

---

This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google™ books

<https://books.google.com>



# SERMONS

BY

*THE LATE*

REV. CHARLES WESLEY, A. M.

STUDENT OF CHRIST-CHURCH, OXFORD.

WITH

A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR,

BY

*THE EDITOR.*



---

LONDON:

PUBLISHED BY BALDWIN, CRADOCK, AND JOY, PATERNOSTER ROW;  
L. B. SEELEY, 169, FLEET-STREET; AND T. BLANSHARD, 14,  
CITY-ROAD.

---

1816.

**C. Baldwin, Printer,  
New Bridge-street, London.**

## INTRODUCTION.

---

**T**HE Rev. Charles Wesley was descended from a long line of learned and pious ancestors, who had the honour of being sufferers, in the different ages wherein they lived, for their steady adherence to their religious principles.

His great-grandfather, Bartholomew Wesley, John, son to him, and his maternal grandfather the celebrated Samuel Annesley,\* LL. D. first cousin to Lord Annesley, Earl of Anglesea, were all ejected from their livings

\* Dr. Samuel Annesley was one of the preachers at Whitehall; but after the order of the King he withdrew from all intercourse with the men in power, and attended solely to his parochial duties. He was Vicar of Cripple-gate and Lecturer at St. Paul's. King Charles II. on his restoration re-appointed him to his living, but his enemies found means to eject him again. All parties acknowledged his integrity.

by the act of uniformity, and enrolled amongst those illustrious names who chose rather to sacrifice every worldly advantage than violate their conscience; affording bright examples of heroic firmness and Christian resignation, under the oppressions of a violent party and malicious enemies.

His father, the Rev. Samuel Wesley, quitted the Dissenters when a boy, from reading a defence of the death of King Charles I. From a private academy he entered himself at Exeter College, Oxford, where by his erudition and abilities he soon acquired academic honours, and maintained himself without the assistance of his friends on a slender stipend, till he obtained orders and a curacy. His loyalty being so remarkable at such an age, he was strongly solicited by the party of James II. to support the measures of the court in favour of popery, with promises of high preferment. But he absolutely refused to read the declaration; and when surrounded by courtiers, soldiers, and informers, preached a bold and

pointed discourse from Daniel, iii. 17, 18.: "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known to thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up:"—evincing an unequivocal proof that a person of high church principles may be a true friend of the Protestant cause, and of the liberty of the subject.

When the glorious revolution took place in 1688, he was the first who wrote in defence of it, and dedicated the book to Queen Mary, who so much approved the performance that she gave him the livings of Epworth and Wroote in Lincolnshire, and appointed him Chaplain-extraordinary to herself. All this family were educated at the university of Oxford, and became Masters of Arts and Students or Fellows at their respective colleges. The Rev. Samuel Wesley married very early in life the daughter of Dr. Annesley,

a woman of extraordinary intellect and eminent accomplishments; but her great characteristic was piety, which she so sedulously instilled into the minds of her young children, that they ever attributed to her instructions (under Divine Providence) the principles and habits of order which distinguished their conduct through life. By this lady he had nineteen children. He destined his three sons from their birth to the church, should their inclinations accord with his wishes; and he was not disappointed. His eldest son Samuel was entered King's scholar at Westminster school, and sent to Christ-Church, where he became Student, and was solicited, as soon as he had attained his Master's degree, to supply the place of usher at Westminster, in which employment he remained 20 years. He took orders under the patronage of Bishop Atterbury, to whom his unalienable attachment blocked up every avenue of preferment, and prevented his being elected one of the masters of that seminary. He attained

much celebrity by his poetical talents, and lived in habits of intimacy with Lord Oxford, Pope, and Swift; and the Dean, though himself a Whig, was a steady friend to his family. In this circle his wit and literature were held in high estimation. But genius was his lowest excellence; he was a man of inflexible integrity and active benevolence. The infirmary for the sick and poor at Westminster was first projected by him, and his strenuous endeavours eminently promoted its success. He was indefatigable in the cause of morals and religion; and if his notions of church government were carried to excess, his public adherence to a friend in disgrace, when he foresaw it must preclude his own advancement, was meritorious. On quitting Westminster he resided at Tiverton, and was head master of the grammar school, where he ended his days, much honoured and lamented, and where his memory is still cherished with respect.

John Wesley, the second son, was educated at the Charter House, and became Fellow of Lin-



coln College Oxford, at the age of twenty-three. His reputation as a polite scholar, an excellent critic, and a sound logician, was soon established: he was chosen Greek lecturer and moderator of the classics; and had he pursued riches and honours in any of the learned professions, there is little doubt he would have obtained them. Previous to his ordination he wrote in a letter to his mother "I once wished to make a fair show in learning and philosophy; but it is past. *There is a more excellent way*: yet a little while and we shall all be equal in knowledge, if we are equal in virtue."

It was by the perusal of the writings of the Rev. William Law\* that he entered upon that strictness of deportment which distinguished

\* The Rev. William Law was a non-juring clergyman of the church of England.

The late learned Dr. Johnson has left upon record that "*Law's Serious Call to a Religious Life*" was the best book on the subject in the English language, and from which he derived his serious principles.

Edward Gibbon, Esq. (with whom there was some family

him and his community. He was ordained by Dr. Potter, Bishop of Oxford, and now became conspicuous for his zeal, and the careful distribution of his time, which he regulated (as he did the most inconsiderable action) by method. As his natural temper was uncommonly amiable, his influence over his pupils was great; and while he endeavoured conscientiously to make them good scholars, he laid down three rules as indispensable to the progress of learning and virtue: 1st, Early rising; 2dly, To avoid the acquaintance of the trifling and idle; 3dly, To retrench superfluous expenses. All the singularities he recommended were on the side of reason and religion.

Charles Wesley was five years younger than John, and sixteen younger than Samuel, under whom he was bred as King's scholar also at Westminster, and who instilled into him those high church principles which never were era-  
connexion) mentions Law as the only consistent Christian he ever saw. His works (till he became mystical), are marked by strong sense and clear reasoning.

licated. His progress in learning procured him the favour of his master, and his courage the love of his school-fellows, amongst whom was the late Earl of Mansfield\* who renewed his intimacy with him in the decline of life, remembering him as his early champion in juvenile battles. He went captain of the school to Christ-Church, Oxford, of which he was elected Student and Master of Arts.

His brother John gives this account of him on his first residence at the university: "He pursued his studies with diligence, and led a regular harmless life; but when I spoke to him of religion, he would answer, *Would you have me turn a saint all at once, and hear no more.*"

In his twentieth year he began to think se-

\* James Murray, Earl of Mansfield, was descended from an ancient family who espoused an active part in favour of the Pretender during the rebellion of Scotland. On his entrance into Westminster school he suffered much ill-treatment from the boys on account of his ancestors. Party violence raging in those times extended to the children as it does now in France.

riously. His brother was then officiating as curate to his father, and on his return had the satisfaction to find him following his steps. He kept the church fasts, attended the daily prayers and weekly sacrament, observed the methods of study prescribed in the statutes of the university, and persuaded some of his young friends to do the same. The exact order in which (like John) he spent every hour procured him the name of Methodist; and it appears that Charles was the first on whom this title was conferred, though there were no regular meetings established till his brother returned from Epworth, to whom they unanimously committed the direction of their plan, and then began to spend some evenings in every week together in reading the Greek Testament and discoursing on religious subjects. Some young students of other colleges requested to join them, amongst whom was the Rev. J. Harvey, and afterwards George Whitfield. Such singular piety naturally incurred the ridicule of their gay and thought-

less acquaintance; but it was not till they visited the sick (though with the permission of the minister of the parish), the work-houses, and prisons, set up a charity school, and devoted some portion of their time to instruct the ignorant poor, that it stirred up the opposition of all the irreligious and profane. Mr. Morgan of Christ-Church (son of an opulent Irish Gentleman) led the van in these benevolent acts. John Wesley, who wished to avoid giving offence by any needless irregularity, had consulted his father, who was remarkably attached to church order, stating what they had done, and what they proposed to continue; who highly commended their conduct, especially their visits to the prison, but advised them to obtain the consent and direction of the Bishop of Oxford, who, with the Vice-Chancellor, immediately expressed the warmest approbation of their active zeal. They now were branded as Enthusiasts, Sacramentarians, Reformers. John was entitled the Father of the Holy Club.

Various reports were circulated, amongst which, that they had been the death of Mr. Morgan by imposing on him rigorous fasts: this calumny, however, was soon refuted by Mr. Morgan's father, who was convinced that it was his pious son who had set the Wesleys the example of fasting, and been prevailed upon to change his too abstemious mode of living before they began theirs. He candidly took pains to satisfy the public it was a falsehood, and was ever ready to vindicate their characters from like injurious aspersions.

It was about this period that the enemies of the Christian revelation were so much increased, so daring in their attempts to propagate deism in the universities, as to rouse the attention of the Vice-Chancellor; who, with consent of the Heads of Houses and Proctors, issued an edict, which was fixed up in most of the halls, enjoining the several tutors of each college to redouble their diligence, as there were some of the members of the university in danger of being corrupted

by ill-designing persons, who not only entertained blasphemous notions contrary to the Christian Religion, but endeavoured to instil them into inexperienced minds; exhorting each tutor deeply to inform his respective pupils in their Christian vocation, explain the articles of religion which they professed and were to subscribe, enforce the necessity of perusing the Scriptures and such other books as might promote sound principles and orthodox faith; and further, forbidding the junior members of the university to read any books that might tend to weaken faith, subvert the authority of Scripture, and introduce deism, irreligion, and profaneness. The Dean of Christ-Church was the only one who would not permit this edict to be placed in the halls of his college.

The writer of Mr. C. Wesley's life\* here remarks "that it is edifying to a pious mind to trace the ways of Providence not only as they relate to individuals, but as they affect

\* Dr. Whitehead.

whole bodies at large. In the case before us we may observe that, at the very juncture when the infidels were making so strong an effort to diffuse their baleful principles in this celebrated seminary of learning, God was preparing two or three young men to counteract the evil, and to plant a religious society in the same spot, which extended its beneficial influence farther and wider than it ever entered into the ideas of the little community to conceive, and which was in the end the means of reforming the outcasts of mankind throughout the kingdom."

When death deprived them of Mr. Morgan, the brothers continued unshaken in their purposes. They were the bond of union in their selected company, and if one or more of the members deserted them through fear or shame, their own resolution remained inflexible. They boldly raised the standard against infidelity and vice: indefatigable in acts of charity, exercises of devotion, and habits of self-denial, they passed through good report and



evil report, apparently insensible to either. In the year 1731 a meeting was held by the seniors of some of the colleges to stop the progress of their zeal; and it was publicly rumoured that a certain Rev. Doctor was about to blow up the "*Godly Club*," now its most common name. Whether his noble intention was overuled by the interposition of higher powers, or himself ashamed of it, is not known; but they had no other molestation than the censure and ridicule of characters like his own. But accounts of their ascetic singularities spreading far and wide, their father took a journey to Oxford to examine himself whether they might not carry matters too far, and injure their healths and their cause by unnecessary rigour. In a letter to Mrs. Wesley he writes, "I am well repaid for my expense and labour, by the shining piety of our two sons;" and in which it appears that he did not disapprove of any of their proceedings. This worthy old clergyman died in 1735, and they had the privilege of

attending him in the last peaceful moments of his exemplary life.

In this year, the trustees of the new colony of Georgia were seeking proper clergymen to send over to the settlers to instruct the Indians.

The establishment of such a colony in America was suggested by some humane and opulent gentlemen who proposed to transplant the indigent of Great Britain and Ireland; free of expense, with materials to build and cultivate the soil; and in 1732 they obtained a patent from King George II. for legally carrying their plan into execution. The late General Oglethorpe was appointed the head of the settlement. He was a man of enterprise and ability, an excellent judge of political utility, and sensible of the benefit which might be derived, not only by the provision for so many poor people, but by the further security of Carolina, if he could procure proper instruments for the undertaking. He was intimately acquainted with the elder

brother of the Wesleys, and fixed upon John and Charles as the persons exactly qualified to go out as missionaries in a new world. By his solicitations, aided by the request of the other trustees, they agreed to embark for America : Charles was engaged as his private secretary, besides being the secretary for Indian affairs, and also appointed the minister at Frederica ; John, at Savannah.

But the fundamental regulations established by the trustees were not adapted to the situation of the poor settlers, or the prosperity of the province. Like other distant legislators who formed laws on speculation, they fell into many errors with the best possible intentions. Their injudicious restrictions, the wars in which they were involved with the Spaniards and with their neighbours the Creek Indians, and their frequent insurrections among themselves, perpetually threw the colony (which was ill provided with accommodations) into a state of confusion and wretchedness.

New settlers are commonly a dissatisfied

people, and those whom General Oglethorpe carried over with him added to the number of malcontents ; particularly some women, who proved to be of loose morals : their influence over the men, and jealousies of each other, were continually promoting animosities and divisions. The serious deportment of Mr. Wesley, his frequent reproofs, and above all, his acute penetration into their character, rendered him an object of their hatred during the voyage, which they soon manifested on shore. Plans were deeply laid to ruin him in the opinion of the General, or take him off by assassination : when he walked in the woods, he often narrowly escaped being shot by guns fired as by accident, but which afterwards appeared to have been aimed at *him*. The shafts of calumny were more successful : when mutinies arose, General Oglethorpe was made to believe that Mr. Wesley was the instigator, and had persuaded the people to leave the colony. In consequence of these insinuations his conduct towards him, without

for some time assigning any cause, became totally changed; and when Mr. Wesley found out to his utter astonishment, that he was accused of exciting discontent amongst the people, he could only deny the charges and request to confront his accusers. The hardships and ill treatment to which the loss of the Governor's favour exposed him in a foreign land, and surrounded with enemies, could only have been patiently endured by a practical Christian. He continued to discharge his ministerial labours and official employments with unremitting diligence; but though his mind was supported, his frame sunk under the weight: he was thrown into a violent fever, and being deprived of the consolations of kindness or medical aid, his life must have fallen a sacrifice, if his only friend in the place (the Reverend Mr. Ingham) had not brought his brother from Savannah to rescue him from his oppressors. An explanation with the General then took place; the whole iniquitous plot was discovered, and his enemies were

compelled to bear a testimony of his innocence, and their own guilt; denying their charges before all those to whom they had alleged them.

It is justice to the memory of General Oglethorpe to mention that he became fully sensible of his error, and endeavoured to repair it; and having had full proof of the ability and integrity of his injured secretary, who had borne his wrongs so meekly, he anxiously sought to retain him, promised to build him a house, and supply him with a deputy in his absence, if he would remain in the province: he prevailed on him to delay his resignation till himself returned to England. Mr. Charles Wesley carried the dispatches over to the trustees, waited for the arrival of the General; but foreseeing the impracticability of instructing the Indians in a state of war, the little good which could result from his residence in that divided colony, and unambitious of the advantages attached to his employment, he gave it up in 1738.

The popularity of the brothers, on their return to their native country, raised a spirit of prejudice and persecution scarcely to be imagined in this age. The churches were so crowded that it was complained there was not room for the best of the inhabitants. They were charged with delivering new doctrines from the pulpit by strictly inculcating the old; and they waited on the Bishop of London \* to answer the complaints he had heard alleged against them respecting their preaching the absolute assurance of salvation. His Lordship's words were memorable: "If by assurance you mean an inward persuasion whereby a

\* Dr. Edmund Gibson: his learning recommended him to Archbishop Tennison, whom he succeeded at Lincoln before he was translated to London; he governed his diocese with the most exact care, jealous of the least privilege belonging to the Church, a friend to toleration, but he opposed all repeals of the Test Act. His opposition to masquerades gave great umbrage at court, and impeded his further preferment. He was the author of many celebrated works, and equally remarkable for his economy and munificence.

man is conscious to himself, *after examining his life by the law of God*, and weighing his own sincerity, that he is in a state of salvation and acceptable in his sight (a phrase used by our Church), I do not see how any good Christian can be without such an assurance." They replied, "This is all for which we contend; but we have been accused of antinomianism for preaching it in the words of the Eleventh Article of our Church (Justification by Faith). Indeed by delivering the doctrine without enjoining good works, many have been made antinomians in the reign of Charles I." They requested his Lordship not to receive an accusation against presbyters but at the mouth of two or three witnesses, which he promised not to do, and he dismissed them amicably. Their lives, as well as rules, were a sufficient proof that they were zealous of good works.

They next visited the Archbishop of Canterbury who was not the least prejudiced against them. He cautioned them not to give



more umbrage than was inevitable in the promulgation of our Church Articles, and avoid objectionable phrases. He avowed the doctrine they dwelt upon, as expressed therein, i. e. *Justification by Faith*, or, in other words, *that the ground of man's salvation is the death of Christ alone, and good works the necessary fruits of it.*" He exhorted them to stand by the doctrines of the Church, which they assured him they would do (though they expected persecution) while her Articles and Homilies remained unrepealed.

Some time after his Lordship manifested displeasure, not for the discourses they delivered, but the irregularity of their zeal. Order is undoubtedly necessary in church and state government; but when a system of laws purely human is so established in either as to become perpetual, whatever changes may take place in the state of a people, it must in many cases become defective rather than beneficial. The end of regularity in the Church is the propagation of knowledge and the in-

crease of true religion ; but if the strict observance of the rule impedes the end, the end must be attained, though the prudential means, which are in some circumstances obstructive, be neglected. Deviations in non-essentials, if the end be promoted thereby, cannot promote a schism in any church. The clergy however were loud in their clamours, and at last proceeded to refuse them their pulpits. This it was which laid the foundation of itinerant preaching, which did not take place before ; and their steady determination to do good to their fellow-creatures overcame all the obstacles which the fear of man or loss of favour placed in their way. They were neither to be intimidated by danger, affected by interest, or deterred by disgrace : and surely it required no common degree of resolution to expose themselves to the rude ignorance of the lowest of the people, the contempt of men of respectability and influence, and the censure of their particular friends ; yet all these evils were incurred by this mode of reforming the outcasts

of mankind. It is not possible to imagine that, in their situation in life, men of learning and abilities, distinguished by academic honours, could have been actuated by any motive but the purest benevolence.

Travelling from place to place, and preaching in the open air, to diffuse knowledge and awaken a sense of religion in the common people, was extraordinary and new, and it was certainly irregular, and excited the astonishment and the censure of the public. Few could form a conjecture of the utility which resulted from, or the hardships attached to, such an undertaking. Let it be remembered that at that period there were no Sunday Schools, no Tract Societies, no propagation of Bibles, and consequently there could be no royal patronage (as now) for charities which had not been formed. It was a period, also, when the pious zeal and activity of the clergy was not such as at the present day. A general supineness and worldly spirit pervaded that order; and though doubtless there were some

(as in every age) that did honour to their profession, the bigotry and opposition which the Messrs. Wesleys met in the beginning of their efforts to reclaim their fellow creatures, sunk into the depths of misery and vice, was unjustifiable by all the rules of charity.

The labouring poor are the most numerous class in every country ; they are not less necessary to the happiness of a nation than to the higher ranks of society. In the year 1738 their education was totally neglected ; few of them were taught the duty of attending churches, and there was no possibility of doing them good but by some extraordinary mode of communication, as their ignorance and vicious habits removed them out of the reach of those salutary methods appointed by government.

It was a matter of national importance that so large a part of the community should be instructed in the principles of religion and the social duties of life ; and it is in this point that the names of John and Charles

Wesley and the Rev. George Whitefield will peculiarly be held in honour by the candid and unprejudiced.

They directed their labours to those who had no instructor, to the highways and hedges; to the miners in Cornwall and Newcastle, and the colliers in Bristol. These unhappy creatures married and buried amongst themselves, and often committed murders with impunity. It was always dangerous to pass their woods till these clergymen visited them, and, by their active and unremitting endeavours, a sense of morals, decency, and religion, was introduced: the ignorant were instructed, the wretched relieved, and the abandoned reclaimed. In this arduous task they not only met with opposition from the clergy, but shameful treatment from the magistrates, who (to the disgrace of the times be it mentioned), so far from punishing or restraining a lawless mob assembled to abuse them, encouraged and often instigated their excesses.

The Rev. Charles Wesley, in the com-

mencement of his itinerant labours, experienced the same persecution as his brother from the infuriated populace, both in England and Ireland. He was reviled, insulted, assaulted with stones; houses were pulled down which he entered, and the poor inhabitants plundered and wounded, even women and children were maltreated; facts too well known to be controverted. Often his invincible meekness and intrepid composure would disarm the ringleader: sometimes one of the rioters more humane than the rest would espouse his cause, and effect a division that preserved his life, which was always hazarded when the tumult began.

Surely the reformers of such a class merit the praises of posterity, especially if it be considered that these ministers had every thing to lose, reputation, health, and fair prospects in the world; and nothing to gain but outrage and insult from the mob, great bodily fatigue, and general contempt.

If it should be here remarked that enthu-

siasm inspires fortitude, some higher cause must be assigned for that unwearied charity which persisted in such hazardous efforts to promote the eternal welfare of their persecutors, for that unshaken attachment to the church to which they belonged, and the respect they ever inculcated towards their clerical brethren. Providence crowned their ministerial labours with astonishing success. The effects of civilization soon appeared amongst the colliers, and many in the same station; while numbers in a higher rank were led to consider the importance of a religious life, and the truths of Christianity, who never before employed their thoughts upon the subject.

They outlived enmity and prejudice; many of the pulpits of the clergy were open to them in their latter years, and they received every mark of respect from all denominations.

The political sentiments of popular men are of importance to the state. The Wesleys were strenuous advocates for monarchy, and

particularly attached to the Brunswick family. All their adherents in America during the war were firmly loyal : and so large a body of people as the Wesleyan Methodists are now become, still maintaining the same principles, are no inconsiderable support to government.

The Rev. Charles Wesley departed this life in the full vigour of his mental faculties by a gentle decay of nature in his eightieth year : his brother survived him three years. Bright hope and pious resignation distinguished their last moments.

The character of the brothers was distinctly different ; John was born with a temper which scarcely any injuries could provoke, ingratitude ruffle, or contradiction weary. This disposition peculiarly qualified him to govern ; but he was so far from arrogating authority, or demanding submission, and his gentleness and forbearance rendered him so much the object of love amongst the people who placed themselves under his care, that they considered

“ Their sovereign pastor as a sovereign good.”



It has been remarked that public men do not often shine in private life. Though he regarded "all the world as his parish," and every man as his brother, he was amiable in his domestic circle, and kind to his relations, especially to those who were dependant upon him, or whom he thought neglected and oppressed. Charles was full of sensibility and fire; his patience and meekness were neither the effect of temperament or reason, but of divine principles. John affectionately discharged the social duties, but Charles seemed formed by nature to repose in the bosom of his family. Tender, indulgent, kind, as a brother, a husband, a father, and a master; warmly and unalienably devoted to his friend; he was a striking instance that general benevolence did not weaken particular attachments, discerning in the character of men, incapable of disguise, and eminently grateful. The peculiar virtue of John was forgiveness of enemies. He has been frequently known to receive even into his confidence those

who had betrayed it, and basely injured him. They not only subsisted on his bounty, but shared his affection; nor was it easy to convince him that any one had wilfully deceived him; or, if it were attested by facts, he would only allow it had been so in that single instance.

Equally generous and kind was his brother respecting enemies, and capable of an entire reconciliation; but he could not replace his confidence where he had experienced treachery. This formed some variation in their conduct, as also the higher church principles of Charles, who manifested them to the last, by desiring to be buried in consecrated ground.

His most striking excellence was humility; it extended to his talents as well as virtues; he not only acknowledged and pointed out, but *delighted* in the superiority of another, and if there ever was a human being who disliked power, avoided pre-eminence, and shrunk from praise, it was Charles Wesley.

“ In their lives they were lovely, and in their deaths they were not divided.”

His poetical talents were confined to sacred subjects ; he wrote short hymns on the most remarkable passages of the Old and New Testament. There is not a point of divinity, doctrinal, experimental, or practical, which he has not illustrated in verse. His funeral hymns breathe not only the spirit of poetry, but the extreme susceptibility of the pious author, and the religion of the heart.

As a preacher he was impassioned and energetic ; and expressed the most important truths with simplicity, brevity, and force.

Most of these sermons were delivered in his early youth, when he was in America : the thirteenth sermon, by the Rev. John Wesley, was never published amongst his works. They are presented to the public by his WIDOW.

# CONTENTS.

---

---

## SERMON I.

He that winneth souls is wise. <i>Prov.</i> xi. 30.....	Page 1
---	-----------

## SERMON II.

He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. <i>Psalms</i> xci. 11.....	22
--	----

## SERMON III.

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much : and he that is unjust in the least is un- just also in much. <i>Luke</i> , xvi. 10.....	43
---	----

## SERMON IV.

I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pha- risees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven. <i>Matthew</i> , v. 20.....	68
---	----

## SERMON V.

One thing is needful. <i>Luke</i> , x. 42.....	81
--	----

## SERMON VI.

What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter. <i>John</i> , xiii. 7.....	95
--	----

## SERMON VII.

He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. <i>Psalms</i> cxxvi. 6..	114
--	-----

## SERMON VIII.

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. *Matt. vi. 22, 23*..... 125

## SERMON IX.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. *Mark, xii. 30*..... 136

## SERMON X.

Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy. *Exodus, xx. 8*..... 165

## SERMON XI.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto these things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. *Philip. iii. 13, 14*..... 186

## SERMON XII.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, then follow him: but if Baal, follow him. *1 Kings, xviii. 21*..... 207

## SERMON XIII.

*By the Rev. John Wesley.*

There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. *Job, iii. 17*..... 227

## ON THE SIGHT OF A CORPSE.

*By the Rev. Charles Wesley*..... 243

# SERMONS.

---

## SERMON I.

(Preached before the University of Oxford.)

---

*He that winneth souls is wise.*

Prov. xi. 30.

---

**I**N a place where philosophy or the love of wisdom is so universally professed and so carefully cultivated, where so many are obliged by their office to study and practise this particular sort of wisdom, and where more are designed and endeavouring to qualify themselves for the same sacred function, it cannot but be highly proper to make that wisdom the subject of our consideration, which so great a part of us are

engaged by such peculiar ties to recommend both by our lives and doctrines; and to explain and enforce this important truth, "He that winneth souls is wise." He that winneth souls—that draweth them from vice to virtue, from rebellion against God to obedience to his holy laws—that recovers them from darkness and the shadow of death to the paths of light and peace—that disentangles them from the fatal snare from which they had no hope, nay, no desire of escaping—that disappoints the destroyer of his prey, even when he said, "there is none to help them"—he is wise indeed! as will be evident if we consider: First, the end he proposes; Secondly, the means that lead to it.

First, the end he proposes.—Winning souls may be considered first as bringing glory to God. It is true, no action of any created being can do this in a strict sense, can at all add to that essential glory wherewith his Creator was clothed from eternity: yet, in a lower sense, whatever we do may be done to the glory of God; that is, may at least remotely tend to manifest his glory, to increase the honour paid to him by his creatures,

to make him more known and more beloved by spreading his holy name, and adorning his gospel. And in this sense he that winneth souls eminently advances the glory of God, by displaying his glorious nature and attributes to the sons of men, who alone of all the visible creation are capable of contemplating them. Man alone of all the inhabitants of this world can acknowledge and praise Him that made it; can raise his thoughts and affections from sensible objects to Him “whom no man hath seen or can see:” and to persuade him to make this true use of the privileges he enjoys, to declare to him the wonderful works which God hath done, the wisdom and goodness he hath shown in all his works, is as noble a way of advancing his glory as any to which any creature can aspire.

It was for this very thing that God wrought those works, that his eternal power and godhead might be known; that the invisible nature of him might be seen in them:—“He spake and they were made.” With this design were the heavens and the earth created, and all the hosts of them; for this, the Al-



mighty formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; with the same great view he preserves what he has made, and upholds all things by the word of his power—with the same view, he withheld not from us his Son, his only Son! He gave Him to us after he had freely given us all things! that his name might be known and glorified amongst men. This purpose it is which the Omnipotent God hath uniformly pursued through our creation, preservation, and redemption; and this purpose it is (seeing the glory of God is inseparably connected with the winning of souls) which the wise man, of whom we are speaking, is continually promoting, as well as its necessary consequence: with regard to which, we may, in the second place, consider the end he proposes, namely, the good it confers on every person whom he wins to glorify God. Now this is of two sorts; deliverance from misery and advancement to happiness. Of the former we need only observe this one circumstance, that it is *eternal*: this alone is abundantly sufficient to show us the greatness of it; to evince that, if it were

proposed either to save the whole world, or to save a soul—to preserve ten thousand millions from suffering pain sixty years, or to save one man from being in pain, though but equal pain, to all eternity—a wise man would not pause a moment which were the nobler instance of mercy; seeing, although as many men as there are sands on the sea shore were to be miserable for sixty years, the whole sum of misery they sustained would bear no proportion to the endless misery of one, than finite to infinite, than time to eternity.

This simple consideration is enough to give us a general notion of that happiness, the enjoyment of which is secured to him who is rescued from endless misery. That this happiness is eternal we know, and therefore need not inquire into the particulars; nor indeed can we know, if it were possible to man to utter them. St. Paul, doubtless, after having been in the third heaven, would have been best able to have done it; but since even he was unequal to such a task, well may we decline so fruitless an attempt: only we are expressly told that no pain is there, but inexhaustible rivers of plea-

sure ; that the soul that hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall there be satisfied with good, and no desire return unsatisfied and empty ; and that part of this happiness will be an intimate union with the spirits of just men made perfect, of the general assembly of the first-born, of an innumerable company of blessed angels, and lastly, the presence of God, the judge of all, and of Jesus, the adorable mediator of the new covenant.

Here is wisdom ; the pursuing such an end as this ; the recovering him that was just sinking into the gulf of misery to happiness incomprehensible, eternal ! This is the good which he is the means of procuring to that soul which is brought into the path of holiness, over and above the delight and good which results to himself ; which is thirdly to be considered. And no small part of this is the honour of answering the end of his creation, promoting at once the glory of God and the good of mankind ; of sharing in the office of those superior natures who continually minister to the heirs of salvation ; of working together with God ! of being a fellow-labourer

with the ever blessed Spirit, and Jesus Christ the righteous!—an honour, which, however lightly it be esteemed by those who account zeal to be madness, is justly prized by all whose supposed foolishness is wiser than the wisdom of this world!—an honour which shall not fail to be repaid them, in part, at the very moment they endeavour to rescue the fallen, if not by men, yet by those more discerning beings who disdain not to call good men their fellow-creatures; and by their common master, who hath expressly declared, “Those who honour me, I will honour.”

Nor can it even be said of this honour, as is true too often of the honour of men, that it brings no advantage; this is never the case with the honour which cometh from God. None can be conscious of this, without an immediate advantage; without such an internal satisfaction as words cannot express. None can resemble their heavenly Father in extending his mercy even to the evil and unjust, without experiencing even at that time some degree of His happiness and goodness whom he imitates. No human creature can have so

little of the law of kindness written in his heart, as not to feel it burn within him while he is saving a soul from death. A foretaste this of that more ample reward which shall hereafter enlarge his heart, when he, with those whom he hath been a means of saving, shall together enter into the joy of their Lord. We need not dispute whether St. James touches upon that reward, in those remarkable words, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Now supposing those be only the sins of the persons restored to virtue and happiness, and not the infirmities of the guide who restored him, yet how will every good man rejoice in the joy of the Penitent! and how eminent a share must he possess who was the instrument of his salvation! who has occasioned that joy in heaven which is more over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance; to whom under God it is owing that

all his sins which he hath committed are not once mentioned unto him, that the handwriting against him is blotted out, and his name written in the book of life. Neither need we inquire what foundation there is for this opinion of the ancients, that the same reward awaits those who give witness to the truth by dying for it themselves, or saving a soul from death: for whether the reward of a martyr or of a winner of souls be one or not, sure we are that either is eminently glorious above that of common Christians. Neither the word of God nor his attributes suffer us to doubt that different men will have different rewards in heaven; that as one star differeth from another star in glory, so will it be in the resurrection of the dead. Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour; and some of the highest of these rewards are promised to the converters of sinners. All who are admitted into the presence of God will be glorious, but these shall exceed in glory: they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they

that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Such is the wisdom of him that winneth souls ; such is the end which he proposes :—the means which lead to the end, I come now, under my Second head, to consider.

The first of these is, the regulating the understanding of him whom he endeavours to reclaim ; the removing those confused apprehensions of things, those false judgments and ill-grounded conclusions which he has long been planting in himself, and which, perhaps, have been striking root for many years. Whether the first seeds of these were early sown by education, or afterwards by ill advice or example ; whether they relate to faith or practice in general, or to any particular branch of either ; whether they are errors of a whole sect of men, or peculiar to the person infected, they are carefully to be extirpated, and no root of bitterness be left.

In particular there is an absolute necessity of removing the confused notion which most vicious men entertain of piety. They apprehend religion “as a terrible spectre looking down

from heaven only to enslave the earth, standing over them with so horrible an aspect as damps the vigour of all who behold her :” and such a monster as this they cannot but regard as the bane of happiness, the destroyer of delight, and the imposer of numerous burdens too heavy to be borne ; whence they naturally infer, that to cast off her yoke is the surest mark of a good understanding, and that the first rule of prudence is, “ Be not wise over much ;” he who is so, they are persuaded, destroys himself, and cannot be over-wise.

To induce one who thus reasons to be wise unto salvation, he must have his mind enlightened, and his judgment informed. That this absurd notion of true religion may be removed, he must be led to examine the truth, that he may perceive the monster of his imagination was a false image, and had neither the real shape or native loveliness of genuine piety ; that he may be taught to know that righteousness hath looked down from heaven, in order that mercy may flourish upon earth, that men may have a light to guide them to her, whose



ways are ways of pleasantness, and all whose paths are peace.

He is to be convinced that religion forbids no pleasure but what would deprive him of a greater, nor requires any pain to be embraced, unless in order to obtain more than equal pleasure. The plain consequence of which, he may readily observe, is, that a good understanding have all they that do thereafter; and that there is the very same danger of being righteous over-much, provided a man knows what righteousness is, as of having over-much ease and safety in this life, or over-much happiness in the other.

But the convincing a vicious man of these truths is only one step towards his conversion, and often no step at all, since every conviction is not a lasting one. No, a man who has long been wedded to a mistake, if he be at last convinced, will soon unconvince himself, if he wishes it, if his *will* opposes the truth, which has only fixed itself in his understanding, not in his heart.

Old prejudices, though not soon dismissed, are easily received again; and the new opinions

which seemed so firmly implanted in their place, are by an obstinate mind quickly re-established. Therefore to *confirm* those who are brought to the knowledge of the truth is as necessary as to convince them; and when this is done, when due care has been used to strengthen his understanding after enlightening it, then is the time to employ the other great means of winning souls, namely, to regulate his affections. Indeed without this the other is of little effect. He that would enlighten the head must cleanse the heart, otherwise the disorder of the will again disorders the intellect, and perverseness of affection will cause an equal perverseness of judgment; for whatever inclination is contrary to reason is destructive of it, and whoever makes the world his god, the God of this world will blind his eyes.

This then is the most important work of all, namely, the "laying the axe to the root of the tree;" the prevailing on a man to pray for the grace of God to enable him to purify his heart till it be holy and undefiled; to resolve upon sacrificing all his darling lusts which will not submit to the law of God; to stifle every incli-

nation which is contrary to the spirit of holiness, which would rather prevent his entering upon, or retard his progress in, the race set before him ; to lay aside pride, malice, envy, revenge, covetousness, intemperance, in short every passion, every habit, which would keep him a stranger to the covenant of promise, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, without hope, and without God in the world.

When he has determined to renounce these inclinations which are evil in themselves, the next point is to bring him to a resolution of transferring those which are not so to new objects, of setting those affections on things above, and not on things of the earth, on things that were designed to be the delight, and engage the desires, of rational creatures, and are accordingly adequate to their capacities, which no perishable objects are ; to a resolution of seeking his happiness, not in things that are seen, but in things that are not seen : not like the half Christian (to speak in the words of an excellent man) to “ use God, and enjoy the world,” but as one who knows his privilege better, “ who uses the world, but enjoys God.”

After inspiring a sinner with this generous resolution, one step more is to be taken, and that is to fix him in it, to guard him from a relapse, lest his last state should be worse than the first; in spite of the arts which his old enemies will soon use to draw him from his steadfastness, to hold up his goings in the way that his footsteps slip not; to watch over his soul till he has fully proved the whole armour of God, that he may be able to wrestle with principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, to quench every fiery dart of the wicked, and, having done all, *to stand.*

He who hath thus enlightened the understanding, and regulated the will of a sinner, he hath eminently advanced the glory of his divine master, he hath rescued a fellow-being from destruction, and for such a one there is prepared, "an exceeding weight of glory," "eternal in the heavens;" for he that "winneth souls is" truly "wise."

But is not this a higher degree of wisdom than any one born of a woman hath yet attained? This is the inference that a man

of reflection would naturally draw from what has been said of it. Who is sufficient for these things? who is equal to so vast an undertaking? We have heard indeed that it is easy for a designing man to lead others whither he pleases if his object be to lead them into evil, to bring them into just what opinions he chooses, and set their affections by his own. But he who has seen how slowly a confused apprehension is cleared, or a prejudiced judgment rectified, and how unwillingly men admit a truth which they have long despised, even as it were a sword piercing through their hearts to rend asunder a darling error; he who has observed that a wicked man is almost as easily induced to cut off a right hand, or pluck out a right eye, as to set his affections on things above, and mortify his beloved lusts; in a word, he who knows that the persuading an ungodly man to be happy is the persuading him out of his fancy, judgment, and inclination, all which must take an entirely contrary bias, must undergo such a change as is from death to life; he knows that the winning a soul is a work of no common, no human

agency; and that, after every help of nature and of art, after the closest observation both upon men and things, and even the longest experience, "with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible!" This is our anchor; this bids us go on and prosper; this commands us not to doubt, but when we have ourselves fled to the Rock of Ages, and the Holy Spirit of God hath given us grace unto salvation, then he will entrust others to our care. What though we can do nothing of ourselves, "we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us! What though we are not able to turn away the least in our enemy's army, He who is with us has counsel and strength for the war, and his power is sufficient for us! Never will that power forsake the duly prepared and commissioned labourers in his harvest, but as their day so shall their strength be; they shall reap if they faint not.

I would not here be understood to exclude all but those from having any share in this glorious work; no! God forbid! How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed by denying them the blessing of joining with us in convert-

ing some from the error of their ways. Far be it from us, the ministers of mercy, to be guilty of such arrogant cruelty as to condemn all who have not a part in our ministry as reprobate from God and from the benefits of it; which we must do if we forbid this work of God, so far as he hath given us ability; since our Lord himself declares, "He that gathereth not with me scattereth: he that gathers not, as he is able, subjects to my kingdom, scattereth them away from it;" he that is not, according to his power, an agent for God, is a factor for the devil!

Several acts of our blessed offices indeed there are which may not be performed unless by commissioned officers; but here a general commission is given to all the servants of Christ to tread in his steps, to do what in them lies in their several stations to save the souls for which Christ died. We are, it is true, ambassadors of Christ, and as such, are entrusted with many powers, which those who are not his appointed ministers, are not entrusted with: but what scripture denies any man the power of beseeching others for Christ's sake to be reconciled to God? God forbid that

we should thus outrage the feelings of our fellow Christians, that we should thus magnify our office, by speaking as from God what God hath not spoken, as to exclude any who go not beyond their measure, from the wisdom of winning souls.

Indeed, if Solomon had only said, "the priest who winneth souls is wise," they would have had some colour for saying to all who are not invested with the sacerdotal office, "Ye have neither part nor lot in this wisdom; even with such sacrifices God is not pleased when they are offered by unhallowed hands;" but Solomon's words are universal, "He that winneth souls is wise."

And who is he that is wiser and inspired with a better judgment; let him stand forth and make the restriction.

But is this a time for making restrictions? for binding the hands of our fellow labourers? when the avowed opponents and blasphemers of our holy religion, are so zealously endeavouring to destroy souls; when those who have made themselves shipwreck of the faith, so



earnestly labour to plunge others in the same gulf; when even among ourselves have men arisen speaking perverse things; and, not content themselves to deny the Lord who bought them, seek to draw others into the same condemnation; is this a time for turning back any soldier of Christ who offers to set himself in array against the destroyer? Is there not a cause that we should cry aloud, "Who is on our side, who?" who will rise up with us against the enemy, who will stand with us in the gap against these wolves, that no longer put on sheep's clothing, but wander about in their own shapes, seeking whom they may devour? The emissaries of Satan labour one and all: shall any of the servants of God stand idle? Every one of those is zealous to destroy: shall not every one of these be zealous to save? Yea, in this let the heathen teach the Christian; let us do something from the least to the greatest; In these times surely we ought to suffer even the little children to fight for Christ, and forbid them not, lest it be said of us, with more justice than it has been, "Ye take too much

upon you, ye sons of Levi." Let us cut off this occasion of reproach from them that seek occasion, nor let it always be true, that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light!"

## SERMON II.

---

*He shall give his angels charge over thee,  
to keep thee in all thy ways.*

Psalm xci. 11.

---

ONE would think it scarcely possible that a man, even through the wantonness of wealth, power, or glory, should forget the very condition of his nature—that we are weak, helpless, miserable creatures, totally unequal to those many and great dangers that continually surround us, and threaten not only our souls (for these, men seem little to regard) with indelible guilt, but our darling bodies too with a total dissolution. The meanest object of our scorn, a beast, an insect, nay even things that have no life, are sufficient either to take away ours, or render it a curse rather than a blessing. Pangs yet sharper than these can inflict, we may often feel from the perverse injustice or malice of our brethren; encouraged therein by these

wicked spirits, our fiercest enemies, who daily range in quest of prey, and when they are not permitted to effect it themselves, rejoice in seeing us devour one another.

“But where then,” will the infidel say, “is the boasted goodness of the Creator, if he delivers over his impotent helpless creatures to their numerous, powerful, and cruel enemies?” God forbid that he should deliver us to them ! It is true that, to humble our natural pride and self-sufficiency, he suffers them to surround us on every side : it is also true “that we are unable of ourselves to help ourselves,” yet hath he not given us over “a prey unto their teeth;” on the contrary, he hath established a law, and ordained it shall never be broken, that, unless by our own positive voluntary act, they shall have no advantage over us ; for all who do not wilfully, obstinately, refuse to accept it, he hath appointed an inviolable refuge, beautifully described at large in that psalm, a portion of which you have heard repeated, “They may dwell in the secret place of the Most High ; they may abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” That while the afflictions which befall

the rest of mankind increase ever more and more, while a thousand fall into various troubles at their side, and “ten thousand at their right hand,” yet no evil shall approach them, unless for good, “no plague come nigh their dwelling.” We cannot doubt, if we consider what peculiar care our heavenly Father hath taken for their protection, that “He hath given his angels charge over them, to keep them in all their ways.”

A stronger proof of the truth of this general proposition we cannot have, than the authority of Him who proposes it: a clearer view of the sense of it we may obtain by making a particular inquiry,

First, when the angels of God attend their charge; at what seasons they are peculiarly employed in keeping good men in their ways?

Secondly, how they attend upon it; what methods they take (as we may naturally suppose) thus to keep them?

Thirdly, why this charge is assigned them; for what reasons we may presume that the omnipotent and omnipresent God does not exert his own immediate power, but employs these his servants to do his pleasure?

To these inquiries, that they may not appear matter of mere speculation, an inference or two naturally resulting from them may not unfitly be subjoined.

First, as to the seasons or times when the holy angels attend this their charge:—Of this we may in general be assured, that they are always ready to assist us when we need their assistance; always present when their presence may be of benefit; in every circumstance of life wherein is danger of any sort, or would be if they were absent. The commission which they bear plainly extends thus far. They are to keep us in all our ways, and we know when those ministering spirits are employed here by God—his will is done on earth, as it is in heaven.

In particular, when our bodies are in danger of pain or sickness, or our souls with violent passion or sin, then are they especially watchful over us, to ward off the approaching evil; and those no doubt approach often when we are sensible of no impending evil, which is frequently nearest when we apprehend it farthest off. Destruction does not always waste

at noon-day, more often it walks in darkness ; and our being delivered from it then is wholly attributable to their timely interposition, though neither the attack nor the repulse falls under the notice of our imperfect senses. Other seasons there are at which we are sensible of our danger, but not of the means of our escape ; which we suppose to be either the natural effect of material causes, or what we call chance, or the effect of our own strength and wisdom. But were we left alone, left to these or to ourselves, we should soon find how little resistance we could make against the enemies that daily besiege us, without those on our side who are more skilful to save than these to destroy. And unquestionably they would save us whenever assaulted by any evil, whether visible or invisible, but that this exceeds the commission which they have received from their Heavenly Father and ours. This He did not appoint, could not permit, as his wisdom knows it would not benefit but injure us. He knows of what infinite service afflictions are to creatures in our station, and therefore, that to be delivered from them all while on earth

would be the greatest evil that could befall us. Such an undistinguishing tenderness to the body would be an irreparable injury to the soul: if the one were continually comforted here, both might hereafter be tormented. Neither would it be kindness thus to exempt us from spiritual, any more than from temporal danger—to deliver the soul from all temptation, any more than the body from all pain. Were the angels of God enjoined to do this, as we should be without trial so should we be without choice, and we are commanded “to choose whom we will serve.”—“Behold I have set before thee life and death, therefore choose life.” Had we been without the power of choice, we must have been content with some lower happiness than that we now may hope to be partakers of, and which is the natural necessary result of virtue—of obedience to the divine law, which divine grace will enable every soul to keep who sincerely implores this aid. But although for these reasons (and who knows how many others the divine wisdom may have in view?) the blessed angels may not always prevent sin



or affliction from assaulting the soul or body, yet when either approach, they may prevent us from being totally overcome; they may preserve us from sinking under temporal misfortunes, from being enslaved by spiritual adversaries: they may likewise recover us out of that trouble which they might not hinder us from falling into, nay, and often assist us to rise by our fall; by having been defeated to obtain a nobler conquest. In what manner it is that the angels of God do this, by what particular methods they may be supposed to keep us, I proceed under my second head to inquire.

Little of certainty, you are sensible, can be expected on a subject of this nature, unless where there is the express warrant of His revelation, who made all things, and therefore knows them all. Revelation expressly assures us, that these his servants excel in strength; which we also may infer from the works ascribed to them, in many places of Holy Writ. That one of them shut the lion's mouth, which would otherwise have devoured Daniel; that at the word of another, the chains fell off St. Peter's hands, and the prison gates

unfolded, seems an inconsiderable exertion of that strength, when we are informed what is in another place related of the tasks assigned them by their Sovereign Lord ; “ I saw,” saith St. John, “ four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that they should not blow.” Of four others who seem to have been of that number which probably lost much of their strength with their purity, the same Apostle records that they were loosed from their bonds in the river Euphrates, “ to slay the third part of men.” What then cannot these effect, whose strength is still entire when they are permitted to exert it ; especially since, secondly, they excel equally in wisdom, as we have the highest reason to believe. They, like man, were undoubtedly created upright, though with superior powers, as they are beings of a superior order ; but they fell not like him, and have therefore retained them unimpaired, at least, ever since the world began, if not many ages before : but we may be assured they neither would nor could retain them without continually improving them. At what degree,

then, of knowledge and wisdom may we not suppose they are now arrived? If a creature of so confined, so depraved an understanding as man, can improve it so much in threescore years, what bounds can imagination place to the understanding of an angel, which, with so vast a grasp, and so just and unbiassed an apprehension, hath been travelling onward towards perfection for probably many thousands of ages? especially considering whose face they continually behold, even His of whose understanding there is no number; and that to imitate him, as far as the noblest creature can, is their vocation, and pleasure, and glory!

By these perfections, strength, and wisdom, they are well able to preserve us either from the approach (if that be more profitable for us) or in the attack of any evil. By their wisdom they discern whatever either obstructs or promotes our real advantage; by their strength they effectually repel the one and secure a free course to the other: by the first, they choose means conducive to these ends; by the second, they put them in execution. One particular method of preserving good men, which we

may reasonably suppose these wise beings sometimes choose, and by their strength put in execution, is the altering some material cause that would have a pernicious effect; the purifying (for instance) tainted air, which would otherwise produce a contagious distemper. And this they may easily do, either by increasing the current of it, so as naturally to cleanse its putridity; or, by mixing with it some other substance, so to correct its hurtful qualities, and render it salubrious to human bodies. Another method they may be supposed to adopt when their commission is not so general; when they are authorized to preserve some few persons from a common calamity. It then is probable that they do not alter the cause, but the subject on which it is to work; that they do not lessen the strength of the one, but increase that of the other. Thus too, where they are not allowed to prevent, they may remove, pain or sickness; thus the angel restored Daniel in a moment when neither strength or breath remained in him.

By these means, by changing either our bodies or the material causes that use to affect

them, they may easily defend us from all bodily evils, so far as is expedient for us. A third method they may be conceived to employ to defend us from spiritual dangers, by applying themselves immediately to the *soul* to raise or allay our passions; and indeed this province seems more natural to them than either of the former. How a spiritual being can act upon matter seems more unaccountable than how it can act on spirit: that one immaterial being by touching another, should increase or lessen its motion, that an angel should retard or quicken the channel wherein the passions of angelic substance flow, no more excites our astonishment than that one piece of matter should have the same effect on its kindred substance; or that a flood-gate or other material instrument should affect the course of a river: rather, considering how contagious the nature of the passions is, the wonder is on the other side; not how they can avoid to affect him at all, but how they can avoid affecting them more; how they can continue so near us, who are so subject to catch them, without spreading the flames which burn in themselves.

And a plain instance of their power to allay human passions is afforded us in the case of Daniel, when he beheld that gloriously terrible minister, whose "face was as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, his arms and feet like polished brass, and his voice as the voice of a multitude," (x. 6;) when the tears and sorrows of the Prophet were turned so strong upon him, that he was in a deep sleep, void of sense and motion. Yet this fear, these turbulent passions, the angel allayed in a moment; when they were hurrying on with the utmost impetuosity, he checked them in their course; so that immediately after we find Daniel desiring the continuance of that converse which before he was utterly unable to sustain.

The same effect was doubtless wrought on all those to whom these superior beings, on their first appearance, used this salutation, "Fear not"—which would have been a mere insult and cruel mockery upon human weakness, had they not with that advice given the power to follow it.

Nearly allied to this method of influencing

D

the passions is the last I intend to mention, by which the angels (it is probable) preserve good men, especially in or from spiritual dangers. And this is by applying themselves to their reason, by instilling good thoughts into their hearts; either such as are good in their own nature—as tend to our improvement in virtue; or such as are contrary to the suggestions of flesh and blood, by which we are tempted to vice. It is not unlikely that we are indebted to them, not only for most of those reflections which suddenly dart into our minds we know not how, having no connexion with any thing that went before them; but for many of those also which seem entirely our own, and naturally consequent from the preceding.

It were easy to demonstrate that to some of these heads all those actions are reducible which we can conceive our guardian angels to perform in execution of this their charge. But we come to our third inquiry, which was, why this charge was assigned them; for what reasons we may suppose He who is omnipotent and omnipotent does not use his own

immediate power, but of these his servants, to execute his pleasure.

I am not ignorant that this is usually thought a knowledge too wonderful for us—that man cannot attain a view of these ways of God, these hidden treasures of his providence. It cannot, however, be unlawful to extend our search as far as our limited faculties will permit, provided we approach with due reverence and humility, and offer nothing contrary to the analogy of our faith.

Consistently with these, we may presume that one reason wherefore our gracious Creator assigns this charge to his holy angels is, because they delight in it; because they have additional happiness therein, besides what results from being employed in the service of God; seeing the more benevolent any being is, the more pleasure he enjoys in doing good. And that these are benevolent in the highest degree we cannot but infer, by their holding the highest rank among creatures, inasmuch as God always favours and honours them most who are most like him; for God is love, and to conduct others in the paths of hap-



piness must be particularly pleasing in his sight, and enhance their own happiness.

Nor is it a barren useless pleasure which these sons of God reap from their attendance on the children of men, but joined with improvement: in doing good to us, they accumulate good to themselves also; and this perhaps is a second reason why the most High hath allotted this province to them, that by exercising the goodness they already possess they continually acquire more, and swiftly too. Even we, fettered as we are in this tabernacle of earth, and weighed down by original corruption—even we can perceive that the more acts of any virtue we perform, the stronger habit we slowly acquire: much more swiftly, then, must exercise improve those blessed spirits who have neither of these our impediments: much more sensibly, by the acts of benevolence which they perform, must they advance in this godlike virtue.

And thirdly, as by this exercise of it they are more benevolent and happy, so thereby they treasure up to themselves an augmenting fund of future happiness. The greater good-

will they bear to men, the greater must be their joy when these men, in the fulness of time, are received into the glory appointed for them; the more exquisitely will they sympathize with them when all their sorrows are done away, when the days of sickness and pain and sin are passed for ever, and swallowed up in blissful immortality, and they are admitted with these glorious spirits to drink those rivers of pleasure which flow from the presence of God for evermore!

In those days we shall evidently perceive a fourth reason why these ministering spirits are now so constantly sent forth to guard those who are heirs of salvation; namely, that when entered into their inheritance they might be gratefully sensible of their benefits; that when they experience the inestimable value of them, this gratitude might ripen into love; that this love might be a means of increasing their happiness by seeing those whom they loved, and seeing them so happy, and by reflecting that themselves, unworthy as they were, while in these earthly tabernacles of clay, had in some degree contributed to its augmentation.

From that little we have been able to conjecture respecting this one dispensation of Providence—as the time when, the manner how, and the reasons why, the blessed angels have charge to keep good men—may we not naturally infer that we should adore his wisdom and goodness, who hath instituted the services of men and angels in so wonderful an order!

How great is that goodness which hath not left without defence his weak and helpless creatures! How great is that wisdom which hath so well proportioned the powers of our defenders to their office! How infinitely great are these divine attributes which have made man serviceable to them, and that such impotent, miserable creatures should be the means of conveying a benefit to beings only not almighty.

Hence we may, secondly, infer the weakness of that objection which men who pretended to believe a God have often made against his Providence—that it is beneath the Supreme Being, the Mighty Creator, to concern himself in our little concerns. Now supposing this (though it be palpably absurd to believe it of Him who is omnipresent as well as omni-

potent), how would it prove that chance governed the world? since there is a particular order of beings (which the Scriptures attest there is), to attend upon this very thing; who are ready on all occasions to assist such as need and will accept of their assistance, and, by the powers wherewith he hath endued them, are sufficiently able (were that the will of their Heavenly Master) to preserve both the natural and moral world in order, without the interposition of his mighty power.

We learn hence, in the third place, to condemn the folly and error of those who intrude into the Christian church their own doctrines and commandments of men—namely, the worshiping of angels; the paying to the creature the incommunicable honour of the Creator. “Let no man beguile us of our reward” in this “shew of wisdom in will worship and humility.” (Colossians, ii. 23.) They keep us in all our ways it is true, but we know who has given them this gracious charge. The Lord our God is but one Lord, and these are servants that do his pleasure; and if their doing this, if their obeying his order were a sufficient reason for us to worship them,

the sun, the moon, fire and hail, storms and tempest, which alike fulfil his word, alike may claim our adoration.

It is God himself, as we may fourthly collect from what has been said, to whom our prayers and praises are due, to whom we ought to return our sincerest acknowledgments, whom we should implore with the deepest humility, that we may reap the fruits of his wisdom and goodness, from the constant ministry of his servants. To Him our petitions should be addressed, according to the wise direction our church has given us, "that as His holy angels do him service in heaven, so they may succour and defend us upon earth;" that their general commission to inspect human affairs may affect us in particular, and secure to us such a degree of present ease as best accords with our future happiness.

Happy is the man even now, as he can be upon earth, who is in such a case! who enjoys such a protection! happy in having the greatest possible security that he never shall be unhappy—unprotected—unblessed! that even the greatest temporal evil cannot befall

him but to procure a greater good, and that no evil shall befall him that does not work out a far more and exceeding reward; that though he wrestles not only against inanimate foes, but against flesh and blood, the depravity of his own nature, with the perverseness, malice, and injustice of other men; nay, and not only against all these combined, but against principalities, the rulers of this world, the wicked spirits in high places; they that are for him are not only more, but stronger than those who are against him. And are not these at least as watchful to do us good, as those are to do us evil?—so watchful, that let him be but faithful, let him but fix his love on their common Creator, and nothing in the creation, animate or inanimate, by design or by chance, shall have power to hurt him. In famine they shall preserve the good man from death; in war, from the power of the sword:—They shall hide thee from the scourge of the tongue. Thou shalt laugh at destruction when it cometh. The very beasts of the earth shall they make to be at peace with thee, and thou shalt be at league with the stones of the field. (Job v. 22.)

Wherefore to Him that hath thus loved us, and formed and redeemed us, and given us this good consolation; among the numberless evils with which we are surrounded—to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—One God—let us yield all praise, majesty, and dominion, now and for ever!—Amen.

### SERMON III.

---

*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*

Luke xvi. 10.

CHRISTIANITY, from its first establishment in the world, has met with strong opposition from two different sorts of people—the persecutor and the scorner. The one has essayed by force of arms and violence to drive it out of the world; the other, by scoffs and insults to render it contemptible in it. By the mercy of God and the constancy of Christians, the former have been disappointed of their purpose, and their cruel intentions have been entirely defeated; but the latter too often have succeeded, and by their taunts and jeers, their insults and reproaches, have done more injury to Christianity, than bonds and imprisonments,



racks and tortures, ever could effect. They have made people ashamed of their profession, brought religion into disrepute, and prevailed upon many of its followers to sacrifice their piety to preserve their reputation. One of the arts by which these scorners have been able most effectually to serve their master, the devil, has been to represent the several duties of the gospel as too mean for the Most High God to impose, or for man (his most excellent work) to be solicitous about.

For instance, profane jesting and loose conversation are expressly forbidden by God himself; but these enemies of righteousness will boldly venture to deny their obligation to obedience in such immaterial matters; that, provided a man is honest and performs his duty in the main, he need not extend his care to a jest or a word; for that the Almighty is too great and too good to take cognizance of such things, or expect that man himself should do so.

Another (if he finds you reluctant to spend your time and money in idle diversions and recreations) will ridicule your scrupulosity, and ask you if you suppose that God can deign to

concern himself respecting these trifles, or has given any precept on such unimportant subjects? In short, they have so far carried their cause, that religion is almost wholly excluded from common life, and confined to solemn times and places, to forms and modes of worship. The practice of Christianity is restricted within the bounds of the church; and he that would regulate all his behaviour and conversation by the rules of the gospel will be inevitably branded with the names of superstitious, scrupulous, and pharisaical.

It is this error which I design to combat in my present discourse, and show,

First, that no action is too trifling and insignificant to be made a part of our religion, or regulated by the rule of the gospel:

Secondly, that by neglecting to take care of what we call our little actions, we are led into great transgressions:

Thirdly, that the advantage of thus regulating the little common actions of our lives by the rule of the Divine command will be greater than Christians at first may imagine.

We know there is but one rule for the Christian's behaviour in the world; and that is, that

he should have a constant view to the great end of his creation in every action of his life. Now the end for which man was created and sent forth to be an inhabitant of this lower world was the glory of God and the salvation of his own soul. Accordingly we find St. Paul exhorting his Corinthians to look constantly, with a simple heart and single eye, to this great end of their being; and "whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, to do all to the glory of God."

Now I would ask whether the doctrines of my text do not evidently and clearly prove the point we are discussing? Eating and drinking, those common necessary actions of life, are commanded to be done in such a manner as that the glory of God may be promoted. Now it is certain we should never be required to refer these actions to God, unless they were in some measure capable of advancing and promoting his glory: and surely no work can be termed trifling and insignificant, whereby so noble an end is attained; no action be deemed indifferent, which tends to promote the one design of our creation. Eating and drinking, therefore, those essential means of supporting

and preserving our lives, are in this text positively declared to be subservient to the glory of God, and, as such, are expressly referred to him. And if this principle respecting these necessary actions must actuate us, it applies to every thing we do; the consequence of which is, that no action is too mean or trifling to be incorporated into our religion, or to be regulated by the strictest rules of the gospel.

Secondly, we find in effect that the Almighty hath most rigidly extended the rule of his commandments to all our actions, and that there is not any thing we can either do, or speak, or think, wherein some of his precepts are not immediately concerned. Now, since our Creator has seen good to lay down regulations for every instance of our behaviour, are we not indispensably required to conform ourselves to his rules? Will any man doubt whether he be obliged to demean himself in a manner strictly consonant to a Divine command? That be far from us to question so plain a principle as whether a creature is bound to obey his Creator! All those commandments which enjoin us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all

our strength, and to serve him faithfully with all our soul, do evidently extend their sense so far as to include every thought, word, and action; for what action can be lawful which cannot be referred to him, directly or indirectly? what are we at liberty to do without having a view to his service? When the Son of God in his holy gospel has particularised those several duties comprised in this saying, to obviate all objections, and silence all cavils that might have been made against his precepts as trifling and unimportant, he strengthens it with this solemn sanction, "He that keepeth the least of these commandments, and teacheth men so to do, shall be called *great* in the kingdom of heaven; but he that breaketh the least of these sayings shall be esteemed least in the kingdom of heaven."

Now the sense of this passage is plainly this—that nothing is too insignificant to be made an instance of his laws, nor any action so inconsiderable as not to be in some measure a means of increasing our great and glorious reward in his heavenly kingdom; which suggests a third argument, namely, that

No action is to be considered unimportant,

which will be followed by such an inconceivably great reward. The text proves evidently that the eternal God has respect to the little actions of our lives; and if they be conformable to his holy commandments, he will not fail to fulfil his gracious promise, and greatly to reward them in the next life.

“Had the prophet bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? and how much more when he saith, wash and be clean,” was the reproof that Naaman’s servant gave him when he rejected Elisha’s advice, and refused to make use of the means he had prescribed for the recovery of his leprosy. And may not the Almighty make the application to those servants whom he hath ordered to be faithful in that which is least, and for encouragement hath promised to make *great* in the kingdom of heaven? Heavy, without doubt, will be the condemnation of those who neglect to secure the mighty recompense of Heaven, from not observing to fulfil the jots and tittles of the law. He cannot have a due sense of the value of those good things which God hath *prepared for all who love him*, who refuses any

labour, or starts at any difficulty, which lies in the way of attaining them ; much less who refuses to comply with easy bonds, and so light a yoke ; to submit to little grievances and self-denials, which are privileges to a devout Christian. Surely, if heaven be worth all our care and pains, we cannot think ourselves blameless if we do not labour in every action of our life to secure it ; and if the kingdom of God is so invaluable, so beyond all that we can hope or conceive, as to deserve the struggle of “ taking it by force,” how can we be justified for not entering in, when encouraged by this divine promise ; “ He that keepeth the least of these commandments shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

To evince this important truth beyond all possibility of contradiction, and to remove every doubt, whether we are obliged to refer all our actions to the glory of God, and consequently that none of them are too mean to be made a part of our religion, or to be regulated by the strict rules of the gospel, the blessed Jesus expressly assures us that, at the day of judgment, every individual action of our lives

will be scanned and strictly examined. Now, if not one be too insignificant to deserve the censure and cognizance of the Almighty, not one is too mean to be referred to his service. If we are to give an account for each, certain it is, that each should be done *as to the Lord*.

Persuaded I am that no action can stand the test of this strict and solemn scrutiny, which is not begun, continued, and ended in his service; and therefore the proof of this article of our faith ought to convince us of the importance, as well as the truth, of the doctrine now under consideration, and effectually prevail upon us to do every thing we do as in the presence of our God, in the sight of our judge, who hath required it of us that Himself should be the ultimate end of all our actions.

That we may not think that we shall escape unpunished in the great and terrible day of the Lord, merely for the innocence, or rather the insignificance of our actions, our blessed Saviour has told us, that we shall give an account at the day of judgment even for every idle word. Now, if our idle words will not escape



censure, where shall he appear who has a whole train of idle actions ?

Now every word and action is idle which is not done with a view proposed by our Creator in our very existence here. This interpretation is corroborated by St. Paul's well known passage in his epistle to the Ephesians, iv. 29, 30 : "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister gráce to the hearers : " and "Grieve not the holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

If any ask what we mean by idle words, my answer is, the same that the apostle means by "corrupt communication ;" words that are not edifying or beneficial, such as minister no grace to the hearers. In this manner, then, we must not converse or speak, but preserve an invariable view to the great end of our being, the glory of God, and the good of others.

Now if no conversation can be vindicated, which is not sanctified, consecrated, if I may so say ; if no subject, however light, be exempted from some moral tendency ; I ask

whether it doth not hold equally true, that no action or business we can undertake is too despicable to have a reference to religion, or to be made an offering holy and acceptable to the Most High ?

Indeed, if we consider human actions simply in themselves, they are all infinitely too mean for the great Majesty of Heaven to regard. What are our best services to the Almighty God ? Is he honoured by the bowing of our knee, or lifting up of our hands ? Oh no ! the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity need not be worshipped with man's worship, the worm of yesterday ! Neither hath he respect to the *outward* actions of his creature, but to the temper and spirit with which they are performed. He, therefore, who is faithful in that which is least, is esteemed, in his sight, as faithful in much ; and he that is conscientious, and fearful of doing a little thing which may offend God, will be blessed with a reward exceeding all comprehension of mortals.

We know that the two mites of the widow were accepted before the abundance which the rich cast into the treasury, because of that sim-

plicity of heart, and fervent piety, wherewith the offering was made. And is not the same spirit capable of sanctifying the meanest actions of our lives, that is, the desire to please God, and rendering every thing acceptable in his sight?

Yes; God is a spirit, and seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth. He that hath promised that even a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of God shall in no wise lose its reward, will doubtless have a great respect to, and will mightily bless and prosper, him who in his least action has reference to the advancement of his glory. He, therefore, who refuses to indulge himself in pleasure, who lays various restraints upon his behaviour and conversation, who is fearful of doing many things which the generality of people freely allow themselves in, if he has made God the foundation of his scrupulosity, and a desire of his glory the ground and reason of his singularity—he shall be received as *great* in the kingdom of heaven.

Thus have I endeavoured to prove my first position; and, I trust, have incontrovertibly

proved that there is no act of our lives too mean to be made a part of our devotion, consequently, to be laid under the strictest rules of his holy gospel.

Secondly, I have now to show the danger of not being faithful in that which is least, and to evince that, by neglecting what we call our little actions, we are often led into great and heinous transgressions.

It is the observation of the wise son of Sirach, that he who despiseth little things, shall fall by little and little; and experience will attest this truth, and prove it to every attentive Christian. See we not that vice, as well as virtue, is of a progressive nature, and by degrees encroaches on the hearts of its votaries? The evil spirit is too subtle a tempter to show the heinousness of sin at the first glance, and therefore adapts his temptations to the conscience and disposition: and, knowing that mankind (until they become thoroughly reprobate) are averse from monstrous crimes, he ensnares them into little transgressions; aware that he who is once habituated to small offences will soon lose his horror at sin, shake off his

tenderness of conscience, and by degrees grow hardened in vice and impiety. Therefore this enemy of our souls, when he would seduce any of the servants of God from the path of righteousness, would make the first declension from that path as small as possible, that he might ensnare them in his nets, without their even perceiving the danger, and bring them unawares from the road to heaven to the gate of destruction. For instance, is drunkenness the sin to which he tempts?—his method is to conceal this frightful vice, and its dreadful consequences, under the veil of innocent mirth and social pleasure, so that his victim is beguiled, by a desire of being easy and agreeable to his companions, to weaken his understanding, till he becomes a beast, and makes shipwreck of his reason as well as conscience. Now had this man been so upon his guard as never to exceed the bounds of Christian temperance and sobriety, had he been scrupulously exact in observing the rule of the apostle, of eating and drinking only to the glory of God, he would have preserved the intellects which the Almighty bestowed upon him, avoided the stum-

bling block which the evil one cast in his way, and escaped the guilt, the misery, and the punishment, which those incur who are overcharged "with surfeiting and drunkenness."

Again:—a virtuous youth who would tremble at the sin of fornication, will be tempted to loose conversation, and "jestings which are not convenient;" he will hear them amongst his irreligious companions, till he joins in them, and easily be persuaded there is no great evil in such little things, till by little and little he flings off all restraint, falls into the commission of vices which he once regarded with indignation and horror, and at last is ensnared by the strange woman whose "house is the gate of death, and her chambers the path-way to hell." Now had this man been so obedient to his Maker, and faithful to himself, as to have "set a watch to his words, and kept the door of his lips," he had avoided this most dangerous of sins, and been preserved from the iniquity which will now in all probability bring him to destruction.

Farther: the generality of mankind, in theory, abhor gambling; though most of them

allow themselves in games, and recreation is made a pretence for extravagances, and diversion becomes an inlet to profuseness and prodigality. A trifling wager may be risked and lost without injury, and a small part of our income appropriated to pleasure and chance; but alas! insignificant as these beginnings appear, they are likely to end in serious evil. The gentleman too often degenerates into the gambler; and by degrees it comes to pass that many wager away their estates, and cast the fatal die which reduces themselves and their families to beggary and want.

Now all these may serve as examples to demonstrate the direful tendency of being negligent of our little actions, and the important truth of my text, "that he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much:" that he who places not his common ordinary actions under the restraints of religion is bringing himself under snares and temptations, blindly enters into the confines of vice, and throws himself by steps and degrees under the full power and dominion of the adversary.

And indeed a little spark will quickly kindle

to a flame ; a small breach in the river's bank will soon cause an inundation. He that will venture to go ever so little out of the right way ought seriously to weigh with himself where may be the end. Every step out of the path of life is a step leading to death. We have the testimony of the Holy Scriptures that the way to heaven is narrow, and beset with traps and pitfalls ; and, if we deviate from it, no wonder if we are entangled or dragged down to ruin and destruction. To be secure, we must go on in holiness ; and to be free from danger of evil, we must constantly practise all that is good. He that can trifle himself into a *spirit of carelessness* and want of thought, deceives his own heart if he fancies he is safe ; and the man who suffers himself at any time, or in any degree, to relax in circumspection, exposes himself at that time, and in that degree, to all the assaults of a vigilant and subtle adversary, who seeks to destroy his immortal soul.

But it will be said, is the Christian then secluded from mirth and diversion, pleasures and entertainments ? Yes ; as far as they are



inconsistent with piety and innocence, with temperance and safety. Whatever pleasure may be enjoyed *consistent with these*, and is entered upon with either a mediate or immediate reference to the glory of his Creator, a Christian may delight himself in. But whatever is incompatible with these principles, whatever diversion is unlawful, either in itself or in its necessary consequences, which tends to evil, or exposes men to be an easier prey to temptation, I scruple not to say, cannot be a pleasure designed for Christians ; so manifestly the reverse, that God, who seeth the evil as well as the danger, has solemnly forbidden such diversions in his holy word, by commanding us to abstain from all appearance of evil, and strictly enjoining us to do nothing which may not be done as unto the Lord, and be some way subservient to his honour and glory.

So much I have deemed proper to remark on the danger of not being faithful in that which is least, and established the truth I undertook to discuss ; namely, that by neglecting to take care of our miscalled little actions, we are often led into great and heinous transgres-

sions. I therefore proceed to my third head of discourse, wherein I promised to show;

Thirdly, the incalculable advantages which will arise from regulation of the little common actions of our lives by the strict rules of God's commandments.

He that would be secure must not approach the precipice of evil. The danger has been demonstrated, and the only means of avoiding it is to keep at a distance from the very appearance. He that maketh every action a point of duty will not easily be ensnared into a flagrant breach of it, and he that is circumspect in little will scarcely ever fall into great transgressions.

Tenderness of conscience is the noblest preservative from sin, and a scrupulous fear of offending the best safeguard against it. The fortress of virtue is most effectually secured, when the inlets to vice are most sedulously guarded. Constant recollection impedes attack; and he who never exposes himself to the least shadow of temptation will never be in danger of being overcome by the greatest. Were the good man of the house always on the watch,

the thief could never break in and spoil his goods ; and if the Christian would not indulge himself in the full enjoyment of that liberty which he thinks allowed, but conscientiously abstain from *some* of those wordly good things, which he sees his brethren use intemperately, it would be as probable a means to preserve him from falling as can be conceived. Who is so likely to persevere as such a faithful servant, to whose mind the injunction of his Lord (to all Christians, as well as to his disciples) is ever present, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, *watch!*" Is it not one of the most awful punishments that attend the wicked, to be given over to a reprobate mind ; to have their hearts hardened and their consciences seared. Now such as is the curse of a callous heart, so great is the blessing of a tender conscience ; and as on one hand an obdurate resolution is a certain forerunner of eternal destruction, so on the other, a sedulous adherence to virtue, and a nice sense of every little breach of duty, is of all others the most powerful preservative from the guilt, as well as the punishment, of sin ; and universal conscientiousness

is an invulnerable shield against the force of temptation.

Hazael, king of Syria, was offended highly at the prophet, for predicting the evils which he should bring upon the Israelites. "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" was the rebuke he gave the man of God; but when he had contemplated the splendour of a crown, and permitted his thoughts to dwell on the pleasures of high station, his heart swelled with pride and ambition, and he soon fulfilled the awful prognostication, slew his master, ascended his throne, and exercised his ill-gotten power with so much tyrannic cruelty, as served to accomplish the designs of Providence, who appointed him a scourge to the rebellious nation, which had become traitors to their God; and has given in this narration, to all ages, a striking instance of the deceitfulness of the human heart, and the danger of not checking evil thoughts before they proceed to actions.

The case is plain; if we would be holy, we must use the means. The lesson of Christian perfection is not to be learned at once; we

must be well exercised in rudiments and first principles, if we ever hope to make a progress in the school of Christ. By habituating ourselves to little restraints in the first instance, by voluntarily imposing on ourselves small crosses, we shall in time become conformed to His death, who deemed no sacrifice too great to purchase our salvation. By abstaining from taking the utmost liberty we lawfully may, we shall be effectually secured from even the desire of criminal gratifications, and escape the dreadful guilt of heinous and presumptuous sins.

The children of this world (who in their generation are wiser than the children of light) will eminently prove the advantages resulting from strict exactness, and punctual regularity, in the most trifling things; they will tell us of the benefits resulting from doing every thing by rule and order, neglecting no means of gain, and ever adding to their accumulations; and why the same attention is not required in a Christian, which experience teaches us is so useful in a tradesman's concerns, it will be difficult to show. Christianity is an employ-

ment no less extensive than important; its influence may reach, if we please, to every action, and render the most insignificant of them holy and acceptable to God. Why then should not every thing we think, and say, and do, be undertaken with this view, and wholly referred to his most sacred and adorable name?

I have shown in the first part of this discourse that all our actions are capable of being thus piously and advantageously improved; that none are too mean to be dedicated to the service of God, or instrumental in promoting his glory. Away then with this objection of their being unworthy of the Most High, and not fit to be made instances of our obedience to him, or to be regulated by the strict rules of the gospel; away with all jeering scoffs against this religious scrupulosity which I have been inculcating: and if any men there be that still continue to laugh at any such little singularities of the true disciples of Christ, let them remember it is written, "Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep." No doubt can possibly be made, that every action of our lives may be referred to God, and there is demon-

stration to prove that we are thus to refer every action : for if we consider, on the one hand, the great danger which those incur who are negligent of their little actions, to what manifold and great temptations they are exposed, even to commit heinous sins ; and on the other, those mighty benefits which accrue from bringing our indifferent actions to the standard and test of God's holy will and commandment—I say, whoever weighs these great truths as he ought will find the indispensable necessity of no longer living to himself, but unto God ; and of doing the most insignificant action of his life with such a spirit and temper, as that it might be done unto the Lord and not to man.

This is the method to escape the punishment due to those who live for themselves, and not to God : hereby we shall assure our hearts before him, when he is constantly in our thoughts, and is set always before us. How eminent a share of glory shall they receive, who are thus perpetually concerned in promoting the glory of God ? How abundantly shall they be recompensed for those pleasures from which they have voluntarily abstained for

Christ's sake! Much doubtless shall be given, as well as forgiven, to those who have loved so much as to make the great object of their love the end of every thing they do. We have our blessed Saviour's promise that, in consequence of their being faithful in that which is least, they shall be esteemed faithful in much, and for their tender fear of transgressing their Divine master's little commands, they shall be pronounced great in the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed therefore are all they who hear these sayings and keep them! They shall escape the guilt and punishment of heinous transgressions, and receive a glorious recompence for their labour, an incalculable reward for their care and industry; such a recompence as fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens; such a reward—great as their Master's love, and extensive as the grace which enabled them to do Him "true and laudable service!"



## SERMON IV.

---

*I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.*      Matthew, v. 20.

---

THESE words are a part of the divine sermon which our blessed Lord delivered from the mount to the people, who, having seen the mighty and wonderful works he had done in the towns where he had preached, followed him in multitudes, and pressed upon him to see the signs he had wrought, and to hear the doctrines he promulgated. These, therefore, he instructs in the perfection of that religion which he came into the world to establish, and shows how infinitely it exceeded all other religious dispensations wherewith mankind till then had been blessed. And as the people to whom he spoke were all of them Jews,

and had a high veneration for the religion of their fathers, he chiefly compares his commands with those of Moses, to convince them how far even the law and the prophets fell short of that which the Son of God himself descended to make known on earth; and as all the people of Israel were prepossessed with high notions of the scribes and pharisees, whom they supposed to be exalted patterns of sanctity, he informs them that, holy and eminent as they thought these men to be, yet the lowest servant of Christ must infinitely surpass them in righteousness and true holiness, or he could never hope to be made partaker of the kingdom of heaven.

In discoursing on these words, I shall,

First, show wherein consisted the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees.

Secondly, consider in what instances all Christians are obliged to exceed them.

Thirdly, conclude with some practical inferences from the whole.

The scribes, as we learn from several passages of Holy Scripture, were for the most part learned doctors and teachers of the law, who

sat in Moses' seat, and explained those portions of it which, through their blindness and weakness of understanding, they would otherwise have remained ignorant concerning. They are sometimes called by the name of Rabbi, which signifies master—one that had been brought up in the schools of the prophets, and was licensed to teach a set of disciples or followers the weighty matters of the law. The pharisees were the most rigid sect of the Jews, men who obliged themselves to the strictest observance of the things required by the law; and were distinguished by placing their conduct under some restraints which were not obligatory, and denying themselves such liberties as were by the law allowed to the people; and hence they derive their name from a word which signifies to distinguish or separate. Now both these sets of men, we may imagine, pretended to extraordinary degrees of piety. The very title of pharisee implies a recluse person, or one who separated himself from his brethren by the remarkable rigour of his life and conversation; and one scarcely can suppose that those scribes who were entrusted

with the education of young people could be other than sober and moral, as well as grave and learned persons; and indeed we find their characters to have been such. They were distinguished by leading austere lives, and professing strict doctrines. They observed great sanctity and severity of behaviour, were regular in their public offices of devotion, fasted and prayed often, and gave much alms. They were zealous for the law to excess, and revered the institutions thereof as divine appointments deserve to be revered. In short, there was nothing in their exterior behaviour but what was becoming in teachers of religion, edifying and exemplary. They manifested the highest regard to God, the greatest veneration to things and persons appropriated to his service, and the severest resentment of any profanation of them.

Such was the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees of old, which our blessed Saviour declares not to be sufficient to bring any one to the possession of his kingdom; which leads me to my second general head, wherein I am

to point out in what instances all Christians are to exceed them.

We see that their external regularity, their zeal, their exact manners, and decent deportment, are such as might be well proposed to a Christian; but they are patterns which we must not be content to equal, but infinitely surpass, or our righteousness will avail nothing in the great day of accounts. The Christian religion requires indeed an exemplary behaviour, an external reverence to God and holy things, and all demonstrative of our piety and virtue: but it endeth not here; it's chief residence is in the heart, and there it is designed to effect the greatest change. Its principal design is to convert the sinner, to rectify his mind, and alter the most prevailing evil temper of his soul. And herein consists the grand difference between the righteousness required of the Christian, and that which was practised by the scribes and pharisees. Theirs was an outside holiness; ours is commanded to be the holiness of the heart. Their virtue consisted in their sanctified actions; ours in upright in-

tentions. Their works of piety and charity were performed to be seen of men; ours must be performed to please our Father which is in heaven. In short, the scribes and pharisees considered *external* sanctity all that was required of them; whereas the Christian is taught principally to regard the state and disposition of his heart, and to regard his outward behaviour only as a testimony and proof of his internal spirit and temper. For instance, the learned scribe and proud pharisee would think he had sufficiently done his duty to God, by having been present at his public worship; but the humble pious Christian knows that God will not accept a religion only confined to time and place, or has any respect to such holiness as is bounded by the walls of the church. No; his conscience tells him that pious ceremonies, without a corresponding purity of mind, are so far from being acceptable to God that they are abomination in his sight.

Indeed devotion, if it consists in no more than bodily worship and the prayers and thanksgivings of our lips, is a solemn mockery

rather than an humble adoration of the Most High, and must be expected to draw down his heaviest vengeance rather than his gracious blessing upon us.

In fine, any instances of piety whose best merit consists in decency of performance may be the piety of scribes and pharisees, but not of Christians.

Another instance wherein the righteousness of Christians is to exceed that of the scribes and pharisees is in the extensiveness of it. Any Christian who is pious upon principle, and whose virtue proceeds from purity of intention, will immediately perceive the necessity of a uniform conduct, and how incumbent it is for a Christian not to act inconsistently, so that one part of his life may not contradict the other. The scribes and pharisees made long prayers, but at the same time they devoured widows' houses. They paid tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, and in this they did well; but then they neglected the weightier matters of the law—judgment, justice, and truth. In short, they were reli-

gious as far as ceremonies and modes of worship were concerned, but neither pious nor honest in their common life.

And here it is that the Christian is required to exceed them. He is commanded to perform every action with the same spirit as he performs his devotions; the glory of God is the end that he proposes in his prayers, and the same sacred purpose is to be the rule of every part of his life. We have an apostolical precept to regulate the most ordinary as well as necessary actions, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God;" and he must be a very loose casuist who can find an exception to this heavenly rule, or point out any actions of a Christian which are not to be tried by it: and whoever thinks that he need only have a view to this sublime end while he is in the immediate act of worshipping, may perhaps lay claim to the righteousness (as they do to the purity) of the scribes and pharisees, but not to that of the disciples of Christ.

The religion which the blessed Jesus instituted was designed to shine forth in the lives



as well as the public worship of professors ; and therefore every one who prays to God with devotion and solemnity at church, and at the same time lives without God every where else, may satisfy himself with the name of Christian, but be assured he has nothing else to boast. He neither feels the power of Christ in his soul, nor has any lot or portion in that glorious inheritance which is prepared for those who love and fear him.

A third instance wherein our righteousness is to exceed that of the scribes and pharisees is, the motive from whence it proceeds. They fasted, they prayed, and gave alms, *to be seen of men* ; and were pious for the sake of that reputation which they gained among their brethren for being so. They made use of their religion to be a cloak to their iniquities : the end of it extended no further than this world, their honour and their interest being the only views they proposed by it ; and therefore of them doth our Saviour justly say, “ Verily, they have their reward.”

But the piety of Christians is founded on a nobler principle, and proceedeth not from a

view of human interest, but from the pure love of God.

This must be the foundation of every holy action and design, if ever we hope to be accepted by God. This love must be the reason of our desire to please him, or that desire can never be fulfilled.

For any exercises of devotion which are performed with another view lose all their excellence: for instance, should we comply with the worship of God because it has the custom and practice of the world to recommend it; should we regulate our actions by the rules of God's holy commandments, lest we should appear scandalous in the eyes of our neighbours; comply with the established modes of worship, and submit to the use of the stated service of God, for honour or profit. Can we lay our hands upon our hearts, and call this religion? Will it be accepted by Him who searcheth the heart, and requires it?

It remains to draw a practical inference from what has been said.

First, we have seen the great exactness and rigour wherewith the scribes and pharisees ad-

hered to all the outward ordinances of the law ; and hence may Christians learn the great veneration and esteem which are due to the institutions of the New Testament. The ordinances of the Jewish church were but types and figures of those of the Christian ; and therefore are we more immediately concerned not to be exceeded by the Jews in the reverence they paid to sacred things.

The scribes and pharisees may in this respect be admitted as examples to us, for they were scrupulous in adhering to every the least jot or ceremony of the law ; and so far their zeal is laudable and recommended to us by our blessed Lord himself, who, speaking of their tithing mint, anise, and cummin, is pleased to say that these things ought to be done, but at the same time the other weightier matters were not to be left undone.

True it is that the inward spirit of Christianity is principally to be regarded, and the greatest danger is that men will trust too much to external duties, even so far as to neglect the religion of the heart, as if we could deceive that Omnipotent Being who dis-

cerneth all the secret springs and motives, the subterfuges and foldings, the thoughts and intentions, of every child of man! We have seen that, strict as the lives and conversation of the scribes and pharisees appeared, they were not accepted for want of sincerity; from which we may learn the great value of uprightness, and should incessantly implore the Almighty God to bestow this grace upon us. The strictest ritual obedience becomes of no effect without it; nay, it is said to be abomination in the sight of God.

Hypocrisy is of all others the most odious sin; its baleful influence extends the farthest, and its poison is noxious enough to blast our best performances. The scribes and pharisees were careful and vigilant in their duty; they forced themselves through the labour and difficulties of heartless religion, and endured the toil and danger of servants—yet were rejected by their Lord and Master, because their services were all performed and undertaken for sinister views. And let it instruct us carefully to try our ways, and accurately examine the recesses of our own hearts, that we may not

fancy ourselves religious, because we are regular in our deportment, and exact in external worship; but sedulously labour to be approved in His sight who judgeth motives, not only that we may escape the tremendous judgments which are pronounced to the scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, and to all who hold the truth in unrighteousness, but be rewarded openly in that great day by our Father who seeth in secret.

## SERMON V.

---

*One thing is needful.* Luke, x. 42.

---

COULD we imagine an intelligent being, entirely a stranger to the state of this world and its inhabitants, to take a view of their various enterprises and employments, and thence conjecture the end of their existence, he surely would conclude that these creatures were designed to be occupied with many things: while he observed not only the difference of the ends which different men were pursuing, but how vast a multitude of objects were successively pursued by almost every person, he fairly might infer that the sons of men were placed upon the earth to gratify their several inclinations either with pleasure, riches, honour, or power.

How astonished would he be to hear their

Creator declare to all without distinction—  
“ One thing is needful ! ” but how much more  
astonished when he knew that this one thing  
needful for men, their one business, the one  
end of their existence, was none of all those  
things which occupied mankind, none of all  
those ends they were pursuing, none of all  
those engagements wherein they were so  
deeply absorbed, which filled their hearts and  
employed their hands—nay, that it was an end  
not only distinct from, but contrary to them  
all ; as contrary as light and darkness, heaven  
and hell, the kingdom of God and that of Satan !

The only thought he could form in their  
favour must be, that they had a surplusage of  
time at their command, and therefore trifled  
a few hours because they were assured of  
thousands of years wherein to work. . . But  
how beyond measure would he be amazed  
when informed that these were creatures  
of a day ; that as they yesterday arose out  
of the dust, so to-morrow they would return  
to it ; that the time allotted for their great  
work was but a span long, a little speck, a  
moment, and yet that they had no manner of

assurance of not being snatched away in the midst of this moment, or indeed at the very commencement of it—when he saw that all men were placed on a narrow, weak, tottering bridge, either end of which was swallowed up in eternity! that the waves and storms that passed over it were continually bearing away one after another in an hour when they expected it not; and that those who yet stood knew not but they should plunge into the great gulf the very next instant, but well knew that if they fell before they had finished the end of their existence they were lost, destroyed, undone—for ever!

How would all utterance, nay, all idea be lost! how would he express, how would he conceive the senselessness, the madness, of those creatures who, being in such a situation, could think of any thing, could speak of any thing else, could do any thing else besides, could find time for any other design or care, but of ensuring—the one thing needful!

It cannot, therefore, be an improper employment,

First, to observe what this one thing is; and,



Secondly, to consider a few of the numerous reasons that prove this to be the one thing needful.

We may first observe what this one thing is, in which many things are comprised; as are all the works of our callings, all that properly belong to our several stations in this world; insomuch that whoever neglects any of these so far neglects the one thing needful: and this indeed can no otherwise be pursued than by performing them in such a manner as in and by every one to advance our great work. Now this great work, this one thing needful, is the renewal of our fallen nature. In the image of God was man created, but a little lower than the angels: his nature was perfect, angelical, divine; he was a dignified image of the God of glory; he bore his stamp on every part of his soul; the brightness of his Creator shone mightily upon him. But sin has now effaced the image of God! He is no longer nearly allied to angels; alas! he is sunk lower than the very beasts of the field! His soul is not only earthly, addicted to covetousness and idolatry—sensual, a lover of pleasure more

than of God; but devilish, inclined to hatred, malice, and revenge! Thus is the mighty fallen! the glory is departed from him; his lustre is swallowed up in utter darkness!

From the glorious liberty in which he was created, he is fallen into the basest bondage. That evil spirit, whose slave he is now become, holds him so fast in prison that he cannot extricate himself. He hath bound him with a thousand chains, even the heavy chains of his own vile affections; for every inordinate appetite, every unholy passion, as it is the express image of the god of this world, so it is the most galling yoke, the most grievous chain, that can bind a free-born spirit; and with these is every child of Adam, every one that is born into this world, so loaded, that he cannot lift up an eye, or raise a thought, to heaven; nay, his whole soul cleaveth to the dust! These chains of darkness, under which we groan do not only hold us in on every side, but they are within us also; they enter into the inmost recesses of our soul, they pierce its very substance. Vile affections are not only so many chains, but likewise so many diseases. Our

nature is distempered as well as enslaved ; “ the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.” Our body, soul, and spirit, are infected, overspread, consumed with the most fatal moral leprosy ; every one of our brutal passions and diabolical tempers, every kind of pride, sensuality, and selfishness, is one of those deadly wounds full of corruption.

To recover our first estate from which we are fallen is the one thing needful : to re-exchange the image of Satan for the image of God, bondage for freedom, sickness for health ! Our one great business is to erase out of our souls the likeness of our destroyer, and to be born again, to be formed anew after the likeness of our Creator. This is our one concern, to shake off this servile yoke, and regain our native liberty ; to cast away every chain, every passion, that does not accord with an angelical nature. The one work we have to do is to return from the gates of death, to have our diseases cured, our wounds healed, and ourselves restored to perfect soundness.

Let us in the second place consider a few of the numberless reasons which prove that this

is the one thing needful, that this alone is to be kept in view, and pursued at all times and in all places; not indeed by neglecting our temporal affairs, but by making them all minister unto it: by so conducting them all, that every step therein may be a step to this higher end. Now that the recovery of the image of God, of this glorious liberty, this perfect restoration, is the one thing needful upon earth, appears first from hence, that the enjoyment of them was the end of our creation; for man was created to love God, and to this end alone, even to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. Love is the very image of God, it is the brightness of his glory. By love, man is not only rendered like him, but in some sense one with him. If any man love God, God loveth him, and maketh his abode with him; he dwelleth in God, and God in him; and he that is thus joined to the Lord is one spirit.

Love is perfect freedom. As there is no fear or pain, so there is no constraint in love. Whoever acts from this principle alone, he doeth whatsoever he will; all his thoughts move spon-

taneously, they follow the bent of his mind, and dwell on the beloved object ; all his words are dictated by his heart, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh ; all his actions are the result of pure choice. Love is the breath of his soul, the full exertion of all his powers, the perfection of all its faculties ; therefore since the enjoyment of these was the one end of our creation, the recovering of them is " the one thing needful."

The same truth appears, secondly, from its being the end of our redemption by Jesus Christ ; of all that our blessed Lord did and suffered for us ; of his incarnation, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Spirit. All these miracles of love were wrought with no other view than to restore us to health and freedom, to happiness and immortality. Thus he himself testifies of the end of his coming into this world : " The Spirit of the Lord is upon me—he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives ;" or, as the prophet expresses it, " to preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken-

hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

For this alone the blessed Saviour lived, that he might remove every spiritual disease from our nature; for this only he died, that he might deliver those who were all their life-time subject to bondage: and it was in pursuance of the very same design that he gave us his merciful law. The end of his command was only our health, liberty, and perfection, or in one comprehensive word, Charity; and the branches of it centre in this one point, our renewal in the love of God; either enjoining what is necessary for our recovery, or forbidding what is obstructive of it; therefore this being the one end of our redemption, as well as our creation, is the one thing needful for us upon earth.

Thirdly, it is the one end of all the dispensations of Providence. Pleasure and pain, health and sickness, riches and poverty, honour and dishonour, friends and enemies, are all bestowed by his unerring wisdom and goodness with a view to this one thing. The will of

God, in allotting us our several portions of all these, is solely for our sanctification ; our recovery from the vile bondage, the love of his creatures, to the free love of our Creator. All his providences, be they mild or severe, point at no other object than this ; they are all designed either to wean us from what is not, or to unite us to what is, worthy our affection. Are they pleasing ? then they are intended to lift our hearts to the Parent of all good. Are they painful ? then they are means of eradicating those passions that forcibly withhold us from him : so that all lead the same way, either directly or indirectly, either by gratitude, or disappointment ; for to those who have ears to hear, every loss, especially of what was nearest and dearest to us, speaks as clearly as if it were an articulate voice from heaven, " Little children, keep yourselves from idols "—every sorrow, every pain, every mortification, " Love not the world, neither the things of the world "—and every pleasure, with a small still voice, " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart."

To the same end are all the internal dis-

pensations of God, all the influences of his Holy Spirit, whether he gives us joy or sorrow of heart, whether he inspires us with vigour and cheerfulness, or permits us to sink into deadness of soul, into dejection and heaviness, it is with the same view; namely, to restore us to health, to liberty, to holiness: these are all designed to heal those inbred diseases of our nature, self-love and the love of the world. They are all given, together with the external dispensation of our daily bread, to enable us to convert them into spiritual nourishment, and to recover his love, which is health to our souls. Therefore the renewal of our natures in this love being not only the one end of our creation and redemption, but likewise of all the providences of God over us, and all the operations of his Spirit in us, it must be, as the eternal wisdom of God hath declared it, "the one thing needful."

How great reason, even in the Christian world, there is to resume the apostle's exhortation, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead?" Hath not Christ given thee light? why then sittest thou in the shadow of



death? What slumber is this which oppresses thee? knowest thou not that one thing is needful? What then are these many things with which thou art encumbered? Why hath any but this great concern the least place in thy thoughts? Is the entertainment of the senses the one thing needful? or the gratifying the imagination with uncommon, or great, or beautiful objects? Our blessed Lord speaketh not thus: he saith not that the one thing is to acquire wealth, or increase what thou hast already; nor to obtain honour, power, rank, or preferment; nor yet to possess a large share of that fairest earthly fruit, learning. No; though any of these may sometimes be conducive to, not one of them is the one thing needful, which simply is to regain an angelical nature; to recover the image wherein we were formed, to be like the Most High! This alone is the one end of our abode on earth; for this alone did the Son of God pour forth his precious blood, that he might form a people to himself, "zealous of good works;" for this alone does his Holy Spirit watch over us, that we, who without this divine influence are not able to

please him, may be unerringly directed to walk in his ways.

One thing we have to do, to press forward to this mark of the prize of the high calling; to emerge out of chains, diseases, death, into liberty, health, and life immortal! Let us well observe that our Lord doth not call this our *chief*, but the one thing, all others being connected with, or quite foreign to the end of life: on this let us fix our single view, our pure unmixed intention, regarding nothing, small or great, but as it has reference to this. We must use many means, but ever let us remember we have but one end; for as while our eye is single our whole body will be full of light, so, should it ever cease to be single, in that moment our whole body would be full of darkness.

Be we then continually watchful over our souls, that there be no duplicity in our intention; be it our one view in all our thoughts and words, and actions, to be partakers of the divine nature, to regain the highest measure possible of faith which works by love, that faith which unites us to God! I say, to regain the *highest measure* possible for us: for who-

ever will plead for any abatement of health, life, and glory? Let us then labour to be perfectly whole, to burst asunder every chain of sin and misery, to attain the fullest conquest over this body of death, the most entire renovation of our natures; knowing this, that when the Son of Man shall send forth his angels to cast the double-minded into outer darkness, then shall the single of heart receive the one thing they sought, even the salvation purchased by the Redeemer, and shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour and glory, adoration and worship, both now and for ever. Amen.

## SERMON VI.

(Preached in America.)

---

*What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*                      John, xiii. 7.

---

**ONE** of the earliest principles in the soul of man is a desire of knowledge. This often acquires considerable strength before reason has shaken off its infant weakness. Indeed it is this which insensibly leads us on to improve and perfect our reason, which by the present satisfaction it affords encourages us to seek, and renders us capable of receiving instruction. So long as this is restricted within proper bounds, and directed to proper objects, there is not in the mind of man a more delightful or more useful inclination; the pleasures it yields are without number; the field of know-

ledge hath no end ; and in almost every part of it springs up some plant not only gratifying to the eye and cheering to the heart, but useful to the life. The desire of knowledge is a means of attaining to the true wisdom, a means to enlighten the conscience and enlarge the capacity, to lead us to see the all-wise, the all-merciful God in each even of these his lower works.

It is true that this source of lasting pleasure may by accident give us much pain, if our desires fix on improper objects—on any of those parts of knowledge which, as they were not designed for man in this lower station, cannot be obtained by him till his removal into another ; or if his desire even of knowing his Creator extend beyond the limits of his capability. He who employs his search even on the ways of the Almighty, and will not be contented till he has found them out to perfection, will not be satisfied on this side of the grave. For what human soul, clogged with this tabernacle of clay, can find out the Eternal to perfection? No, we must believe

what God himself affirms of his own dispensations, “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”

This declaration, though uttered by our blessed Lord upon a particular occasion to one of his disciples, may, if rightly understood and duly remembered, be of great benefit to all Christians. Should a perplexing thought arise in any of our hearts respecting any of the ways of God, or the reasons of them, should our minds be troubled because unable to comprehend them, we may immediately silence them with the reflection—this is an unavoidable evil; what God doeth, “thou knowest not now;” or rather it is no evil at all, for “thou shalt know hereafter.”

Man cannot understand,

First, how the infinite God operates in numberless cases;

Secondly, why things are done by him which he is fully sensible are done.

After illustrating a few instances of our ignorance, I intend, thirdly, to offer some reasons why we may suppose this ignorance to be our

portion, and wherefore the Almighty has been pleased to ordain that, respecting most of his ways, we cannot know them till hereafter.

.. First, we cannot know how it is that the Supreme Governor holds the world in its present state; “how he spreadeth the north over the empty space, and suspendeth the earth upon nothing;”—“how he teacheth the sun his certain seasons, and maketh the moon still to know her going down;” how he sustaineth those other great lights which continually float in the firmament of heaven; how he balanceth them, so that no force can shake them, and so arranges their innumerable armies that every one keeps his appointed station, and constantly runs the appointed race; that though each of them has moved so many thousands of years, with such inconceivable swiftness, yet each preserves its due rank and equal distance from all others; that amidst the variety of their motions there is the utmost regularity; no injury, no confusion, but all is order, harmony, and peace.

It is certain that those who are too wise to

own they know nothing about it will affirm that all this is done by a power unknown to the old philosophers; that this power connects the universe together, and all the hosts of heaven keep their courses because they continually gravitate with such a determinate force towards each other. How clearly do these people explain the ways of God! how satisfactorily do they declare the thing as it is! We allow that all things gravitate with a force proportioned to their quantity of matter. That this is done we know, but we ask how it is done? We inquire what this gravity is? what is this secret chain by which all parts of the universe are so firmly and durably connected? what is the universal spring to which all earth and heaven submit? this attraction, this tendency in every natural body to approach to every other? We know it is the law of nature, we discern it is the hand of Omnipotence, and here our knowledge ends.

Secondly, not that we need ascend to heaven or down to the deep, for instances of the ignorance of man in the ways of God. They are nigh thee even in thy heart, nay, in



the most inconsiderable, the most obvious parts of thy own frame. Who knoweth how thy soul is retained in life? how the Most High God encloseth spirit in matter? how he has so intimately united two substances of natures so totally different? how He who established it at first, still preserves that exact dependence of one on the other? Who knows how the thought of his inmost soul immediately strikes the outward part of this earthly body, and how a consciousness in the mind of having done any thing amiss instantly spreads a blush over the cheek, and a prick of a needle on the hand immediately occasions a painful sensation in the soul? Man is a mystery to himself. That God does work wonderfully within him he knows, but the manner of the operation he cannot know; it is too wonderful for his present capacity. Whether he surveys his hand or heart or head, he sees innumerable footsteps of the Almighty; but vainly does he attempt to trace them to their spring: "clouds and darkness are round about it."

As unsuccessfully may man attempt to search out how this infinite Being operates in the

works of grace. The springs whence we derive spiritual life are at least as unsearchable as those of the natural. That it *is* the Divine Spirit “who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure,” experience and reason and Scripture convince every sincere inquirer; but how he worketh this in us, who shall explain? who can point out the particular methods of divine operation?

This indeed we know, that when the passions are calm, and our souls are tranquil, then chiefly the Spirit of God loves to move upon the face of the waters; yet are we not able to understand how it moves. Darkness is upon the face of the deep; “the wind bloweth,” as our blessed Lord has said, “where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth.”

If there be any particular work of the Holy Spirit which we can less comprehend than the rest, it seems to be his influencing one person in answer to the prayers of another: that he does pour a large measure of his blessed influ-

ence upon us at the request of those in whom he is well pleased, he hath afforded us sufficient ground to believe in several places of Holy Scripture.

It was at the intercession of Moses that the Almighty spared the Israelites when they had made the golden calf, withheld the pestilence which he threatened to inflict when they brought up an evil report of the promised land, and restored Miriam when punished with leprosy.

When the arm of king Jeroboam (which was stretched out to seize a prophet for declaring the judgments of God) was dried up, it was at the prayer of the same prophet he was healed.

When the son of the widow of Sarepta died, Elijah cried unto the Lord, and said, "O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again," and the petition was granted.

The son of the Shunamite was also restored to life at the entreaty of the prophet Elisha; and it was the intercession of Job which ob-

tained pardon from God for his misjudging friends.

The New Testament is also full of instances of the efficacy of prayer, and we are encouraged further by the express declaration of St. James, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;" but how it avails we cannot explain. How the most wise God acts upon us in consequence of the prayers of our friends, the manner of his returning the intercession of the one into the bosom of the other, we cannot know.

Nor yet is the manner whereby God acts in any of these particulars more perfectly unknown to the wisest of men than are the reasons whereon he acts upon others.

To produce a few instances of this truth was the second thing proposed, to mention some things of which we cannot say *why*, though we know they are done.

And first, we cannot say why the Omnipotent God suffered evil to have a place in his creation. Why, he who is so infinitely good himself, who made all things "very good," and who rejoices in the good of all his crea-

tures, permitted what is so entirely contrary to his own nature, and so destructive of his own works. Why is sin, and its attendant pain, permitted to exist in the world?—has been a question ever since the world begun; and the world will probably end before human understandings have answered it with any certainty.

It has indeed been well observed, that all evil is either natural, moral, or penal; that natural evil or pain is no evil at all if it be overbalanced with subsequent pleasure; that moral evil, or sin, cannot possibly befall any one unless those who make it their choice; and that penal evil, or punishment, can only devolve upon such as secure it for their portion, by voluntarily committing sin.

This entirely removes all imputation on the justice and goodness of God, since it never can be proved that it is contrary to either of these attributes to bestow upon his creatures the liberty of embracing either good or evil, to place happiness or misery in their own power, and to give them the choice of life or death.

But still this does not solve the question—*why* an omniscient and merciful God gave them this choice? It is incontrovertible in so doing he did not act contrary to any of his divine attributes; but can we venture to affirm that it would have been contrary to them to have acted otherwise? to have predetermined man to obedience? to have constrained him to be happy, and given him no choice of misery? Perfectly consistent it was with his goodness and justice to set life and death before his creatures; but would it have been inconsistent with either to have permitted them to know only life? Why the supreme Disposer of all things chose one of these methods rather than the other, can blind and feeble man presume to judge? The All Wise could not act without infinite wisdom, however it be hidden from finite comprehension. Man cannot attain to such knowledge, or fathom the councils of the Most High; but doubtless in another state they will be unfolded, and fully justify the ways of God to man.

Nor can we here understand why, among those who choose happiness, the Almighty

makes the difference which we see he does make. Why he appointeth to one ten talents, to another five, to another one ; and that these, if improved, shall bring a proportioned reward. Not that he hath so limited any of his rational creatures, but that each may attain an inconceivable degree of happiness ; and more or less of it every one will attain according to the improvement of talents entrusted to him ; but yet some appear chosen to such honour (as the prophets, apostles, and martyrs) as no others attain ; to such excellence, as even the opportunity of achieving belongeth not.

Thirdly, why the eternal God is pleased to bestow on these persons such a measure of honour, happiness, and virtue, (distributing the ten talents with the grace to improve them,) we can no more resolve, than why he is pleased to inflict such a measure of suffering on others : in the latter case indeed we may sometimes trace the immediate reason, and observe that the particular affliction either is pointed at the particular vice to which such a man naturally inclines, or is conducive to that virtue which

he eminently needs ; but if we move one step beyond this, we are lost again. We cannot explain wherefore it was that such a man was suffered to be naturally inclined to that evil or averse to that good. Or if it should occur, as it sometimes does, that we can assign a reason for any notorious fault in our natural temper, yet we only put off our ignorance one remove, and return to our doubt.

Thus, if we perceive our nature is peculiarly prone to some hateful sin, because there is no other method of bringing us to humility, without which all our actions are displeasing to the God who seeks the humble and contrite spirit, yet the difficulty recurs—Why did the good God permit me to be so prone to pride? And here at least we must stop ; we have only to rest on his good pleasure, and own “that his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out!”

Innumerable are the other instances wherein it is obvious that man knoweth not the ways of God, that he never designed us to be of his council, or privy to the secret springs of his conduct ; why he gives to this man one en-



dowment, to that another ; why he distributes the several blessings, and his Holy Spirit, in such a measure and at such a time ; why—but it is vain to attempt to enumerate all the instances of this one branch of human ignorance, unless we could declare all the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Attempt we rather to search after that part of his ways which is not past finding out, and to inquire, as we proposed to do in the third place, why this ignorance is our portion.

And one great cause why (as we may reasonably suppose) our Heavenly Father permits this cloud to rest upon us, prohibits our knowledge, and displays so small a part of his ways is, that our profound ignorance may teach us the most useful knowledge—humility ;—that, conscious how little we can know of the Most High, we may be the more intent upon knowing ourselves ; that, from a due sense of our utter inability to understand either the manner or reasons of the divine operations, we may seriously apply to what we are able to

understand—the manner and reasons of our own actions. Nor is any thing more suited to give us a just, that is, a mean opinion of ourselves, than to have so many proofs daily before us of the imperfection of our noblest endowments; if reason, boasted reason, be so imperfect, what must be the meaner parts of our frame. If thy understanding, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! By pride, saith the prophet, didst thou, O Lucifer, son of the morning! fall from heaven.

Lest his next race of creatures should also fall from it, the Almighty God particularly guarded them against it. He made them lower than his angels, that, not having the same temptation, too high an opinion of their own perfections, they might continue capable of that glory and honour wherewith he designed to crown them; that he permitted man so strangely to debase all his powers, corrupt his will, and obscure his understanding, that he might withdraw pride from man.

Here then is one wise and merciful reason for the present blindness of our understanding.

that God, by hiding himself from man, might teach him humility, and so conduct him to his Maker. Another cause is, to fulfil his eternal purpose, that man, as long as he continues upon earth, should walk by faith not by sight. The design of our Heavenly Father was not that we should see and know, whether we would or not, that all his ways are wise and good and gracious; but that we should *believe* this, give such an assent as *he has given us power to give or to withhold* (for the power of choice is his gift); and this intention of our Creator is admirably served by the measure of understanding which we now enjoy; it suffices for faith, but not for knowledge; we can believe in God—we cannot see him.

Another reason why we are so little acquainted with his ways, why what the Omnipotent doeth, man cannot know, seems to be alluded to in the text, “but thou shalt know hereafter.” This knowledge, therefore, is denied us on earth, because it is a felicity for heaven. And what a felicity! to have the veil withdrawn at once, and to enjoy the full blaze of Deity! the wisdom, the goodness, the love

of God! Clearly to discern by what means the great Author of this visible world united all its parts together—by what chain the pillars of the earth were upholden, and the armies of the sky supported! In what manner the mysterious union between the body and the soul was effected and maintained, that astonishing correspondence between spirit and matter, of perishable dust and immortal flame! To comprehend how the Holy Ghost, the author of the world of grace, sustained the soul in moral life! How, in answer either to our own prayers or to the prayers of others, his blessed influence, overshadowing us out of the darkness, storm, and confusion of our degraded natures, educed all light, and peace, and order! To comprehend the reasons why sin and pain and misery were permitted to mingle with those works which God himself had pronounced very good!—to perceive what unspeakable blessings owe their being to the curse, even the redemption of man (that greatest instance of the love of God) overbalancing the evils of the fall!—why it was just and right as

well as merciful in God to deal to every man his distinct measure of faith, “and anoint some whom he chose before the world began, with the oil of gladness above their fellows;”—wherefore he distributed to every man his distinct measure of suffering also;—why some were plucked as brands out of the flame, and others sanctified from the womb;—why the several gifts of the Spirit were distributed as they were with respect to kind, degree, time, and persons? What a gratification to a reasonable soul to have such a prospect displayed before him!—to have the eye of the mind opened, strengthened, and cleared, that it may command and enjoy it to the fullest extent! A prospect which we could not see and live, which, imprisoned in this habitation of clay, we could not bear; and which is therefore fitly reserved for that state wherein, being clothed with glory and immortality, we shall be like the angels now in heaven—purified to see our God! Amen.

To Him who dwelleth in the light which no

mortal can approach, whom flesh and blood hath not seen nor can see—to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—the ever-blessed Trinity—one God—be glory and praise, might and majesty, now and for ever!

## SERMON VII.

(Preached at Frederica :—at Savannah :—at Christchurch, Boston.)

---

*He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*

Psalm cxxvi. 6.

**EXPERIENCE** shows us that even they who are Christians indeed, who serve God with all their strength, may go on their way weeping, perhaps for many years, perhaps to the end of this transitory life.

They are followers of him who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and if any man will come after him he must deny himself, and take up his cross; he must suffer with his master, more or less, being like him, to be made perfect through sufferings. For this very cause are these sufferings permitted, to lead

them to higher perfection ; they go on their way weeping, that the good seed they bear may yield them more fruit ; and that good seed (even all those Christian virtues which are perfected by affliction) shall in due time grow up into a plenteous harvest of rest, and joy, and life eternal.

The certainty of this great truth is pointed out to us by the very manner wherein it is revealed. Heaven and earth may, nay must, pass away, but not one tittle of the sacred word of God. As sure as He exists, and is a rewarder of all that diligently seek him, so sure no one virtue of any disciple of Christ, shall in any wise lose its reward. Only let him bear forth this good seed unto the end, and though he may now go on his way weeping, he shall come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him.

I propose briefly to explain, that every virtue is the seed of joy eternal ; an important consideration, which requires your most frequent thought and deepest attention. The time indeed will not permit me to enumerate every Christian virtue, but only those general graces



which we can never regard too highly, humility, faith, hope, and love; yet this is almost the same thing, since these are the common root of each particular virtue, none of which has any value, nor in truth any existence, unless it spring from them. It will therefore be sufficient to show, in few words, that each is the seed of joy; that every one of these graces, although when first sown it may be as small as a grain of mustard seed, yet as it groweth up, shooteth out great branches full of delight and blessedness.

This joy, I therefore call eternal, because the Holy Scriptures assure us that it is the same in kind, though not in degree, with that we shall enjoy in eternity; for it should be well observed, and ever remembered, that heaven is begun upon earth; and accordingly our blessed Saviour often means by the kingdom of heaven that temper of mind which a Christian now enjoys. He begins to enjoy it when he begins to be a Christian, when Christ begins to reign in his soul, is the object of his love, and the principle of his actions; and the more absolute this principle and love are, the

more happiness he enjoys : for as all the poor in spirit, all that believe in God, all that trust in him, and love him, are blessed ; so the greater their humility, faith, hope, and love, the greater is their blessedness : and thus they go on from strength to strength, they go on from one measure of joy to another, till what was sown on earth be removed into a better soil, and grown up to perfection in heaven.

But before this is explained further it may be proper to examine an objection which almost every one is ready to make, and this is, that by this doctrine every Christian is happy ; which is contrary to experience, there being many good Christians who scarcely know what joy means.

I answer, Is that mind truly in them which was in Christ Jesus ? Have they those tempers which he requires ? Are they renewed in humility, faith, hope, and love ? Otherwise they are only nominal Christians, and however unhappy they are it is nothing to the present question.

Supposing they have some degree of these tempers, have they such a degree as they might have ? have they as much as the first Christ-

ians enjoyed? so much as God would give them too, if they would receive it?

If not, let none wonder that a low degree of holiness gives (if any) but a low degree of happiness. If they have a deep humility, a strong faith, a lively hope, and a fervent love, at some seasons, do they not at others so droop and faint in their minds, as to become like common men; if they do, no one can expect their joy should extend further than the cause of it: they cannot be always happy till they are always holy; and when they are always heavenly-minded, then they shall rejoice evermore.

Yet is it most certain, as was before remarked, that till that happy hour when God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, even they who bear forth this seed of joy may go on their way weeping. They may, nay they must, endure affliction, for so did the Captain of their salvation. But it is as certain that a Christian knows how to rejoice, not only after, but *in* tribulation: for as in the laughter of the wicked the heart is sorrowful, so in the tears of the righteous there is joy; he does not wait till his afflictions are overpast, but in every thing giveth thanks; though he cannot but feel when he

suffers pain, yet in the midst of it he can rejoice in the Lord, and possess his soul in such patience and resignation, such a confidence in the love of his heavenly Father, under the most severe dispensations, as shall impart a peace, even at that season, which the world cannot give.

Let us dwell on this point more particularly. The first of all Christian graces, and the foundation of all, is humility ; a deep sense of our spiritual poverty, an experimental knowledge that we are nothing but sin, and deserve nothing but shame ; and a clear sense that we have nothing, and can do nothing—no, not so much as think a good thought, without the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

And is such a virtue as this the seed of joy ? —Yes, as surely as it is the seed of all other virtues, as surely as it is contrary to the pride of fallen nature, which is the source of all torment. No sooner does humility enter a soul, which before was all storm and tempest, than it says to the sea of passion, “ Peace, be still ;” and there is a great calm.

In every branch of humility there is a sweetness not to be uttered : in the entrance into

such a state indeed, there is pain, but it is full of penitent delight; there is mourning united with it, but even that mourning is replete with blessedness. It is health to the soul, it heals while it wounds. It comforts at the same time, and in the same degree, as it softens the heart. Humility not only removes all that swelling anguish with which pride drinks up the spirits, it not only implants consolation wherever it comes, and brings rest to the weary soul, but joy, which increases more and more unto the perfect day.

Humility cannot but lead to faith; a sight of our spiritual diseases induces us to fly to the cure of them. Who can feel himself sick, and not desire to be made whole? What contrite sinner does not rejoice in a Saviour? and the more he rejoices in this unspeakable gift, the more firmly he believes that his Saviour is able and willing to save to the uttermost—able to save all that believe, for he is God! and willing, for he is God manifested in the flesh. Here is joy, which none can divide from faith! joy unspeakable and full of glory.

God! the Lord God! Jehovah! God over

all ! the God to whom all things are possible, hath undertaken the cause of fallen man ! He hath promised, he hath sworn to save ! nay, he hath done more—he hath bowed the heavens and come down, he hath been made man ! he hath lived, and suffered, and died. Jesus Christ hath died to save man ! Tell it out in all lands—let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad ! publish ye, and praise, and say, “This is the victory which overcometh the world—even our faith.” If we can believe, all things are possible to him that believeth ; to him it is easy to rejoice evermore—Yea ! we cannot but rejoice in thy strength, O Lord Christ, and be exceeding glad of thy salvation !

Now if it be so joyful a thing to believe that Christ died to save sinners, what consolation must it be to add to our faith, hope ? to be assured that he died to save us ? If to know that a ransom is paid for fallen man, and a new covenant of mercy given him, be the source of a peace which passeth all understanding, yea, of joy unspeakable and full of glory, how must he rejoice who feels within his own soul that this ransom is paid for him ! whose heart bears

witness that he is within that covenant, and shall find mercy even in the day of vengeance !

If the belief, that all who are faithful servants of their great master have an house eternal in the heavens, be a continual spring of gladness, how shall he sing for joy with whom the Spirit of God bears witness that he is faithful ! who can lay hold of these great and precious promises, whose eye God hath opened to look into eternity, and to take a view of those mansions of glory, into which he knows his blessed Lord is gone before to prepare a place for him !

Such joy have all those that hope in God, and the stronger their hope the greater it is : but this is not all ; for hope leads to love, and in this love happiness is complete.

Very excellent things are spoken of this happiness which flows from loving God ; whoever possesses it feels more than ever can be spoken, even if he spoke with the tongue of men and angels. It is what Scripture terms the hidden manna, the inexpressible sweetness whereof none can conceive but he that partakes of it ; but some little imperfect knowledge may be

attained from what appears in outward exercises of it.

Not to insist on the pleasure which the man feels who loves his God, in manifesting love to his neighbour for God's sake, how does he rejoice whenever he has an opportunity of pouring out his heart before him! How is his soul satisfied when his mouth praiseth him with joyful lips! How does it increase when he joins with the congregation of the faithful in prayer and thanksgiving! He needeth not the exhortation of man, nor even the *command* of his Creator, to drag him to the house of prayer: he needeth not be reminded that if he forbears assembling himself with the people of God, as the manner of most is, he casts himself out of the congregation of saints, he renounces the privileges of his baptism, casts himself out of the sanctuary, and excommunicates himself from the body of Christ. No, he is glad when they say unto him, "Let us go into the house of the Lord;" but his joy overflows all bounds when, in the memory of him whom his soul loveth, he eateth the living bread which came



down from heaven, and drinketh the cup of salvation.

Lo, thus is the man blessed that feareth the Lord! that beareth forth good seed! these sheaves shall he bring home in this life, however he may now go on his way weeping.

These are the first fruits which he shall receive even here, but the harvest is not yet: he as yet knows and loves his God only in part, therefore enjoys him in part only; but the hour approaches when that which is in part shall be done away: yet a little while and he shall come again with fulness of joy to reap his entire harvest. Behold, "One standeth at the door" who will complete what he hath begun; who shall ripen the seeds of grace into glory, and, instead of the dew of heaven, which now refreshes his spirit, will give him rivers of pleasure for evermore! Amen.

## SERMON VIII.

(Preached at Frederica, in the island of St. Simon's, Georgia, on arrival; March, 1736.)

---

*The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.*

Matt. vi. 22, 23.

---

**T**HE good providence of God hath at length brought you to the haven where you desired to be. This is the time which you so wished to find—this is the place you have so longed to arrive at. What then ought to be your thoughts, your designs, your resolutions, now the Almighty God hath granted your heart's desire? Consider well what ought to be your conduct; now choose whether you will serve God or not: but consider that if you do serve him, you must do it with all your mind; that no man

can serve two masters, for ye cannot serve God and Mammon; either you must give to God your whole heart, or none. He cannot, will not, have a divided heart; either wholly lay aside the thoughts of pleasing him, and choose another master, or let the pleasing him be your one aim in all your thoughts, all your words, and all your actions. Believe our Lord himself, you can find no middle way: "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light: but if thine eye be not single, but evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness."

I am persuaded there is not one of you here present that will not earnestly attend while, in the name of that God who hath hitherto defended us, and is now present with us, I

First briefly explain these important words of our Lord, and

Secondly apply them to the present circumstances.

And first, may the God who spoke them enable me so to explain them, that the meaning may sink deep into your hearts!

"The light of the body is the eye;" that is,

the intention is to the soul what the eye is to the body. As every part of the body is directed by the eye, so every power of the soul is in all its movements directed by the intention !

As every turn of the foot or hand depends upon and is governed by the eye, so on the eye of the mind depends every deliberate movement of the understanding and the affections, and consequently of whatever depends upon these, as do most of our words and actions. If therefore thine eye be single, that is, if thy intention be not divided into two ends—if in all thy thoughts, words, and works, thou hast only one view, namely, to serve and please God, thy whole body shall be full of light ; this single intention will be a light in all thy paths ; all darkness and doubt will vanish before it, all will be plain before thy face ; thou wilt clearly see the way wherein thou shouldest go, and steadily walk therein.

But if thine eye be evil, if thy intention be not single, if thou hast a divided aim, if besides that of pleasing God thou hast a desire to please thyself, to do thy own will—if thou aimest at any thing but the one thing need-

ful, namely, a recovery of the image of God in thy soul, thy whole body shall be full of darkness: thou wilt see no light which way soever thou turnest thyself; never wilt thou be free from doubt and perplexity, never out of uncertainty and entanglement.

As thou art continually aiming at what cannot be achieved, thou wilt be continually disappointed. The thick darkness of ignorance, and guilt, and misery, will gather around thee more and more, nor wilt thou be able while encompassed with such a cloud, ever to recover the way of light and peace.

The sum is this: as long as thou hast but one end in all thy thoughts, and words, and actions, to please God, or, which is the same thing, to improve in his ways of holiness, in the love of God, and of thy neighbour, so long shalt thou clearly perceive what is conducive to it. Thy God, whom thou servest, shall so tenderly watch over thee, that light, and love, and peace, shall guide all thy ways, and shine upon all thy paths; but no sooner shalt thou divide thy heart, and aim at any other end but holiness, than the light from which thou turnest

away being withdrawn, thou shalt not know whither thou goest : ignorance, sin, and misery, shall overspread thee, till thou fallest into utter darkness.

Secondly, to apply these words to your present circumstances was the next thing proposed ; in order to do which more effectually, I shall, by the assistance of God, give you some directions concerning a single intention, and exhort you to practise them.

I would not willingly believe that any of you need to be directed to have a single eye in your religious exercises. To aim at the favour or praise of men, or indeed any thing beside the pleasing God, in sacrament, prayer, or any duty of the like nature, is such an affront both to God and man, that we should be very cautious of charging any one with it, even in our heart. It may be enough, therefore, barely to observe, that there is no name sufficiently expressive of the folly of those hypocrites who in any of these solemn offices have any other view than to please God and save their own souls.

But you are not, perhaps, so well aware that the same singleness of intention is full as neces-

easy in every part of business as it is in your devotions ; yet this is the very truth. Unless your single view be to please God, and to be upright before him, the most lawful business becomes unsanctified ; for it is no more allowed a Christian to work, than it is to pray, with any other intention ; and a mixture of impure motives does as much pollute our employments as it does our prayers.

Every thing that proceeds from, and is suitable to, this intention, is holy, just, and good ; and every thing which does not proceed from an upright heart and single eye is so far evil and unholy.

This, therefore, is the second direction I would give—to preserve a single intention in all your business, which indeed converts it into religion, which ennobles every employment, and renders the meanest offices of life a reasonable sacrifice, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Nor is a single eye less essential in our refreshments than in our occupations and devotions, as every creature of God is good, if it be sanctified by the Spirit of God and by prayer.

Without this sort of prayer, at least an *intention to please him* by using it, no creature is good, nor can be used without injury to ourselves; and lest we should imagine that meats and drinks were too little and insignificant matters for the Almighty to regard, he has been graciously pleased to remove this supposition, by giving you a third direction in express words by his apostle, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

*Whatever ye do*:—this plainly comprises our recreations as well as refreshments; a fourth direction therefore equally important is, let the same pure intention be preserved in these likewise. It is his will that you should use exercise for your health, and delight your eyes with the works of nature and wonders of creation, in such a measure and manner as will prepare you for business or devotion; so far, therefore, as your present state renders them necessary, to this end you are to use them, and no other.

One direction more is important before I close this head, and that is, that you, above all



others, are required to keep a single eye in your conversations. Whether devotion or business be the subject, or whether you converse for social enjoyment and recreation, in whatever case, you are enjoined to aim at the glory of God. Any other motive is evil, and comes from evil: it is an idle word, or conversation, rather, as the term should be translated; and of every such idle word, our Lord plainly tells us, we shall give an account at the day of judgment.

I have now laid before you, in the plainest manner I was able, the directions wherein this single intention must be observed; nothing remains but to exhort you instantly, zealously, and diligently, to practise them.

The God of your fathers hath lately given you a most gracious testimony that he hath not forsaken you or your children. Your eyes have seen that "his ears are not heavy that they should not hear, neither his hand shortened that it cannot save." You have cried unto him in your trouble, and he hath delivered you out of your distress. He hath led you through the terrors of the great deep; he there

made bare his mighty arm before you—at his word the stormy wind arose and lifted up the waves thereof—we reeled to and fro, and staggered like drunken men, and were at our wits' end, when he made the storm to cease so that the waves thereof were still. He hath prepared a table for you in the way wherein you went; even there, with corn and wine hath he sustained you. Some of you he hath raised from sickness, to some he hath forbidden sickness to approach; to all of you, who allowed spiritual blessings to be blessings, he hath afforded them. Yea in these he hath been found of them who asked them not; he hath spoken to the hearts even of some who were unmindful of his mercies; and now “he hath brought you to the haven where ye would be.” What reward then will ye give unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto you? Love him with all your hearts, serve him with all your strength, forget the things which are behind—pleasures, riches, honours—in a word, whatever does not lead to God.

Behold all things about you are become new,

be ye likewise new creatures. From this hour let your eye be single. Whatever ye speak, or think, or do, let God be your aim, and God alone. Let your great end be to please him, in all your business, your refreshments, your recreations, your converse, as well as in religious duties.—Let this be your one design.

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Have one intention, one desire, one hope, even that the God whom ye worship may be your God, and your All, in time and in eternity!

O be not of a double mind, think of nothing else, seek nothing else—to love God and be beloved by him is enough!

Fix your eyes upon this one point, and your whole soul shall be full of light! God will continually lift up the light of his countenance upon you, his Holy Spirit shall dwell in you, and shine more and more unto the perfect day. He shall purify your hearts by faith from every earthly thought and unholy affection; he shall establish your souls with so lively a hope of his favour, as already lays hold on the prize of your high calling; he shall fill you with peace,

and joy, and love—love, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person—love which never ceaseth, never faileth, but still extends its vivifying flame, still goeth on conquering and to conquer, till what was a weak, blind, wavering, sinful creature shall be filled with all the fulness of God, and worship in his presence when time shall be no more!

## SERMON IX.

(Preached on board the London Galley, between Charles Town  
and Boston.)

---

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy  
heart, and with all thy soul, and with all  
thy mind, and with all thy strength.*

Mark, xii. 30.

---

**W**HEN God had formed man out of the dust, and breathed into him the breath of life, when he had stamped his own image and superscription upon him, in his understanding, will, and affections, he gave him a law, even to love Him in whose image he was made; and love, the one thing which his Creator required in return for all his benefits, he therefore required, because it was the one thing needful to perfect the happiness of his creature.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” was the whole of that law which God enjoined to man

in his original state ; but when he had wilfully degraded himself from that state of happiness and perfection, by transgressing the single prohibition which was appointed for the *test* of his love, a more particular law became needful for a remedy of those many inventions he had found out, whereby, being alienated from the love of God, he was enslaved to the love of his creatures, and consequently to error and vice, to shame and to misery.

A more particular law was accordingly given him, by the rules whereof he was fully apprised of every avenue at which sin and pain might break in upon his soul. By this he was also directed to those several means which his merciful Creator had appointed for the renewal of his nature ; and to complete its use, (till his nature was restored to the image of Him who created him,) it pointed out all those thoughts, and words, and works, by so many express injunctions, which the love of God (when that was the spring of his soul) produced without any injunction.

Yet we may easily perceive that, even in this state of man, love is still the fulfilling of the law ; of every law which hath proceeded out

of the mouth of God, at sundry times and in divers places, and particularly of that which in these last days he hath given us by his Son. Love is the end of every commandment of Christ, all of which, from the least even to the greatest, are given to man, not for his own sake, but purely in order to this. The negative commands, what are they, but so many cautions against what estranges us from the love of God? and the positive either enjoin the use of means of grace, which are only so many means of love, or the practice of those particular virtues which are the genuine proofs of love, and the steps whereby we ascend from strength to strength towards a perfect obedience of this first and greatest commandment—that commandment which contains all, preceded all, and which shall remain when all the rest are done away; “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.”

I shall endeavour to lay down, First, a plain sense of this commandment;

Secondly, to prove this sense to be the true one; and,

Thirdly, to answer the grand objection against it.

First, I am to lay down a plain sense of this commandment.

The love of God may be taken in various senses: first, as it implies obedience to him.— Thus St. John: “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments;” and such a metonymy, or putting the cause for the effect, frequently occurs in the Sacred Writings, whereby, as the love of Him is placed for outward obedience, of which it is the vital principle, so the fear of God is said to be the departure from evil, which is the necessary consequence of it. By the same figure, the love of God has been sometimes taken for a desire of enjoying his presence; for this immediately flows from love, and increases in the same proportion with it: whereas some eminent men have unwarily confounded the stream with the fountain, and have improperly termed the desire of enjoying God, love of desire, as if love and desire were all one; but desire is as essentially distinct from the love that produces it, as is any fruit from the tree upon which it grows.



Love itself is, by the common consent of mankind, and agreeably to universal experience, divided into love of complacency or delight, and love of gratitude or benevolence: and accordingly, love of God may be divided into love of delight and love of gratitude; the one regarding what he is in himself, the other what he is to us. The boundless perfections of his nature are an eternal ground of delight to every creature capable of apprehending them, and the numberless exertions of all those perfections on our behalf lay the strongest claim to our gratitude. In the former sense, every reasonable creature is to love God, because his power, wisdom, yea, and his goodness, are infinite: in the latter, "We love Him (says the apostle) because He first loved us." When these fountains have once united their streams, they flow with redoubled violence, and bear the Christian strongly forward to please and obey the All-merciful, and to be made one with God the All-perfect; to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength.

As to the measure of love prescribed in the

words, all commentators agree that they mean at least thus much—we must not love any thing more than God; we may not love the creature above the Creator; nay, that we must not love any thing so much as Him—that he claims of us a love of pre-eminence; that we must reserve for him the highest seat in our hearts, the largest and choicest share of our affection. They are all likewise agreed that we may entertain no love which is contrary to the love of Him; that whatever affection we find, or have reason to suspect, will either prevent the kindling of the divine flame, or quench it when kindled, or any way obstruct its increase, or diminish its heat or brightness—to that affection we must not give place, no, not for a moment, but immediately resist it with all our might.

But we must rise higher than this; or we shall never attain the plain sense of the command, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength;” which imports in ordinary construction (to use the words of a great master of reason as well

as devotion), "that we love God, not only with the highest and best, but with the whole of our affection—that we love him not only with every capacity, passion, and faculty, with the understanding, will, and affections, but with every degree of every power, with all the latitude of our will, with all the whole possibility of our souls; that we devote to him, not only the highest degree of our love, but every degree of it; in one word, that God be not only the principal, but the only object of our love." (Norris's Sermons, vol. iii. p. 7.)

Not that the Almighty is so to be the only object of our love, as to exclude his creatures from a subordinate share of it. "The Lord rejoiceth in his works:" consequently man, made after his likeness, not only may, but ought to imitate him therein, and with pleasure to own "that they are very good;" nay, the love of God constraineth those in whose hearts it is shed abroad to love what bears his image, and we cannot suppose any love forbidden by God which necessarily flows from the love of him.

And even that love of the creatures which does not flow from the love of God, if it leads

to him, is accepted. For this end hath he given us them to enjoy, that by these steps we may ascend to higher enjoyments; therefore, whatever love tends to the love of God is no more forbidden than what flows from it.

Yet further: there are many of the works of his hands which God expressly commands us to love, and that, not only with a love of benevolence, but of complacency: for such surely is natural affection; such is that tenderest of all passions towards our fellow-creatures, which our blessed Redeemer does not disdain to compare to the love between himself and his church; and such is the delight which we ought to have in the saints that are upon the earth, and in those that excel in virtue. The contrary opinion, that we are forbid to love any creature in any degree, supposes the all-knowing God to command our love of himself, and yet to prohibit the immediate necessary effect of it.

It charges the All-wise with enjoining the end, and in that very injunction forbidding the means; it blasphemes his most holy and perfect law, as notoriously contradicting itself,

as requiring elsewhere what was absolutely condemned in the very first commandment of it. This, therefore, duly considered, the sense of that command is easily resolved into this—Thou shalt *so* love the Lord thy God with all thy powers, and with the whole force of all, as ever to remember that thou art bound, yea, by this very law, to obey him whom thou lovest; and therefore to love those things which he commands thee to love so far as he commands it.

Secondly, to cherish that love which is the necessary effect of thus loving the Lord thy God, viz. the love of those men whom he has created, particularly those who are renewed after his image, in righteousness and true holiness; and,

Thirdly, to use all the means which reason and experience recommend as conducive to this great end, especially to love all his creatures so far as it tends to the love of thy Creator. Indeed the third rule includes both the preceding, seeing that all obedience to God tends to the love of him, and every other fruit of divine love increases that love from which it sprung. The full sense of the first commandment is therefore contained in this single sentence—

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God alone for his own sake, and all things beside only so far as they tend to him.

That this is the mark towards which we are all to press if we would attain the prize of our high calling; that none can attain it unless they press toward this mark, according to the several abilities which God hath given them; that this plain sense of the great commandment is the true one, I am in the second place to show, first from the Holy Scriptures, secondly from reason.

From every part of the Holy Scriptures, it appears that love is the proper worship of a reasonable nature. To go no further than the words immediately preceding the text, "Hear, O Israel (said our Divine Teacher); the Lord thy God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God." Thou shalt love Him—why? because He is *the Lord thy God*; and as such has a just claim to thy love; because love is the worship due to thy God; because it is the proper homage of a rational being to his Creator. "Thinkest thou that he will eat bulls' flesh, and drink the blood of goats? Offer unto

thy God thanksgivings, and pay thy heart to the Most Highest." Without this he will not be pleased, though thou shouldst give him thousands of rams, or all thy substance to the poor. But with love every sacrifice is accepted, with this He ever is well pleased. Hear, O Israel, God is thy Lord! therefore shalt thou worship him, and all worship but love is abomination before him.

Therefore, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;" thou shalt not divide thy heart; he has the right to it all; thou mayest not alienate any part of it; reserve for him not the largest share, but the whole of thy affections; hadst thou more lords thou mightest have more loves than one, but if thou hast no other God, thou canst have no other love. It is written, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Behold, love is the worship of thy Lord, this alone is his reasonable service; therefore, thou shalt delight in the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

What wonder is it then, that the essential wisdom of the Father knew no mean between

a single and an evil eye! That his inspired apostle exclaims with such vehemence of affection, "Purify your hearts, ye double-minded;" that his beloved disciple, after "This is the true God," immediately subjoins, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." From what idols and what idolatry we are to keep ourselves, he elsewhere explicitly declares in those well known words, "Love not the world, neither the things of the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Were any further proof from the Holy Scriptures required, let us hear St. Paul: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." It is here required that, whatever use we make of any power which God hath bestowed on us, whatever act of any faculty we exert, all should tend to the glory—the love of God; and it is enjoined expressly. We need not argue from a parity of reason, "whether ye eat or drink," therefore, whether ye rejoice or love; we need not argue from the less to the greater; if every bodily action, which at best profiteth but little, how much more is every movement of our soul to be



subordinated to the end of our being?—No, we have yet a more certain word of direction; the very terms are, “whatever ye do.” This commandment indeed is exceedingly wide; not a word of our tongue, not a thought of our heart, can escape it: do ye act, do ye speak, do ye reason, do ye love? do all to the glory of God.

It is true that, if the literal sense of these Scriptures were absurd, and apparently contrary to reason, we should be obliged not to interpret them according to the letter, but to seek for a looser meaning: to guard those, therefore, who desire to love God, even as he requires, from this specious pretence for idolatry, I proceed to show that this very sense is not contrary, but agreeable to the strictest reason. And how reasonable it is, so to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our strength, as to love nothing else but for his sake and in subordination to the love of him, may appear,

First, from the general acknowledgment of all men, that we ought to love nothing above God. This is granted to be of the last concern; all men confess that on this eternity depends.

Reason, therefore, must direct us to ensure this point, to risk no hazard of so mighty a stake; whatever we do, to secure from all possible danger our passage into a happy futurity. But this cannot be done while we entertain any love insubordinate to the love of God; for while we love any object without reference to Him, we are never certain that we shall not love it above him. So long as the very disease of our nature is the loving the creature for its own sake; so long as this love so imperceptibly steals upon us, that it is impossible to fix its bounds and to say, "Hitherto shalt thou go and no further;" it is equally impossible that we should be safe from loving it more than God.

If reason then prohibits our running the least hazard of loving any thing more than God, and if we must be in imminent danger of doing so, while we love any thing without reference to him, then reason, as well as the Holy Scriptures, requires that we should so love God with all our hearts, as to love nothing but for his sake, and in subordination to the love of him.

The same truth may be evidently inferred from that further concession made by all men, "that we may not entertain any love which is contrary to, or subversive of, the love of God—which does, directly or remotely tend to it;" for all love which does either, obstructs it. If it does not lessen what we have already attained, it prevents our attaining what we otherwise might attain; for the force of a divided, can never be equal to a united heart; nor is it possible that a part of our strength should carry us so far as the whole.

But this is not the heaviest charge against that love of the creature which is not conducive to the love of God. No, it is not only obstructive, but subversive of it. They are inconsistent and incompatible. Many loves indeed may consist in the same heart, so they be all subordinate to one; but two ultimate loves are as flat a contradiction as two firsts and two lasts: so that when the son of Sirach says, "Woe be the fearful hearts and faint hands, and the sinner which goeth two ways," he can only mean, either he that flatters himself he goes both towards God and towards his idol;

or rather that is unstable in his ways, sometimes walking in one, sometimes in the other. That this is frequently our own unhappy case, experience is sufficient to prove; for not the Almighty himself can make it possible to walk in two contrary ways at the same time. All our habitual love must at any one time terminate either in God or in some of his creatures, and if it terminates in him, then it does not in them; if in them, not in him.

We cannot therefore have two ultimate loves; and by uncontrovertible consequence, when we have any ultimate love but that of God, the love of God is not in us. Nor can it be affirmed with truth, that there may exist an insubordinate which is not an ultimate love; for as every end which is subordinate to no other is itself an ultimate end, so every love which is subordinate is not an ultimate end: ultimate and subordinate being contradictory terms, between which there is no mean.

But who is this, touching whom we thus coldly debate whether he should wholly possess or only share our affection? Is it not the

Lord—our God! the all-sufficient! the all-perfect? In whom are hid all the treasures of loveliness, of goodness, of felicity? Is it not He of whose wisdom, of whose bounty, of whose mercies, there is no number? and are we afraid of loving Him too much! with too fervent, too entire an affection?

Hath the love of God towards us been restrained? hath he set any bounds to this ocean? Who is He that hath raised us from the dust? who breathed into us these living souls? who endowed us with the capabilities of enjoyment in both worlds? who upholdeth us with the word of his power? who protects us by his gracious providence? who redeemed us by the blood of his Son? who sanctifies us by the graces of his Holy Spirit?

Oh God! are the creatures of thy hand, the purchase of our Blessed Redeemer, disputing whether they may not love thee too much? whether thou art worthy of all their affection? Does not the essential loveliness of thy nature deserve, not only all, but infinitely more than such finite creatures can offer! Is not our whole affection immeasurably less than

the least of thy mercies! Or, if the whole mite of our love could repay those we have already received, is thine arm shortened? Is not the omnipotent God able—is he not willing—nay, has he not sworn, to render us a thousand fold for every particle of love we give him, throughout a blissful eternity? Can we withhold from Him one atom from the whole mass without tearing a star from our own crown? and shall it be thought unreasonable that he should demand the whole? that he should require all our love? Yea! worthy art thou, O Lord, of all the love of all the creatures thou hast made! especially of those whom Thou hast redeemed! whom Thou hast guided by thy council, and wilt hereafter receive into glory!

The grand objection which has been frequently made against this sense of the great commandment (to which most others are easily reducible); and which I proposed to consider in the third place, is this, “That did it oblige us so to love God with all our heart as to love nothing but for his sake, and in order to the love of Him, such an obligation would be destructive

of that happiness which religion was designed to establish ; it would reduce us to a gloomy and melancholy state, and make the Christian of a sad countenance ; deprive us of all the innocent pleasures of life, and reduce our enjoyments to so narrow a compass, that they would not counterbalance our pains, and support us under the evils to which we are now exposed, so that “if only in this life (even without the persecutions of primitive ages) there were hope, we should be of all men the most miserable.”

I shall reply first to the particular branches of this objection, and then in general to the whole.

With regard to the first, be it observed, that the happiness whereof it supposes the entire love of God to be destructive is a happiness that is to result from an enjoyment of the creatures not referred to the great Creator, that is, it is such a happiness as never did, nor ever will exist. “That this happiness is not, cannot be found in any creatures (to use the words of the above-cited author), is obvious from experience, from the vanity which we

find in all things, and from the restlessness and desire of change which is consequent upon it: we try one thing after another, as the searching bee wanders from flower to flower, but go off from every one with disappointment and a deluded expectation. Though almost every thing promises, nothing answers; and even the succession of new enjoyments (the best resource we have for the emptiness of each) amuses but does not satisfy; a glorious happiness this! vexation, disappointment, and loss! and of this happiness, it must be confessed, the love of God is absolutely destructive."

But does it not render men gloomy and melancholy, by depriving them of the innocent pleasures of life? They who speak thus seem not to be aware how easy it is to produce a cloud of witnesses, and those heathens as well as Christians, who, though they allow there are a thousand sorts of pleasure, which, considered with regard to the whole species, are neither good nor bad, yet utterly deny that any individual pleasure is barely innocent. But we need not pagan testimonies, since plain reason is sufficient to show that this expression can



never be used with propriety. It must import either too much or too little; for every pleasure, weighed with the circumstances that attend it, is either more or less than innocent. If it tends to the love of God it is more; if it does not, it is less. Pleasures of all sorts used in that proportion wherein they enliven and strengthen our minds, and render us more fit for discharging the duties of our responsive stations, deserve a better title than that of innocent; they are virtuous and rewardable; and pleasure of any sort, used in any other proportion deserves not so good an epithet, as implying a sinful and punishable waste of time and other talents which God hath lent us. If these be the innocent pleasures which are meant in the objection, we own that the love of God does destroy them; but it deprives us of none which in any way conduce to that even cheerfulness, which is both the parent and daughter of divine love, and the life of virtue and the beauty of holiness.

The clearness and strength of reason with which one of our most celebrated divines (Young's Sermons, ii. 184) confirms this im-

portant truth, will excuse the repetition of his words.

Some of the heathen philosophers were of opinion that no actions (whether pleasing or not) are indifferent, but that all are positively good, or evil; whereby they meant, not that no actions are indifferent in their own nature, but that no action is indifferent in fact—in fact, I say, for in this state, actions (beside their formal essence) include the end and intention of the actor: and in this sense they affirmed that a good man made all his indifferent actions good, and on the contrary, a bad man made all his indifferent actions evil; for the pious heathens laid down this for a rule, that every man ought to lay down a certain general purpose for his actions, viz. to act agreeably to right reason, and while he fixed his eye upon this end, so long all his actions, even those which were in themselves indifferent, were rendered wise and good; but on the contrary, while no purpose was fixed, all the actions of man, however indifferent in their own nature, became loose, irrational, and evil. And thus St. Paul more clearly tells us,

that every Christian ought to establish in his mind a general purpose to which every action should be directed, "Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." This is an aim that will sanctify every act, though in itself indifferent; but as long as we have no regard to this general end, all the mass of our indifferent actions become a profane waste of our precious time, which the Almighty assigned us for better uses, *i. e.* to devote and give it back again to himself. We should, therefore, often put this question to our soul—

*Dic anima, quo tendis? et in quod dirigis arcum?*

'Say, my soul, whither aimest thou? and whither tends *this* action?' Hast thou the glory of God in view? This kind of reflection will consecrate the soul in all she does, and make every natural turn into a religious act, and lead us to meet our God in every circumstance and event, and converse with his wisdom, goodness, and providence in our walks, in our business, at our table, in our lying down and at our rising up: in fine, it will render us

more pious towards God at our work, than we can be without it at our prayers."

As to the last part of this objection, that such a love of God would reduce our enjoyments to so narrow a compass that they would not counter-balance our pains and support us under the evils to which we are now exposed, I answer, it never was designed they should: God hath provided far better supports for us than such feeble aids. And in fact, who is he whom these did ever support under agonizing pain, or heavy sorrow? for whom did creature comforts ever suffice or even cheer, when God wrote bitter things against him? when the waters came in, even to his soul, and the floods of trouble poured over him? Not one, since the world began; "miserable comforters are ye all," utterly unable to heal the broken in heart—unfit medicines for the chamber of sickness—inefficient cordials for the bed of death!

I come now to the direct and adequate answer to all the parts of this well-known objection. The entire love of God, though it does exclude all such enjoyments of his creatures as neither directly nor remotely con-

duces to our enjoying our Creator ; though it does especially forbid, and effectually prevent our leaning on those broken reeds when affliction presses down our soul ; and though it does set us above what are sometimes mis-called innocent pleasures ; that is, vain, unnecessary, trifling, useless, enjoyments ; yet it is in no wise destructive of that happiness which our blessed religion was designed to promote ; so far from it, that love, entire love, is the point wherein all the lines of our holy religion centre. This is the great happiness which the great Author of it lived and died to establish ; and a happiness it is, worthy of the most high God ! worthy of infinite goodness and infinite wisdom to bestow ! a happiness not built on imagination, but real, and rational ; a happiness that does not play before our eyes at a distance, and vanish when we attempt to grasp it, but such as will endure the closest inspection, and the more it is tried it will delight the more. In the happiness of love there is no vanity, neither any vexation of spirit : no delusion, no disappointment is here : peace, joy, and hope, ever dwell with love ; the man who loves God

feels that God hath given him all things richly to enjoy ; and he surveys with joy all the creatures which God hath made. Love increases both the number of his delights, and the weight of them, a thousand fold, for in every creature he sees as in a glass the glory of his great Creator ; and while every thing reflects to his enlightened eye the image of Him whom his soul loveth, the sense of that divine presence, over and above the delight which he experiences in common with other men, imparts such a vital joy and gladness to his heart, that, were *eternity* added to it, it would be heaven !

Here then is the sufficient, and the only sufficient support under all the evils of life.—Evils ? nothing is an evil to him who loves God ; all things to him are very good, for each and all are alike under the direction of his heavenly Father, and must work together for his good. He has but one desire—to delight in God ; and God hath given him the desire of his heart : and while his spirit cleaves steadfastly to him, he is safe from the power of evil. Indeed if his heart were not

M

wholly with God, as many things as he loved besides him, so many ways would he live open to disappointment, and fear, and grief, and misery. But so long as he has one object of his love, and regards all things else only as they minister unto it, his heart standeth fast; for he is assured that neither life nor death, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate him from the love of God.

I shall conclude in the words of that excellent man above cited, who so well practised what he taught, “Ye have heard what is the full and true extent of divine love, and the full and true import of the great commandment—a commandment worthy of Him that gave it, and worthy of the solemn mark of attention wherewith it was more than once delivered: “Hear, O Israel!” and let all the whole creation hear,—and silently and reverently attend to this great law, which (lest any should fancy himself himself unconcerned in it) expressly is directed to every creature; “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all

thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

The language of the great God to every rational creature is, "My son, give me thy heart," for it was I that made it; it was I who gave it thee, it was I who bestowed its vital motion, and that for no other end but to direct and incline it towards myself. I only am thy true essential good: in me alone canst thou find rest for thy soul; all the springs of happiness are in me. Therefore, my son, give me thy heart; I alone merit, I alone can reward thy love; let none have any share in this supreme affection, but devote it all to me thy God. With angels, therefore, and archangels, and all the company of heaven, having unclasped our hold from the inefficient creation, let us love the Lord our God, and him alone; let him not divide with the creature, (oh how unfit a rival for so divine a guest!) but let him reign an absolute monarch in the hearts he has formed for himself. Yea, let us love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul, and with all our strength!



Unto God the Father who first loved us, and made us accepted in the Beloved—unto God the Son who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood—unto God the Holy Ghost who sheddeth the love of God in our hearts, be all love, and all glory, and all adoration, for time and for eternity! Amen.

## SERMON X.

(Preached at Islington Church, London; 1738.)

*Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy.*

Exodus, xx. 8.

“**T**HAT the Sabbath was not ordained in the beginning of the world, nor ever observed from the creation till the time of Moses; that being given by Moses to the Jews, it was not observed as a moral precept, but, like other ceremonies, was sometimes kept and sometimes not, as public or private business might occur; that lastly, it was for ever repealed at the destruction of the temple:”—such are the assertions of those who would so remember the sabbath as not to keep it holy at all.

In answer to so much of these objections as seem to require an answer, and to the conclusions drawn from them, I shall endeavour to show,

First, that the command for keeping the sabbath holy was given for wise ends, by such an authority as none but the same which gave can repeal it ;

Secondly, that it has not been repealed by this authority, as the ends for which it was given are still in force ; and,

Thirdly, what that keeping the sabbath holy is, by which we obey this command, and answer the ends of it.

First.—The command of keeping the sabbath holy was given for wise ends, by such an authority that none but the same which gave can repeal it. I dispute not here whether or not this command was given to Adam, or observed before Moses ; nor yet whether we are to keep the sabbath upon the seventh day, as was the practice of the Jews ; or on the first day of the week, according to the usage of the Christian church from our blessed Lord's resurrection to the present times ; my inquiry is this, What is the authority which commands us to keep one day in seven holy ? and what were the chief ends for which this command was given ?

The authority by which it was given was the authority of God : it was the supreme governor of the universe, who from the holy place of Sinai spake all those laws, among which was, "Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy."

He it was, who declared again and again, "Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep (Exodus xxxi. 13, 14) :—it is holy unto you ; every one that defileth it shall be put to death."

Now who but the Almighty God hath power to repeal what the Almighty God hath once established ? seeing therefore that it was he who established this law, none but himself has power to repeal it ; and till he repeals it, it must be the duty of all men to obey it, whether the reasons for which his wisdom hath established it be known to them or not.

An incontrovertible reason for their obedience (if they know no other) is this, that God has given the command. But this is not the case : the wise reasons of this command are, or may be, known to all men ; the chief designs of it are almost every where delivered, together with the law : the first we have in the second

chapter of Genesis, ver. 3 : “ And God blessed the sabbath-day, and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made ;” and again in the twentieth chapter of Exodus : “ In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is : wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day, and hallowed it.”

In these words, three things are plainly affirmed :—first, that God is the creator of this world :—secondly, that having created it in six days, he ceased from his work upon the seventh day, and hallowed or sanctified it ; ordaining that man, being made in the image, and for the imitation of God, should imitate him in this, in bestowing six days on the works belonging to this world, and resting from all these works on the seventh to meditate upon a better.

We perceive here the chief reason of this command ; the great end for which it was given, even that man might learn to imitate God, to fulfil the purpose of his creation, that he might ever remember who it was that created himself and heaven and earth ; that having finished his

six days, he might upon the seventh retire from this world, and ascend in heart and mind into the heaven of heavens, whither his adorable Creator rested from the works of his creation.

Another end of this command God hath declared, both on Mount Sinai and long after by his prophet Ezekiel: "I gave them my sabbaths, that they might know I am the Lord which sanctifieth them." That these sacred days, so often as they returned, might confirm them in the important knowledge, that God was the author of their virtue and happiness as well as of their being; that, should he withdraw his sanctifying power, they would as naturally sink into sin and misery, as, should he withdraw his animating power, they would fall into their native dust,

Now as they were instructed by what means holiness was to be attained, so that they might actually attain it was a third wise end of the Almighty's command to keep one day in seven holy. This we learn from that other declaration of God, wherein after it is written, "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy;" it follows in the very next verse, "Ye shall keep

my sabbaths;" plainly intimating that one reason why they were to keep his sabbaths was, that they might be holy as God is holy; that by dedicating to him one day in seven, they might be enabled to spend the other six as became those who acknowledged their Creator and Sanctifier to be of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; that they might ever be mindful of taking him for their example, not only on one particular day, but in the general course of their lives, which should be holy, just, and good.

The sum of what has been hitherto observed is this:—God who hath an unquestionable right to command his creatures, and prescribe whatever laws he is pleased to enforce; who, though under no obligation of acquainting man with the reasons of his divine will, has not only been pleased to make it known, and bid him, "remember the sabbath-day to keep it holy," but has graciously condescended to acquaint him with several of the reasons for so doing; the chief of which are these:—first, that by imitating the sabbath of divine rest, man might retain a more lively and lasting sense

of the Almighty Being, the Creator of himself and all things which exist:—secondly, that he might constantly remember who it is that is his Sanctifier as well as Creator:—thirdly, that he might be ever mindful it is the grand business of his life to imitate him in all his imitable perfections, and to make the mercy, justice, and holiness of God the pattern of all his thoughts, words, and actions.

Secondly.—The next question is, whether this command has yet been repealed by the authority which gave it, and whether these ends for which it was given are still in force or not.

As to the former part of the question it is confidently affirmed that God did repeal it, when Jesus Christ was made man; to prove which a famous controversialist gives us the strength of his cause in these words: “In these rigid vanities by which the Pharisees had abused the sabbath, our Saviour thought it requisite to detect their follies. They taught that it was unlawful on the sabbath-day either to heal the impotent, or relieve the sick, or feed the hungry; but he confutes them both



by his actions and his disputations. Did they accuse his disciples of gathering corn upon the sabbath, being an hungred? he tells them what David did in the same extremity. His commanding the impotent man to take up his bed, was it so great a toil as to lift up the ox or the ass out of the pit? Nor had God so spoken the word, but that he could repeal it; the Son of Man being Lord also of the sabbath. Nay, it is observable that our Lord wrought more works of charity upon the sabbath, than on all the other days; and several of them, when there was no extreme necessity that the cure should be performed on that day, or the man perish. What then? came our Saviour to destroy the law? No—but to let them understand the right meaning of it, that they might no longer be misled by the Scribes or Pharisees.”

Further, that the sabbath was to be repealed is by this apparent :

“First, that it was an institute of Moses ;

“Secondly, that it was an institute peculiar to the Jewish nation.” (Dr. Peter Heylin’s *History of the Sabbath.* 1st edit. p. 168.)

Thus far the historian, whose numerous assertions it may be worth while to examine apart, beginning at that wherewith it ends, as being most important.

The sabbath (he says) was first an institution of Moses; second, an institution peculiar to the Jewish nation: now as every institute peculiar to the Jewish nation was an institute of Moses, we will inquire whether the hallowing the sabbath was an institute of Moses, or not.

I therefore think it was not, because it was instituted two thousand years before Moses was born; so saith the text in Genesis expressly: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it."

Indeed so soon as it shall be proved that there is an absurdity in taking this in the plain literal sense, we shall be obliged to take it in a less plain, in a figurative sense, and to affirm that, though this is related as done at the

creation, it was not done till the distributing manna in the time of Moses, four or five and twenty hundred years after the creation ; but till this absurdity be shown, we have no pretence for giving up the letter. We can have no pretence to interpret any scripture figuratively, but when an absurdity follows a literal interpretation : this not being the case here, we may, we must, conclude that the sabbath was instituted at the creation ; therefore it was not an institute of Moses ; and consequently that from this supposition, which is obviously false, it cannot be inferred that it was to be repealed at all.

However, the objector avers, “ it is inferred that it actually was repealed from the assertions before-mentioned, which are briefly these :

“ The Pharisees thought it unlawful to do even any works of necessity or mercy on the sabbath-day.

“ Secondly, that our Saviour proved they thought wrong, such works being lawful on any day.

“ Thirdly, that the Son of God being made man could, if he pleased, set aside his own command.

“Fourthly, that himself performed more works on that than any other day : and,

“Fifthly, that he came not to destroy but to fulfil the law, to teach men its right meaning.”

All and every one of these five propositions we allow to be perfectly true, and should be glad to know from which of the five we are to infer the conclusion. Are we to say the Pharisees having wrong views of the sabbath, therefore the sabbath is abolished? or that our Lord proving their notions of it to be wrong, therefore it is disannulled? or that the Almighty could if he pleased set it aside, therefore he did set it aside? or that our blessed Saviour performed works of necessity and mercy on the sabbath-day, therefore we may do works which belong neither to necessity nor mercy? or lastly, that the Son of Man came to fulfil the law, therefore he destroyed this branch of it?

I trust it will not appear presumption if, notwithstanding all the arguments of this learned author, I still conceive that the Almighty hath not repealed his own command

respecting the sabbath ; nay, and that he never will, till the great sabbath begins ; both because he hath not done it yet, and because the reasons for which he gave it are still in full force, and must remain so till the grand consummation of all things.

For, first, to preserve in man a lively and constant sense of God being the Creator of all things, this end of the sabbath must continue so long as men continue upon the earth : this reason for keeping it can never be wanting so long as any of those creatures are living, who, notwithstanding all the methods used to prevent it, are so prone to forget their heavenly benefactor, who so readily lay hold on any pretence, nay, who are so willing without any pretence at all, if not to think they are the work of chance or their own hands, at least to act as if they thought so.

And the second end of the sabbath can no more cease than the first. That man should be constantly and deeply sensible he can no more sanctify than he could create himself, must ever be of the last importance : it must be the highest concern to men to remember they are

unable to help themselves: to preserve the impression of this great truth ever strong upon their minds, that he who is born of a woman must be born again of God, or it is impossible to please him.

Thirdly ;—it is of equal concern to man to remember that it is the great business of life to imitate the divine example set before us. I presume no one will venture to affirm that this end of the sabbath has lost any measure of its force; that it does not hold full as strongly at this day, as it did on the birth-day of creation; it being therefore evident that God himself hath given this command, and that he hath not repealed it, and that it is sufficiently probable he never will, since the designs of the institution must ever remain in all their energy, all that remains is to show, thirdly,

What it is to keep the sabbath holy so as to obey the command and answer the ends of it.

To keep either a day or a place holy is simply this, to set it apart to religious purposes; this is both the proper and the common sense of the word. By saying this day or this place is kept holy, both the learned and the

unlearned mean, it is dedicated to God, it is appropriated to his service; and to profane or unhallow a holy day or place is, not to set it apart to these uses; to use it in the same manner with other things which are not dedicated to God, not appropriated to his service; to perform in the consecrated day, or in the holy place, the works of ordinary days and unhallowed places.

To keep the sabbath-day holy, as well in the proper or common sense of the word, is therefore to set it apart to religious uses, to dedicate it to the service of God: what is implied in this we shall easily perceive, if we consider first, what we must—secondly, what we may—thirdly, what we may not do, on the sabbath of the Lord our God.

First, We must, if we would obey this command at all, and answer the ends for which it was ordained, employ a considerable part of this day in prayers and praises to God; we must retire with him from this lower world into those regions which are above the firmament; to contemplate on the various works which he hath made, and on the goodness,

wisdom, and power of the Creator; we must speak of his marvellous acts, and delight in the memorial of his abundant kindness.

That branch of his kindness, particularly, whereby he daily renews the face of the earth, whereby he restores fallen man to pardon and peace, and gives him the second better life of holiness and happiness. That this his last noblest gift may not be in vain, we must now especially work together with him, labour to confirm ourselves in his likeness, by entreating the assistance of his Holy Spirit (for we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves) to be holy because he is holy: we must make it our especial aim that the Divine image in our souls may be perfected: to bind mercy and truth around our neck, to write them on the tablet of our heart.

Secondly, Not that the human mind can be every moment uninterruptedly intent upon this, that might make even devotion a burden: no, we have bodies as well as souls; and this our gracious Lord considered, though the Pharisees did not; he therefore took away the intolerable severity with which their traditions



had loaded the sabbath, and made it of no effect but to impede those designs, for the furtherance of which it was ordained. He brought it back to its original standard, to its just and natural extent; accordingly both his words and actions manifested that we may perform works of necessity and mercy on this day; that we may do whatever cannot be done on another day, or not without manifest inconvenience; such as enjoying the works of creation with meditation and gratitude, feeding and watering cattle (for this is a work of necessity); we may relieve our sick or indigent neighbours (for this is a work of mercy); and visit the prisoners and the afflicted.

Thirdly, This therefore we may do, but we may not do any other work which can be done on another day, and done without much inconvenience; the delaying of which a day longer, would not give either to ourselves or our neighbours much loss or pain. Neither may we use any such recreation on the sabbath as does not further the ends for which it was ordained: some recreation connected *with those ends* is allowed on this day, because few minds are

able to preserve a cheerful devotion and lively gratitude without it; it is therefore a proper work of necessity as far as it conduces to both, but we must go no farther; we may not indulge ourselves in any recreation, I do not say which disqualifies, but which does not promote pious meditations. Here then is a short and certain rule; whatever aids devotion we may use, whatever impedes or does not aid it we must avoid, as it defeats the end of this sacred institution.

It is the same with the day as the house of God, and for this reason it is that the Almighty more than once mentions them together: "Ye shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary."

We are not so to reverence the sanctuary as not to show mercy, not to save life therein; we may likewise do necessary works, such as cannot be done elsewhere, or not without great inconvenience, but we may not do ordinary works; the former are not contrary to its holiness, the latter unhallow, pollute, and profane it; and when either the temple or the sabbath of God is made a day or a house of merchan-

dise, it will not be long before truth itself will pronounce the one an abomination and the other a den of thieves. If from what has been said, it appears that this command, "Keep the sabbath holy," was promulgated to man by God, and that for wise ends, even to preserve in him a deep abiding sense that God is his creator, his sanctifier, and his pattern; secondly, that as God has not yet repealed this command, so the ends of it are in full force; and lastly, that the only way of keeping the sabbath holy, of obeying this command, and answering its design, is to abstain from all works which neither necessity nor mercy requires, that we may set apart the day of God for the service of God, which alone is to sanctify or keep it holy; then is the sabbath no institution of Moses, neither is it peculiar to the Jewish nation, but the command to observe it, as well as the reasons of that command, extend to all ages and nations. Then if we subtract from it the additions of the latter Jews, and this one circumstance peculiar to them, "Let no man go out of his place on the sabbath-day;" whereby the Almighty guarded

it for a time, from the disobedience of their stiff-necked forefathers, we may safely affirm of the fourth commandment, as well as of the other nine, that Jesus Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil it; and till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from this law till all be fulfilled.

Brethren, let me add one word of exhortation, and be ye assured of this, that those who watch over your souls as they that must give account would not wilfully lead you out of the way. If there be any here who will not keep the sabbath holy, who says he cannot submit to the rigour imposed, of so worshipping the great, the good, the holy God; who, so far from estimating his high privilege, thinks prayer and praise, meditation and pious discourse, too heavy a burden to be sustained during a whole day, and so resolves to spend at least a part of this day, either in diversion or business. I exhort all such to work rather than play! I exhort you that are parents, in particular, if ye care not to train up your children to devotion, when they come from church not to send them to the streets or market-

places, but rather of the two, to school: as to the innocence of either, it is no importance which you do, but the latter looks more like prudence: if ye disregard the other world, why should you neglect this? why sell your own and your children's souls for nothing? Perhaps you may gain somewhat which you value by industry—as to the command of God you throw that quite out of the question; this is totally rejected either way; you no more hallow that day when you play, than when you labour, and as to the ends, you destroy them alike: you are no more endeavouring to remember your Creator, to be thankful for his benefits, and conformed to his holiness, while ye pollute his holy day by diversion, than by work; but in the latter case you may gain some earthly gain which you prize, and exchange conscience for money.

If you lift up your hand against your God in labour rather than idleness, you may have this comfort in your rebellion, that ye did not serve the Devil for nought.

Not that any who serve their heavenly Father, who keep his day wholly sacred, and

neither pollute it by diversions nor work, have less reason to expect a reward from their divine master, even in this present world.

For to these who would not be disobedient to his command, even to acquire riches, who love God better than pleasure, or gain, or reputation, to these saith the Most High, "If thou turn away thy foot from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thy own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words ; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob, thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

## SERMON XI.

(Preached on board the Simonds.)

---

*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto these things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

Philip. iii. 13, 14.

---

**IT** is observed that the several inspired writers of the Holy Scriptures, who have professedly treated of our progress in religion, and pointed out the various steps in the scale of perfection, have always represented their sentiments on the subject by obvious allegories and familiar allusions. Thus we find Christianity sometimes compared to a race, at others to a warfare; and the passage of the Sacred Scripture

now before us is no way to be understood without this metaphorical mode of interpretation, the phrases used being in a great measure borrowed from the circus, and the diversity of races represented. Thus, when the Apostle tells his Philippians that he counteth not himself to have "apprehended," it must be remarked, in order to understand him, that the word we translate "apprehended" is in the original Greek almost always applied in a technical sense to him that wins and carries off the prize; it being the custom to place the crown, which was to be the victor's reward, over the goal, and the first of the competitors that came in reached the prize and carried it away with him. So that the meaning of St. Paul is, that he doth not think himself already possessed of his crown, nor yet so secure of it as not to be exposed to some danger of losing it: he doth not imagine that he hath yet attained the reward of his labours, nor sufficiently ascertained the victory; and therefore, as he emphatically proceeds "this one thing I do," or this is my only care, "forgetting those things which are behind, and



reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ."

And here again are terms borrowed from the races, to be explained. The phrase which we have rendered "forgetting those things which are behind," is in the original "not looking behind me," and the term "reaching forward," is something stronger in the Greek, being expressed by a word that signifieth "vehemently to stretch forward." Now these are plain allusions to the Olympic Games, to the customs of the competitors, who stand not idly looking back, and examining either how far their antagonists are behind them, or how much of the course they have passed over, but ardently pursue their object, and endeavour to overtake all that are before them, and arrive at the destined mark as rapidly as possible.

The sense may be thus paraphrased—"My brethren, I count not myself to have attained my crown, nor do I think myself so certain of it, that I cannot miss it; but this one thing I do; without considering how much of my race I have run, or how many of my compe-

titors I have overcome, I stretch forward to the utmost of my capacity to achieve my end; and having ever in my view the goal, and fixing my eye on the way marked out for me to run, I relax not my speed, that I may if possible attain the crown which God in Christ hath promised."

The words thus explained will furnish us with these several topics of discourse.

First, that in this world Christians are never so certain of their reward, as to remit their care without danger of missing it.

Secondly, that it is never to be attained by resting contented with any degree of piety short of the highest that may be attained in this life: and,

Thirdly, that a constant progress towards perfection is the indispensable duty of all Christians.

We know that this world is a state of trial and probation, wherein we are placed by Divine Providence to work the works of God, to conquer and subdue the enemies of our salvation and those manifold sins and infirmities whereby our nature is corrupted and depraved. Now a state of trial always implies a state

of danger, and, whilst we are only in our probation for heaven, we must not think ourselves secure from all possibility of miscarriage.

True it is, we are inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, and we have the gracious promise of our merciful Father to secure our title to it. But it must be duly considered, that all his promises are conditional, and that *he has given us power* to perform (for the power to fulfil it is his gift) our part of the condition; if we bury our talent in the napkin, and will not fulfil it, we cannot claim our crown.

Our covenant with God consists in perpetual war against the world, the flesh, and the devil. These are our spiritual foes, which assail us with never-ceasing vigilance, and as long as we live upon this earth, and carry about with us a body of sin and death, so long must we be unavoidably exposed as well to their attacks, as to the attacks of that powerful and invisible enemy, who is represented in the Holy Scriptures as going to and fro in the world, seeking whom he may devour. We know the power and malice of this spiritual adversary, nor are we ignorant of his devices, whereby he lieth

in wait to deceive : subtle and mighty as he is, can we imagine that he will propose any temptations which are unsuited to our frailty ? No : he knoweth our weakness, and well adapts them to our several dispositions, and so strong, I had almost said irresistible they are, that happy, thrice happy is he who is not sometimes ensnared by his wiles.

He is the prince of the power of the air, and therefore wanteth not strength to assault us. He is the old serpent that deceiveth, and faileth not in craft to circumvent us : indeed so great are both, that we can by no means withstand either, without divine assistance ; and all our hopes of victory are founded on our faith in these consoling truths, "That greater is He who is with us than he who is against us ;" and that the God of Hosts is on our side, "who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it."

But further, we are exhorted in the Holy Scriptures to be constantly on our guard, to take to ourselves the whole armour of God,

that we may be able to stand in the day of temptation, and having done all to stand.

Again—we are cautioned, “that he that thinketh he standeth should take heed lest he fall,” and commanded to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Now to what end are all these monitions, this care and fear enjoined, unless there be some imminent danger? Why should we take to ourselves “the armour of God” were there no liability of our being conquered by the enemies of our salvation? Why take heed to our steps if there was no danger of falling? Were the crown of glory already in our hands, our labours must needs be at an end—we are expressly told that our life must be a constant endeavour, that we must daily strive against sin, and sedulously watch against all the assaults of our enemy; and therefore, it may be concluded, that we have not “apprehended” or attained the reward of our labour, or acquired the *utmost* degree of grace and Christian perfection from which we *never* can be shaken or removed, till we leave these tabernacles of clay.

The great apostle St. Paul thought himself

obliged to press forward towards the mark of his high calling; and it would be the greatest presumption of us to imagine we had arrived at a height of security which precluded the vigilance which this eminent saint so earnestly enjoins: if notwithstanding the zeal, the activity, the abundance of revelations, bestowed upon this favoured disciple of Christ, *he* deemed it indispensable to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, much more reason have we not to be high-minded but fear. I know there are some who hold it as an unquestionable tenet of religion, that "grace once received never can be forfeited." But this mistake has arisen from mixing metaphysics with divinity, and admitting every one's private opinion as a rule of faith. When men began to dispute concerning grace and free-will without understanding wherein either the one or the other consisted, it is not extraordinary that difficulties should arise which reason was unable to solve; and that schism and heresy were introduced into the church of Christ, by turning points of philosophy into religious disputes, and making the quirks and quibbles of school-

●

men upon them of as much importance as if they had been so many articles of faith. Holy Writ has assured us, that as the wicked man may turn from his wickedness, so likewise the righteous man may turn from his righteousness; nay, that he may apostatise so far as to commit things worthy of death, and to be guilty of sins in which we are told, he shall surely die. (Ezekiel, iii. 20.) And the catholic church of Christ always thought that all Christians in this world were constantly exposed to temptation, and of consequence in danger, *i. e.* in possibility, of falling.

We need not multiply quotations to prove this; it is evident from their solemn addresses to the Almighty God in behalf of the penitents, as recorded in the Apostolic Constitutions, wherein every Christian was bound to acknowledge his own obnoxiousness to sin, and to pray for preventing and restraining, as well as assisting grace, to preserve him from falling; and when the penitent was restored, the congregation were commanded by the deacon to pray, and afterward, by the mouth of the priest or bishop *did* pray, for the reconciled

penitent, that God would keep him steadfast and immoveable in the way of righteousness, and grant he might never fall or be shaken more.

Now their prayers would be superfluous were it not admitted that the most perfect estate in this world is but a state of trial and probation, and the highest attainments not sufficient to exempt us from the danger of falling away. The Son of God himself was tempted; and he alone was tempted *without sin*: therefore his disciples cannot expect to escape the temptations of their great adversary, who knows full well that the crown of glory is not in this life given, and he is never without hope of preventing us from gaining the prize; and if his assaults be aided by any fancied security of our own, and come upon us unawares, great is the danger of their success, to our eternal loss.

Having at large insisted on my first doctrinal point, that no Christian is in this life absolutely secured of his reward, or can presume to be advanced so high as to be beyond the reach of danger, I proceed to a practical



inference deduced from what has been said, which is this:—

That if we are not excluded from all possibility of falling from our station, forfeiting the portion of grace we have received, and missing our glorious reward, we are not at liberty to indulge ourselves in ease and security.— Vigour, industry, and perseverance, become the necessary duties of Christians; we must watch and pray that we enter not into temptation, and have power to overcome what we cannot escape. We must continually strive to enter in at the strait gate, and constantly oppose our spiritual adversaries. As long as we are watchful we are safe, but if we trust to our best performances—alas! I need not tell you how grievously we shall find ourselves deceived at last. There is not a more dangerous delusion than for a man to think himself beyond the power of temptation: we then become careless in our duty, negligent in our station, confident in our own strength; till, like Samson, we “wist not that the Spirit of God is departed.”

Caution and watchfulness are essential cha-

characteristics of a real Christian : it is frequently enjoined by our blessed Lord himself to his disciples, and by them the obligation extended to all mankind, "What I say unto you I say unto all—watch."

None are exempted from this duty, no excuse can be urged for not performing it ; watch therefore for the coming of your Lord, for you know neither the day nor the hour of his coming. Let your loins be girded, your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that watch for their Lord, that they may be ready to enter in with him when he cometh ; for many shall seek to enter in when the door is shut.—Therefore, "blessed are those servants whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing." Stand therefore fast in the faith ; "be strong, and quit yourselves like men," that so, in God's good time, ye may at length attain the crown which is laid up for all who persevere to the end. I grant he gives perseverance to his people, but what are the marks by which they are known ? They are those who apply to him for this grace, who are ever watchful over their own hearts, lest they

should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and who *do* persevere in faith and in good works, giving all diligence to make their calling and election sure.

Secondly : Our reward is never to be attained by resting satisfied with any degree of piety short of the highest. Christian perfection, or universal holiness, is the goal of our religious course: hitherto then must all our aim be directed, all our endeavours tend; to this are all the promises of the Gospel made; and surely the highest reward deserves the most arduous efforts, the most unremitting care. The gates of heaven are opened wide, and we are invited by God himself to enter in and take up our everlasting residence in that kingdom of light and love and joy; and will not such a reward compensate well the labours of a short life? Are not fourscore years, even of pain, well endured for an eternity of bliss? or should we murmur if our days on earth, which are few and evil, are spent in the service of God (whose service is perfect freedom, and brings the only happiness here), instead of being wasted in sinful pleasure; which is never

unaccompanied with a sting, even in this state: Is a treasure in that kingdom of heaven, (where no moths or rust corrupt, and no thieves break through and steal) of less value than the fading enjoyments of the world?

My brethren, there is no shadow of comparison; and therefore, the same ardour and diligence in working out our salvation, as the children of this world evince in their pursuit of riches, pleasures, and honour, is indispensable in a Christian.

Again, all our hopes of heaven are only founded upon the promises of God; we have no manner of reason, therefore, to hope, if we fulfil not those conditions which he gives us the power to fulfil: now the only way proposed by the Gospel is "to ask that we may receive," and to aim at the highest degree of holiness or Christian perfection. Is it not the word of our blessed Lord himself, "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect;" *i. e.* to offer our spirits, souls, and bodies a holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. Now if this be so (and what Christian presumes to say it is not?) who,

soever does not aim, or wilfully abstains from aiming at this point, may, for ought he knows, stop short the mercy of God.

But here it may be urged, that in the eternal house of God are many mansions, and that the stations of the kingdom of heaven shall differ in glory, and consequently that all mankind are not expected to attain an equal summit of piety, or be entitled to an equal degree of glory; in answer to which I must observe, that though there be various degrees in these happy mansions, yet he who aspirerth not after the highest is not prepared for the lowest. The man who doth not sincerely endeavour, to become a perfect Christian deceives himself if he thinks he is a Christian at all.

True it is, the Almighty God knoweth our frame and understandeth the weakness of our nature, the strength and number of those temptations to which we are exposed; and therefore vouchsafes of his infinite mercy and goodness, not to exclude us from his favour, for those sins and backslidings of which we repent, and strive against, and watch, and pray. But by this it cannot be proved that

we should not aim to do his holy will in the *most perfect* manner. This is the new covenant with man, and he has promised to give us a new heart and renew a right spirit, even the power of loving Him with all our heart and mind and strength.

Thirdly, a constant progress in Christianity is the indispensable duty of all ranks and degrees of Christians.

They that would hope in time to attain to the highest degree of holiness, must, as the Royal Psalmist expresses it, go on from "strength to strength." As long as we can be better than we are, and fancy ourselves so far advanced that we cannot go farther, we have especial need to follow the apostle's advice, "Not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think." Alas! whilst we are in this world, we are surrounded with snares, beset with temptation, are sometimes overcome, often repent and sin again; therefore we may be sure that we have not yet attained, neither are already perfect; our crown is not put into our possession, nor the victory over our spiritual enemies completely gained: still, there-

fore, must we fight and strive against them, still must we press forward towards the mark of our high calling.

While we are in this world we are but in our road to heaven, and therefore must continue marching on and overcoming. Life is our pilgrimage, heaven is our home, and as we have here no abiding city, so neither have we any cessation of our labours; but death will end them all, and if then we are faithful unto death, God will give us the crown of eternal life. Now he has promised to keep those faithful, who love and serve him with all their hearts, and who study to run the way of his commandments, and to go on unto perfection; and when we have done all, to say "we are unprofitable servants." Aim, therefore, at exalted holiness, aspire after the highest degrees, even the height of humility!

He that frequently performs his duty to God, and labours earnestly to do good to his brethren, must not sit down self-satisfied, imagining no more is required of him—perish the thought!

When we have done all the good offices

which opportunity affords, we must sedulously seek out more; and however charitable we may have been to our brethren, yet if charity increaseth not, *it faileth*, and is not the genuine grace recommended in Scripture; it is but a heathen, not a Christian virtue; and what is spoken of this may be said of all other virtues in the Gospel—their improvement (which is part of their essence) proves their authenticity.

Farther, it is a maxim universally true and established by the general consent of mankind, that he that maketh no progress is certain of going backward. Now this maxim is as true when applied to religion as to any other thing: he, therefore, that stands still in the paths of piety recedes, not only loses his time but his ground. He that doth not constantly and daily strive against the storm of vice and torrent of iniquity wherewith the world is now overflowed will infallibly be carried down by it: there is no resting in the mid way between right and wrong, between heaven and hell; we must pursue our course towards the one, or make speedy advances to the other.

Habits we know are only to be acquired by



constant and repeated acts. He, therefore, that would be religious, must be always exercised in religion: and he that would attain to Christian charity must never relax in his labours of love. If we continually labour in the task our Great Master has assigned us, we shall increase in the ability to perform it; but if we abate our zeal, our talent will be hidden till it be taken from us.

Besides, in order to acquire a habit, it is not only necessary that there be repeated acts, but we must endeavour that every act be proportionably better than the last. He that contenteth himself with barely plodding at the rudiments of learning will never make a scholar; and he that aspires no higher than the first steps in the scale of perfection will never be a Christian. It is St. Paul's advice to the Hebrews, that they should leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on unto perfection, not resting satisfied with laying the foundations of Christianity, but endeavouring to raise a proportionable superstructure thereupon; and were this advice duly observed, men would not con-

tinue all their lives such babes in Christianity, nor would a hoary head and ignorant mind be so frequently conjoined, as God knows they are: we should behold youth more sober and old age more venerable, and each the wiser and holier the longer they lived upon this earth.

Thus have I shown, by these unanswerable arguments,

First, that Christians are never so certain of their reward as to remit their care;

Secondly, that it is never to be attained but by perseverance, and by not resting satisfied with any degree of piety short of the highest aim; and,

Thirdly, that Christians of all ranks and conditions are indispensably obliged to make a constant progress and proficiency in the knowledge and practice of true Christianity.

These doctrines are so plain and evident that they need no application, and so essential that they will recommend themselves to your serious consideration. Instead therefore of an exhortation, I choose rather to require you to join in prayer to God that he would graciously

assist us in the performance of them; for which purpose I conclude with an excellent collect of our church.

**O God!** who declarest thy mighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the path of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasures, through Jesus Christ our Lord!—  
**Amen.**

## SERMON XII.

(Preached at Cowes, in the Isle of Wight, 1735; at Savannah, in Georgia, June, 1736: at Dr. Cutter's church, in Boston, Oct. 17, 1786.)

---

*And Elijah came unto all the people, and said,  
How long halt ye between two opinions? If  
the Lord be God, then follow him: but if  
Baal, follow him. 1 Kings, xviii. 21.*

AN exclamation this, in which Christians are no less concerned than those Jews to whom it was immediately spoken: for do we not, most of us, halt between two opinions? do we not endeavour to do service to two masters? and is it not the frequent practice of the generality of Christians to compound between God and the world? to contrive how to serve God, without renouncing the service of the world, the flesh, and the devil? Do we not see many, who make loud professions of their zeal for religion, still anxious for the good things of this life? In

short, may we not truly say that while we all pretend to be true worshippers of God, we do every one in particular, at some seasons, set up his idols in his heart, and divide his religious worship between that and his God? To you therefore is this Scripture given, and every one is still concerned in this expostulation of the prophet, How long will ye halt between two opinions? "If the Lord be God, then follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."

In discoursing on these words, I shall,

First, show who they are that come under this censure of halting between two opinions;

Secondly, consider the folly and danger of it;

Thirdly, conclude with an earnest exhortation to an entire devotion of ourselves to God.

I am first to show who they are that come under this censure. And here, I doubt, upon a serious and impartial examination of ourselves, we shall most of us stand self-condemned, and when we inquire who they are, our conscience will reply to each, Thou art the man. For judge, I pray you, and judge as in the presence of God; are ye in heart and mind solely devoted to him? have you no other design in all

your undertakings but to perform the will of your Father who is in heaven, and finish the work he hath given you to do? Who among us can stand so severe a test, or whom will not conscience condemn upon so strict a trial? Who is there that may be termed holy in the sense of this word, as it implies a total renunciation of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and an entire and absolute surrender of himself to God? alas! who can lay his hand upon his heart and say, "that no private views, no secret ends, mix with his devotion!" that God has not only some place in our thoughts, but the whole of our souls and minds at his disposal, and reigns alone in the hearts he has formed. There are many rivals who will dispute with him his right to absolute and entire dominion: the world, with her pomps and vanities, pleasures and delights, entertainments and diversions, has monopolized a large share of our affections; sensuality also ruleth with an almost uncontrolled sway; nor is the evil spirit of darkness without share of power and influence over us.

Now while any of these have dominion,

P

while we set our hearts upon the flesh and its gratifications, or fix our affections on things of the world, or indulge hatred, ambition, malice, and revenge, it must be owned that, if God has any place in our thoughts, his empire is disputed, his claim to our obedience questioned, his supreme authority neglected : we are not his devoted servants, since we give our service to other masters ; nor can we be called his faithful soldiers since we are likewise enlisted under the banners of his enemy. Thus then may they be said to halt between two opinions, who are divided between God and the world, who suffer the Creator and the creature to share their affections, and who allow only a portion of their heart and mind, to the service of their heavenly Benefactor. Where the grace of God has so far influenced the conscience as to engage the man to consider these things, and yet the cares of this world, the lusts of the flesh, and temptations of the devil, retain their share of influence over him, this man may be said to halt between two opinions.

Such is the case of him who, without a surrender of his whole heart, professes himself to

be a Christian. He will tell you that he regards religion to be of the utmost importance. He may be constant in the external duties of religion, in the outward forms of worship, frequent the service of the church, observe the fasts, attend the sacraments; and yet with all this seeming zeal it may be found, that the world has made a deeper impression on him than religion, and he takes yet more pains to procure an estate on earth, than to lay up for himself a treasure in heaven: otherwise how should it be possible that we should see the same man conscientious in church, and knavish in his counting-house? how could we account for public observances of pious rites, and over-reaching frauds in private transactions, of this halting Christian. Of these two discordant principles, obedience to the letter of the law, and neglect of the spirit of it, from which arises the inconsistency of his practice? He halteth between two opinions, and is therefore sometimes found praising God, and at others paying homage to mammon. And thus it must always be with all who are divided between God and the world. We are told it was



because the cares of this world, and the desire of riches, were not rooted out of the heart of those that heard the Gospel, but permitted to grow up with the good seed of the word, that this seed brought forth no fruit to perfection. Indeed this part of the parable seems to have an immediate reference to the case in question, and particularly adverts to those who halt between two opinions; he that received the seed in stony places is the same, that heareth the word, and "with joy received it;" and yet if the cares of the world and desire of riches (those spiritual thorns and briars) are suffered to remain, they will choak the good seed, as our blessed Lord informs us they do.

There are other descriptions of persons whom the text describes as halting between two opinions; these are men who will renounce their vices, with the exception of one darling sin; now this is a plain instance of double-mindedness and insincerity. While we acknowledge the evil of sin in general, and yet retain that one sin which easily besets us, the heart is not wholly with God, it is hypocritical in his sight; and a more dangerous state than any other;

for it leads us to deceive ourselves to the last ; and because, like Herod upon hearing John the Baptist, we may do many things gladly, observe religious ordinances, and external worship, we have no fear of our salvation till it is awfully lost for ever.

The sum of the matter is this : all are concerned in the expostulation of my text, and stand condemned by its censure, who are not wholly devoted to God ; who have not absolutely and entirely dedicated themselves to his service ; who have not renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil ; who have not with all their faculties withdrawn themselves from the consideration of every thing but God and divine things, in the rule he has given in his Gospel, to enable them the more perfectly to perform his duty and service, to an obedience which they acknowledge to be his due, and which their hearts bear witness is a reasonable service. All these may be said to halt between two opinions who preserve any the least respect to any creature which belongs alone to God.

Whosoever loves any thing, fears any thing, hopes any thing, without reference to Him,

hath set up his idol in his heart ; he is divided in himself, and therefore cannot love, fear, and serve God. It is on this account that St. Paul calls the covetous man an idolator, because he allows his desire of gain to share his affections and his thoughts, which God and religion ought wholly to engross. And as the covetous man, so also is the sensualist, the passionate, the proud, the ambitious ; each of them have some end in their actions besides God : in short, any one who pretends to be a Christian, and admits any motive in his pursuits but God and his holy will, halts between two opinions ; he may with his lips confess the Lord to be God, yet pays him not the homage and obedience due to him alone.

The folly and danger of which state comes under the second general head : now the danger will appear from the following considerations:—

First, that it is a state which the Almighty hath no where promised to reward ; and,

Secondly, it is a state which he hath threatened with the severest punishments.

First, Heaven is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ ; and therefore not to be attained

but on such terms as he has appointed: now where has he promised to reward such a half piety as we have described? Has he any, where bound himself to accept it? A sacrifice without a heart! hath he ever capitulated with us to receive any service which falls short of all that lies in our power? a power imparted by his divine grace to perform. Hath he purchased the dominion over us by the Son of his love, upon condition that the empire should be divided between him and his creatures? No, the promises are made to those alone who not only seek, but *strive* to enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is a holy violence preached in the Gospel as essentially necessary to introduce us into the peaceable possession of the kingdom of God; and it is this which distinguishes every real Christian, and proves him to be a disciple of Christ: after the utmost care and diligence we are but unprofitable servants, nor are our most strenuous endeavours the cause of our salvation, which is the meritorious death of our blessed Saviour; but they are the conditions of it which he himself has laid down; or, in other words, faith which works by love,

even the love of God with all our hearts ; and though, through the corruption of our nature, we have all reason to be abased and deeply humbled before God, yet are we to aim at perfection; and whosoever wilfully stops short of any grace he may attain, stops short of the mercy of God ; for though he has promised to pardon for our Redeemer's sake all those sins which by the frailty of our natures we have committed, yet will he never pardon those commissions of sin, and omissions of duty, which we wilfully live in, and continue to live in, through a vain persuasion that it is not required of us to follow the strict rules of the Gospel ; rules which would never have been enjoined, if God had not promised to give us grace sufficient (if we implored it) to walk in all his ordinances blameless. We say then, that a state of voluntary imperfection, a half-course between God and the world, is a state which God hath in no place of Scripture promised to reward, nor yet to accept : but there is another argument for the danger of it, namely, the severe punishment denounced against it. Many and obvious are the texts

wherein the Almighty hath threatened the pains of hell to all those who will not obey his will; and how this may be fulfilled without this entire surrender of ourselves to his service is more than Revelation has made known to us. We are therein taught to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our mind, and to do him service with all our soul and with all our strength; and this, under pain of being utterly excluded from his presence if we fail in the performance of it.

We are expressly told in St. Luke, xiv. 33, that whosoever he be that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be the disciple of Christ. Now what can possibly be more plain than these words; the sense of which evidently is that, unless we renounce every thing in this world so far as that our affections may be placed solely on God, we cannot be his disciples. And if we be not his, what will become of our hope of salvation by Jesus Christ? Certainly the being excluded from the name of his disciple is an exclusion from heaven, which he died to purchase for us. But whoever desires to see the awful condemnation which awaiteth this

state more fully represented, let him hear what the Spirit of God saith to the angel of the church of Laodicea (Rev. iii. 15, 16): "I know thy works, that thou art neither hot nor cold; so then because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Tremendous doom of the lukewarm and indifferent in religion! see we not here that the lukewarm Christian (if we will call him such) is debased even below him who professes no religion? "I wish thou wert either hot or cold:"—so saith the Spirit; showing that coldness, or an absolute neglect of religion, was a more desirable state than lukewarmness or indifference: add to all which, the tremendous doom which attends it, "because thou art neither hot nor cold," I will cast thee from me, and withdraw my grace from every one who maketh no better use of it than do the lukewarm and indifferent.

The folly of living in such a state, of dividing our hearts between God and the world, may be easily collected from the danger of it. The service of God is the most honourable, easy, and profitable, that we can be occupied in; it

must therefore be the greatest folly to quit this service, and engage with a cruel master on the severest terms : yet so does every man who seeks to compound between God and mammon, to divide his service between religion and the world ; for no man can serve two masters ; we must of necessity renounce the service of one. St. James declares, “ the friendship of the world is enmity with God : whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” Here we perceive there is no such thing as a divided love : the love of the world is absolutely inconsistent with the love of God ; so that if we afford the world or any thing in it a share of our affections, but as he has commanded for his sake, in such proportion do we become the enemies of God. And can there be a greater instance of folly ? to lose his favour, in whose favour is life eternal, and the glorious reward annexed to our fidelity, for a small proportion of this world’s good ?

Be wiser : follow the prophet’s advice. If the Lord be God, serve him and him only ; but if not, serve whomsoever you do serve



heartily, that ye may at least have the reward of your services, for the man who is religious by halves, that dares not wholly renounce the service of God, and yet will not entirely devote himself to his Divine Master, has taken the ready way to divest himself both of the pleasure of religion and of the world ; he has just enough religion to embitter his delights, to poison all his enjoyments ; nay, suffers all the pains, and oftentimes more than the truly pious man endures even under martyrdom, and at the same time loses all the satisfaction which ever accompanies genuine piety.

I proceed thirdly, and lastly, to conclude with an earnest exhortation to an entire devotion of ourselves to God.

Ye have seen, brethren, the true nature of the guilt of halting between two opinions, which consists in dividing our affections between God and the things he has made, and placing only such a part of love upon our Creator, as we can spare from his creatures. Ye have likewise been shown the folly and danger of such a state, which God has no where promised to reward, nay, has denounced his

vengeance upon it. Now surely this will be abundantly sufficient, if you believe it, to persuade you totally to renounce the world, and to set your affections on things above: ye have seen that no less a degree of religion than this will profit you; that whoever wilfully falls short of this falls short of the mercy of God: be strong therefore and quit yourselves like men, be bold to assert your liberty, to vindicate the dignity of your redeemed nature, to shake off the bondage of corruption, and to demean yourselves as becomes the children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. Our gracious God, be assured, is infinitely worthy of our highest love, abundantly deserving of our best services; he hath created and preserved us, and therefore has a claim to all we are, and all we can do, in return for such inestimable benefits. Nay, he has redeemed us from sin, and delivered us from the bondage of corruption; and therefore we can never repay the least of his blessings. But his mercy is pleased to accept such service as we are able to perform, in consideration of our weakness, and the poor corrupted state of our nature, and since we have nothing to re-

turn, he graciously receives the mean oblation of ourselves, provided we present it with our whole heart. And this surely no man will suppose too great a sacrifice for all the mighty obligations that have been conferred upon him; for while we serve God, we increase the perfection of our being, and partake of His honour and glory who dwelleth in the highest heavens. To be admitted to worship Him before whom the angels veil their faces is indeed the highest honour wherewith any creature can be blessed; and to devote ourselves to his service is only to be secured of our title to this dignity and pre-eminence, which the King of heaven and earth vouchsafes to the heirs of immortality. There may be other imaginary pleasures and honours; but in reality there is no other happiness, honour, or glory, but in the service of God. All the felicity of this world can afford us at best but a suspension of misery, a vain shadow, and a vain hope! What can riches effect but preserve us from the evil of want? we can enjoy no more than we want, and a very little is sufficient to supply us with that; all beyond is superfluity which brings neither

permanent satisfaction nor lasting advantage. And who for such a reward as this would forfeit those exalted pleasures which flow so plentifully from the service of God? Pleasures they are which fade not in the enjoyment, which pall not on the senses, nor destroy the taste by repetition, but increase to all eternity, which extend our faculties, create new capabilities, and perfect our nature. Such a scene of delight is his life who lives *wholly* devoted to God, who suffers not the world to intermingle with his affections, whose heart is fixed above it, and whose soul is freed from all cares but that of serving and pleasing his Creator. O glorious task! blissful employment! It is the felicity of angels! a foretaste of the joys of heaven! a forestalling the blessedness of eternity! Cast away therefore all obstructions of this love of God; divest yourselves of every base desire; halt no more between two opinions; but, since ye own the Lord to be God, beseech him to give you grace to follow him and him alone; to serve him truly and faithfully with all your strength, to love him with all your heart and mind,

to worship him in your body and in your spirit, to be made perfect in the love and fear of God, that so your happiness may be perfected in the enjoyment of his heavenly kingdom throughout all ages, world without end.  
**Amen.**



A

# SERMON

PREACHED AT

ST. MARY'S IN OXFORD,

ON

*Sunday, September 21, 1735,*

ONE MONTH BEFORE HE WENT TO GEORGIA,

BY

JOHN WESLEY, M.A.

FELLOW OF LINCOLN COLLEGE, OXON.

Q



## SERMON XIII.

---

*There the wicked cease from troubling; and  
there the weary be at rest.* Job, iii. 17.

---

**WHEN** God at first surveyed all the works he had made, behold, they were very good. All were perfect in beauty; and man, the Lord of all, was perfect in holiness: and as his holiness was, so was his happiness; knowing no sin, he knew no pain. But when sin was conceived, it soon brought forth pain: the whole scene was changed in a moment. He now groaned under the weight of a mortal body, and what was far worse, a corrupted soul. That Spirit, which could have borne all his other infirmities, was itself wounded and sick unto death. Thus in the day wherein he sinned, he began to die; and thus, "in the midst of life we are in death;" yea, "the whole



creation groaneth together, being in bondage to sin," and therefore to misery.

The whole world is indeed, in its present state, only one great infirmary: all that are therein are sick of sin, and their one business there is—to be healed. And for this very end, the great Physician of souls is continually present with them, marking all the diseases of every soul, and giving medicines to heal its sickness. These medicines are often painful too; not that God willingly afflicts his creatures, but he allots them just as much pain as is necessary to their health; and for that reason, because it is so.

The pain of cure must then be endured by every man, as well as the pain of sickness. And herein is manifest the infinite wisdom of Him who careth for us, that the very sickness of those with whom he converses may be a great means of every man's cure. The very wickedness of others is, in a thousand ways, conducive to a good man's holiness. They trouble him it is true; but even that trouble is "health to his soul, and marrow to his bones." He suffers many things from them; but it is

to this end, that he may be made perfect through those sufferings.

But till perfect holiness be found on earth, so neither will perfect happiness: While some remains of our disease be felt, some physic will be necessary to heal it. Therefore we are more or less subject to the pain of cure, as well as the pain of sickness. And accordingly, neither do the wicked here cease from troubling, nor can the weary be at rest.

“Who then will deliver us from the body of this death?” Death will deliver us. Death shall set those free in one moment, who were all their life-time subject to bondage. Death shall destroy at once the whole body of sin, and therewith of its companion, pain. And therefore, “there the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest.”

The Scriptures give us no account of the place where the souls of the just remain from death to the resurrection. But we have an account of their state in these words; in explaining which I shall consider,

First, How the wicked do here trouble good men. And,

Secondly, How the weary are there at rest.

Let us consider, First, How the wicked here trouble good men. And this is a spacious field. Look round the world, take a view of all the troubles therein; how few are there whereof the wicked are not the occasion. "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" Whence all the ills that embitter society? that often turn that highest of blessings into a curse, and make it good for man to be alone? Come they not hence, from self-will, pride, inordinate affection; in one word, from wickedness? And can it be otherwise, so long as it remains upon earth? As well may the Ethiopian change his skin, as a wicked man cease to trouble both himself and his neighbour; but especially good men: inasmuch as, while he is wicked, he is continually injuring, either them, or himself, or God.

First, Wicked men trouble those who serve God, by the injuries they do them. As at first, "he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit," even so it is now. And so it must be till all things are fulfilled; till "Heaven and earth pass away,"

“all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.” For there is an irreconcilable enmity, between the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world. If the followers of Christ “were of the world, the world would love its own: but, because they are not of the world, therefore the world hateth them.” And this hatred they will not fail to show by their words; “they will say all manner of evil against them falsely;” they will find out many inventions whereby even “the good that is in them may be evil spoken of:” and in a thousand instances “lay to their charge the ill that they know not.” From words in due time they proceed to deeds; treating the servants as their forefathers did their Master, wronging and despitefully using them in as many ways as fraud can invent, and force accomplish.

It is true, these troubles sit heaviest upon those who are yet weak in the faith; and the more of the Spirit of Christ any man gains, the lighter do they appear to him: so that to him who is truly renewed therein, who is full of the knowledge and love of God, all the wrongs of wicked men are not only no evils,

but are matter of real and solid joy. But still, though he rejoices for his own sake, he cannot but grieve for theirs. "He hath great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart for his brethren according to the flesh," who are thus "treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement of God. His eyes weep for them in secret places; he is horribly afraid" for them: "Yea, he could even wish to be accursed himself," so they might inherit a blessing. And thus it is that they who can not only slight, but rejoice in the greatest injury done to them, yet are troubled at that which wicked men do to themselves, and the grievous misery that attends them.

How much more are they troubled at the injuries wicked men are continually offering to God? This was the circumstance which made the contradiction of sinners so severe a trial to our Lord himself: "He that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." And how are these despisers now multiplied upon earth? who fear not the Son, neither the Father. How are we surrounded with these, who blaspheme the

Lord and his Anointed, either reviling the whole of his glorious Gospel, or making him a liar as to some of the blessed truths which he hath graciously revealed therein? How many of those who profess to believe the whole, yet in effect preach another Gospel; so disguising the most essential doctrines thereof, by their new interpretations, as to retain the words only, but nothing of the "faith once delivered to the saints!" How many who have not yet made shipwreck of the faith are strangers to the fruits of it? It hath not purified their hearts; it hath not overcome the world; they are yet "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." They are still "lovers of themselves, lovers of the world, lovers of pleasure," and not "lovers of God." Lovers of God? No. "He is not in all their thoughts!" They delight not in him, they thirst not after him: They do not rejoice in doing his will, neither make their boast of his praise! O faith working by love, whither art thou fled? Surely the Son of Man did once plant thee upon earth. Where then art thou now? Among the wealthy? No. The "deceitfulness of riches

there chokes the word, and it becometh unfruitful." Among the poor? No. "The cares of the world" are there, "so that it bringeth forth no fruit, to perfection." However, there is nothing to prevent its growth among those who have neither poverty nor riches—Yes, the desire of other things. And experience shows, by a thousand melancholy examples, that the allowed desire of any thing, great or small, otherwise than as a means to the one thing needful, will by degrees banish the care of that out of the soul, and unfit it for every good word or work.

Such is the trouble, not to descend to particulars which are endless, that wicked men continually occasion to the good. Such is the state of all good men while on earth; but it is not so with their souls in Paradise. In the moment wherein they are loosed from the body, they know pain no more. Though they are not yet possessed of the fulness of joy, yet all grief is done away. "For there the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest." *Secondly*, "There the weary are at rest," which

was the second thing to be considered, not only from those evils which prudence might have prevented or piety removed even in this life, but from those which were inseparable therefrom, which were their unavoidable portion on earth. They are now at rest, whom wicked men would not suffer to rest before; for into the seat of the spirits of just men none but the spirits of the just can enter. They are at length hid from the scourge of the tongue: Their name is not here cast out as evil. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Prophets do not revile or separate them from their company. They are no longer despihtfully used and persecuted; neither do they groan under the hand of the oppressor. No injustice, no malice, no fraud is there; they are all "Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile." There are no sinners against their own souls; therefore there is no painful pity, no fear for them. There are no blasphemers of God or of his word; no profaners of his name or of his sabbaths; no denier of the Lord that bought him, none that tramples upon the blood of his everlasting covenant: in a word, no earthly or



sensual, no devilish spirit; none who do not love the Lord their God with all their heart.

2. There, therefore, "the weary are at rest" from all the troubles which the wicked occasioned; and indeed, from all the other evils which are necessary in this world, either as the consequence of sin, or for the cure of it. They are at rest, in the first place, from bodily pain. In order to judge of the greatness of this deliverance, let but those who have not felt it take a view of one who lies on a sick or death-bed. Is this he that was made a little lower than the angels? How is the glory departed from him! His eye is dim and heavy, his cheek pale and wan, his tongue falters, his hand trembles, his breast heaves and pants, his whole body is now distorted and writhed to and fro, now moist and cold and motionless, like the earth to which it is going. And yet all this which you see is but the shadow of what he feels. You see not the pain that tears his heart, that shoots through all his veins, and chases the flying soul through every part of her once-loved habitation. Could we see this too, how earnestly should we cry out, "O sin, what

hast thou done? To what hast thou brought the noblest part of the visible creation? Was it for this the good God made man? O no! Neither will he suffer it long. Yet a little while, and all the storms of life shall be over! And thou shalt be gathered into the storehouse of the dead! And there the weary are at rest.

3. They are at rest from all these infirmities and follies, which they could not escape in this life. They are no longer exposed to the delusions of sense or the dreams of imagination. They are not hindered from seeing the noblest truths by inadvertence, nor do they ever lose the sight they have once gained by inattention. They are not entangled with prejudice, nor ever misled by hasty or partial views of the object. And consequently, no error is there. O blessed place, where truth alone can enter! Truth unmixed, undisguised, enlightening every man who cometh into the world. Where there is no difference of opinions, but all think alike, all are of one heart and of one mind. Where that offspring of hell, controversy, which turneth this world upside down, can never come. Where those who have been sawn asunder

thereby, and often cried out in the bitterness of their soul, Peace, peace, shall find what they then sought in vain, even a peace which none taketh from them.

4. And yet all this, inconceivably great as it is, is the least part of their deliverance. For in the moment wherein they shake off the flesh, they are delivered not only from the troubling of the wicked, not only from pain and sickness, from folly and infirmity, but also from sin. A deliverance this, in sight of which all the rest vanish away. This is the triumphal song which every one heareth when he entereth the gates of Paradise, "Thou being dead sinnest no more: sin hath no more dominion over thee. For in that thou diedst, thou diedst unto sin once, but in that thou livest, thou livest unto God."

5. "There" then "the weary be at rest." The blood of the Lamb hath healed all their sickness, "hath washed them thoroughly from their wickedness, and cleansed them from their sin." The disease of their nature is cured; they are at length made whole; they are restored to perfect soundness. They no longer

mourn the flesh lusting against the spirit; the law in their members is now at an end, and no longer wars against the law of their mind, and brings them into captivity to the law of sin. There is no root of bitterness left, no remains even of that sin which did so easily beset them: no forgetfulness of "Him in whom they live, move, and have their being:" no ingratitude to their gracious Redeemer, who poured out his soul unto the death for them: no unfaithfulness to that blessed Spirit, who so long bore with their infirmities. In a word, no pride, no self-will is there; so that they who are thus delivered from the bondage of corruption may indeed say one to another, and that in an emphatical sense, "Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we shall be like Him; for we shall see him as he is."

6. Let us view a little more nearly the state of a Christian, at his entrance into the other world. Suppose the silver cord of life just loosed, and the wheel broken at the cistern; the heart can now beat no more; the blood ceases to move; the last breath flies off from

the quivering lips, and the soul springs forth into eternity. What are the thoughts of such a soul, that has just subdued her last enemy, Death? that sees the body of sin lying beneath her, and is new born into the world of spirits? How does she sing, "O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be unto God, who hath given me the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ:" O happy day, wherein I begin to live! wherein I taste my native freedom! when I was born of a woman, I had but a short time to live, and that time was full of misery; that corruptible body pressed me down, and enslaved me to sin and pain. But the snare is broken, and I am delivered. Henceforth I know them no more. That head is no more an aching head; those eyes shall no more run down with tears; that heart shall no more pant with anguish or fear, or be weighed down with sorrow or care; those limbs shall no more be racked with pain; yea, Sin hath no more dominion over me. At length I have parted from thee, O my enemy, and I shall see thy face no more. I shall never more be unfaithful to my Lord, or offend the

eyes of his glory! I am no longer that wavering, fickle, self-inconsistent creature, sinning and repenting, and sinning again. No: I shall never cease, day or night, to love and praise the Lord my God, with all my heart, and with all my strength. But what are ye? Are all these ministering Spirits sent forth to minister unto one heir of salvation? Then, dust and ashes, farewell: I hear a voice from heaven, saying, Come away, and rest from thy labours; thy warfare is accomplished, thy sin is pardoned, and the days of thy mourning are ended.

7. Brethren, these truths need little application. Believe ye that these things are so? What then hath each of you to do, but to lay aside every weight, and run with patience the race set before him? to count all things else but dung and dross; especially those grand idols, learning and reputation, if they are pursued in any other measure, or with any other view, than as they conduce to the knowledge and love of God: to have this one thing "continually in thine heart, when thou sittest in

R

thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up; to have thy loins ever girt, and thy light burning; to serve the Lord thy God with all thy might; if by any means, when he requireth thy soul of thee, perhaps, in an hour when thou lookest not for him, thou mayest enter where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary be at rest.

## ON THE SIGHT OF A CORPSE.

*By the Rev. Charles Wesley.*


---

AH lovely appearance of Death!  
 No sight upon earth is so fair,  
 Not all the gay pageants that breathe  
 Can with this dead body compare.  
 With solemn delight I survey  
 The corpse when the spirit is fled,  
 In love with the beautiful clay,  
 And longing to lie in its stead.

How blest is our brother bereft  
 Of all that could burden his mind!  
 How easy the soul that hath left  
 This wearisome body behind  
 Of evil incapable thou,  
 Whose relics with envy I see ;  
 No longer in misery now,  
 No longer a sinner like me.

This earth is affected no more,  
 With sickness, or shaken with pain ;  
 The war in the members is o'er,  
 And never shall vex him again !  
 No anger henceforward, or shame,  
 Shall redden this innocent clay ;  
 Extinct is the animal flame,  
 And passion is vanish'd away.



The languishing head is at rest,  
 It's thinking and aching is o'er;  
 The quiet immoveable breast  
 Is heav'd by affliction no more:  
 The heart is no longer the seat  
 Of trouble or torturing pain;  
 It ceases to flutter and beat—  
 It never shall flutter again!

These lids he so seldom could close,  
 By sorrow forbidden to sleep,  
 Lock'd up in eternal repose,  
 Have strangely forgotten to weep!  
 The fountains can yield no supplies,  
 These hollows from water are free,  
 The tears are all wip'd from these eyes  
 And evil they never shall see!

To mourn and to suffer is mine,  
 While bound in a prison I breathe,  
 And still for deliverance pine,  
 And press to the issues of death.  
 What now with my tears I bedew  
 O might I this moment become,  
 My spirit created anew,  
 My frame be consign'd to the tomb!

THE END,