. Like the armies of God's judgments described by the prophet Joel, they carried terror and destruction—"A fire devoured before them, and behind them a flame burned: The land was as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; and nothing escaped them." * The most populous and fruitful parts of that vast empire were literally made desolate, and became a wilderness; and many places have never recovered their former lustre, and few become equally populous to this day.

* Joel ii. 3.

Waving the particular mention of other periods in which the judgments of God have been made manifest, would only observe, that we are taught by the prophets, to expect desolating judgments before the beginning of the latter day glory, and that they will be very general—that the sins, not of this, or that community, but of the world will come into remembrance before God; and that the full vials of his wrath will be poured out, not

barely to avenge the sins of that generation, but the sins of the world, the measure of their iniquity being then full.

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The most terrifying metaphors are used to prefigure the judgments which will then be executed on mankind. The destruction of men is compared to the harvest and vintage! But the language of prophecy, if we consider the human race as the objects of the harvest and vintage, admits no augmentation of terror. "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat, like unto the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice, to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle and reap: For the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clutters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden without the city; and blood came out of the wine press, even unto the horses bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs." *

* Revelation xiv. 14-22.

The scenes here depicted are yet future. They are confirmed, and in some measure illustrated by other prophecies; but as our understanding of prophecies must remain partial till explained by their accomplishment, we leave the intelligent reader to his own reflections upon them.

INFERENCES.

I. That communities, both small and great are on trial here, and that they are eventually called into judgment and rewarded and punished according to their use, or abuse of talents, is fairly deducible from the subject under consideration. Such being the divine administration, we see the importance of national virtue. Morals are the health and strength of a community: While they remain no enemy can prevail against it. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them"—But when a community degenerates, and become corrupt and vicious, their guardian angel quits his charge, and their guardian God becomes the avenger of their crimes.

II. We see also the importance of good government, and good rulers, who will execute righteous laws with fidelity, and in their own persons, set the example of obedience to them. The example of those in authority hath a commanding influence. Their principles and practices, draw many after them. We see this exemplified in the history of the Hebrews: When their great men were good men, virtue was respected, and the nation rejoiced; but "the wicked walked on every side, when the vilest men were exalted," and the degrading, and even desolating judgments of heaven followed. "These things happened unto them for ensamples; and are written for our admonition," *

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* 1 Corinthians x. 11.

III. The character of individuals is not to be judged by their circumstances here. When judgments are abroad to punish national wickedness they do not always fall on the most guilty—they fall on the community.—All who belong to it are obnoxious. “Suppose ye that the Gallileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices were sinners above all the Gallileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay; except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” All have sins sufficient to justify God in taking them away when, and how, he pleaseth.

Was there not another life, impartiality would require a different divine administration. Discriminations would here be made according to the difference of moral characters. They are not made. The iniquity of fathers is visited on their children; the iniquity of communities on particular generations, and on individuals; and often on those who are not the most guilty! We see it in every part of the sketch which we have taken of the divine government.

The doctrine of another life clears up this mystery. Without the belief of it we cannot “ascribe righteousness to our Maker;” but when we take it into the account every difficulty is removed, That there is another life, in which the perfect rectitude of divine providence will appear, is a dictate of reason, and the explicit language of revelation.

IV. When the mystery of God is finished, and the veil now spread over the divine administration taken away, we shall see the wisdom, justice, and goodness of those parts of it, which now, seeing only in part, we contemplate with surprize and wonder.—“That all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from that of righteous Abel, to our Savior’s day, should be required of that generation;” and that there should be seasons in which the sins of nations and of the world are avenged on particular generations, who are made to bear the sins of those who had gone before them, and on individuals, not distinguished by their crimes, will no more astonish and confound us!

We now witness such things in the divine administration! We cannot but witness them. We shall then see the reasons of them, and be satisfied; we shall join in that angelic ascription, “Even so Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.” * Till that decisive day, let us wait on the Lord, and in the way of well doing, trust in his mercy — “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; To whom be glory forever.” +

* Revelation xvi. 7. + Romans xi. 26.

AMEN.